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Visibility and recognition of pioneer women in the field of Latin American communication. An analysis of the trajectory of Mabel Piccini

Visibilidad y reconocimiento a las mujeres pioneras del campo comunicacional latinoamericano. Un análisis de la trayectoria de Mabel Piccini

Abstract

This article aims to make visible and recognize the contributions of pioneering women in the Latin American communication field. Specifically, we focus on the trajectory of the Argentine, Mabel Piccini. Her pioneering contributions date from very early in the Chile of the Popular Unity at the end of the 1960s. There she integrates a research group on ideology, culture and mass culture, at the Center for Studies of the National Reality, dependent on the Catholic University, together with Armand and Michèle Mattelart. Subsequently, she returns to Argentina and finally to Mexico, after the forced exiles imposed by the dictatorships of the Southern Cone. To address her career, we performed a meta-analysis of her academic work and identified changes, breaks and continuities in her research topics and theoretical positions. We read their contributions in the chart of the displacements collected by the histories of the field of communication in Latin America: from the stage of empowerment (in the sixties and seventies) to that of institutionalization (in the eighties), of professionalization (in the nineties) and bureaucratization and academic consolidation (from the 2000s). The main results and conclusions show that the critical traditions of the 70s were, to some extent, restored in her works of the 90s.

Resumen

El artículo tiene por objetivo visibilizar y reconocer los aportes de las mujeres pioneras del campo comunicacional latinoamericano. Específicamente nos centramos en la trayectoria de la argentina Mabel Piccini. Sus aportes pioneros se sitúan muy tempranamente en el Chile de la Unidad Popular a fines de la década de 1960, allí integra un grupo de investigación sobre la ideología, la cultura y la cultura de masas, en el Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Nacional (CEREN), dependiente de la Universidad Católica de Chile, junto con Armand y Michèle Mattelart. Luego regresa a Argentina y finalmente en México, tras los forzados exilios que iban imponiendo las dictaduras del Cono Sur. Para abordar su trayectoria realizamos un meta-análisis de sus producciones académicas, identificamos cambios, rupturas y continuidades en sus temas de investigación y posiciones teóricas. Leímos sus contribuciones en el cuadro de los desplazamientos que recogen las historias del campo de la comunicación en Latinoamérica: desde la etapa de autonomización (en los años sesenta y setenta) a la de institucionalización (en los años ochenta), de profesionalización (en los noventa) y de burocratización y consolidación académica (desde los 2000). Los principales resultados y conclusiones del artículo se sintetizan en cierta recuperación de las tradiciones críticas de los años ´70 en sus trabajos de los ´90.

1.Introduction

In assessments and retrospectives on the early stages of the communication academic field in Latin America, it is common to speak of the *founding fathers*; which reveals the poor visibility and recognition of the contributions made by pioneering women from the Latin American communicational field. The same is true if we explore references in academic syllabi of university courses of study within communication studies, and even in postgraduate courses (Heram et al, 2020). This brings an evident -but also invisible- fact to our notice: the peripheral place occupied by these women in assessments and studies throughout the history of the field. Who are they? Which topics did they explore? Which perspectives did they adopt? What contributions have they made? These are just a few questions that give meaning to this article, which aims to shed light on a relatively unexplored area.

This work is framed within a broader-scope project which seeks to recognise the career path of pioneering women from the Latin American communicational field who have carried out their research and released their first articles/books in the sixties and seventies []. Born between 1927 and 1949, they have approached communication studies from various source disciplines: university courses of study in Sociology, Pedagogy, Psychology, Literature or the emerging program of studies in Information Sciences and Technology at the Ibero-American University (Mexico). In addition, these thinkers engaged very early in the main currents of the stage: within Communication Political Economy and Communication Policies, the works of Elizabeth Fox (American), Margarita Graziano (Argentine), Nelly de Camargo (Brazilian), and Fátima Fernández Christieb (Mexican) clearly stand out; within Ideological Criticism, Linguistics and Discourse Analysis, the works of Michèle Mattelart (French), Mabel Piccini (Argentine), Beatriz Sarlo (Argentine), Ana María Nethol (Argentine), Margarita Zires (Mexican), and Lisa Block de Behar (Uruguayan) are noteworthy; in the earliest studies about reception and consumption, the investigations of Regina Gibaja (Argentine), Nelly de Camargo, Francisca Bartra Gros (Peruvian), and Michèle Mattelart y Mabel Piccini are prominent. Likewise, it is worth mentioning many other women who have released their first investigations in the early eighties but may also be rightfully considered as forerunners within communication studies and teaching. We shall highlight the works on media reception produced by Rosa María Alfaro (Peruvian), on technologies and social transformations produced by Patricia Terrero (Argentine), on Latin American soap operas carried out by Nora Mazzioti (Argentine), on the Frankfurt School and Marcuse's thinking produced by Alicia Entel (Argentine), on popular radios and audiences carried out by María Cristina Mata (Argentine), on journalism and gender carried out by Patricia Anzola (Colombian), on communication policies and the right to information, by Beatriz Solís Leree (Mexican), on knowledge and information society, by Delia Crovi Druetta (Argentine, resident in Mexico), on popular and alternative communication, by Regina Festa (Brazilian), on methodological and epistemological presuppositions, by María Inmacolata Vasallo de Lopes (Brazilian), as well as the contributions to political economy made by Anamaria Fadul (Brazilian), among others.

This article focuses on Mabel Piccini, an Argentine female researcher whose academic trajectory and intellectual involvement were deployed very early in the Chile of the Popular Unity (UP, from its initials in Spanish), where she integrates a research group on ideology, culture and mass culture, at the Center for Studies of the National Reality (CEREN), dependent on the Chilean Catholic University, together with Armand and Michèle Mattelart. Subsequently, she returns to Argentina and finally to Mexico, after the forced exiles imposed by the dictatorships of the Southern Cone.

Our interest in recovering the contributions made by research women in the communication field and, in our present work, in deeply examining the pathway taken by Mabel Piccini results from a double purpose, tied to our interests as well. On the one hand, as a contribution to the history of the communication field in Latin America, which is expected to be expanded with the history of these newly added research women. On the other hand, as a contribution to the teaching of Latin American studies within the university sphere. Here we retake the challenge taken on by various student organizations who in recent years have begun to take note of the absence of female authors in (our) study programmes. We have understood that such matter (and also questioning) could not be tackled by including some bibliographic quota, but rather required to be addressed by thoughtfully examining the contributions of those first female researchers who have broken new ground.

2. Methodology and Preliminary Considerations

Our corpus of analysis is made up of a set of materials carefully selected on the basis of the following criteria: articles from scientific journals, book chapters and books published by Mabel Piccini from the early stages of her academic work to her latest publications.

Following Barthes (1971), among others, we understand that a corpus is a limited body of materials which has been predefined by analysts. In this sense, even though any choice has some degree of arbitrariness, we have strived to build a corpus that is broad enough and also includes secondary sources, enabling us to reconstruct the authoress' pathway. Based on this meta-analysis of her productions, we shall be able to identify changes, breaks and continuities in her research topics and theoretical positions.

In order to carry out this work, we start from a perspective defined as 'historical materialist', understanding that from the examination of the developments in the field -traditions, displacements, restorations-, they are *determined* (limitations that are also enabling conditions) by academic institutional restrictions (internal logic), especially when we refer to a '*field burdened with the past' ('campo demasiado cargado de pasado')*, alluding to the title of a book written by Fuentes Navarro (1992), who is a renowned historian in the field, thus allowing us to name the political, economic and social series operating along with many other pressures exerting across the history of the field.

As we are interested in reconstructing Mabel Piccini's trajectory, it becomes necessary to take account of some brief preliminary considerations. The histories of the communication field in Latin America make use of dfferent kinds of periodisation (Marques de Melo, 1999; Crovi Druetta, 2004; Torrico Villanueva, 2004; Moragas Spá, 2011; Barranquero, 2011; among others), in an attempt to reconstruct stages, trends and displacements. For this work, we have resorted to the periodisation developed by Fuentes Navarro (1992) and Mangone (2007), adding our own elaborations (Gándara and Heram, 2021), with the purpose of reading Mabel Piccini's contributions at different time points: from the stage of empowerment of communication studies (in the sixties and seventies) through that of institutionalization (in the eighties) and professionalization (in the nineties) to bureaucratization and academic consolidation (from the 2000s).

By the mid-seventies, a relatively autonomous space for social and human sciences begins to unfold in Latin America, where specific knowledge about mass media, its monopolist structure and language, and the ideological nature of its operation within the social system is produced, spread, and recognised. Hand in hand with a modernisation of the cultural industry (the television as a mass medium, the boom of publishing houses), a modernisation of social sciences is produced based on the importance of new theoretical currents (structuralism), disciplines (semiology), new versions of philosophical or cultural Marxism (the Frankfurt School, Althusserianism), blended with the social theory of dependence which organized a radically critical look at the causes of underdevelopment in the region. We are in front of a process of mass movements, anti-imperialist confrontations and struggles for a social transformation: a period that could be circumscribed by two revolutions: the Cuban Revolution (1959), as its opening, and the Nicaraguan Revolution (1979), as its closing, leaving their marks on political-intellectual actions, discussions and research projects.

By the end of the seventies and the beginning of the following decade, a displacement in communication studies is observed, affecting objects of study (before media, mediations, popular cultures and everyday life), theoretical currents and hegemonic disciplines (from ideological criticism and political economy to cultural studies), and key problem areas (instead of domination processes, hegemony and consensus processes). Such changes unfold correlatively with a social and historical series characterised by the defeat of revolutionary projects from the previous decade and the democratic reconstruction, particularly in Southern Cone countries.

In the nineties, when the 'neoliberal' offensive of capitalism deepens throughout the region, a professionalised field status is defined, which has also grown apart from its critical tradition. Generally speaking, the Latin American communicational thinking uncritically endorses market globalization processes, the re-enchantment with the new technologies back then, the examination of consumptions as instances of citizen identity configuration as flexible as labour relations, in short: the shaping of an affirmative look –a rationality– of the social system and cultural industries, which are now fully legitimised from the academia.

From the 2000s on, a fourth stage could be defined, beginning with the bankruptcy of national economies, going through the emergence of the so-called 'national popular' governments, and resulting in the crisis of political systems (resignations, *coups d'etat*, popular uprisings). The communication field in the region will go through contradictory tensions: towards academic consolidation (for instance, through the recognition of communication sciences in national science and technology agencies, the proliferation of postgraduate studies) and academic bureaucratisation (visible in the administrative character of research jobs), towards methodological and thematic la dispersion (as can be seen in conference table presentations) and the recovery of critical traditions (such as that of national politics structuring discussions around media laws), among others.

3. Results

Mabel Piccini (Argentina, 1942 – México, 2015) graduates from the School of Literature, dependent on the University of Cordoba. She travels to Chile in 1968 and joins a research group on ideology, culture and mass culture, at the Center for Studies of the National Reality (CEREN), dependent on the Chilean Catholic University, together with Armand and Michèle Mattelart. Works that became known from those years, apart from other publications on Latin American literature[], focused on youth magazines, like *El cerco de las revistas de ídolos* [*The fence of fan magazines*] (1970), and on the role of the media during the lorry owners' lock-out, like *La prensa burguesa, ¿no será más que un tigre de papel?* [*The burgeois*

press: *Won't it be just a paper tiger?*] (1973), and *La televisión y los sectores populares* [*Television and the popular sectors*] (1974), written along with Michèle Mattelart.

Following a similar pathway to Armand and Michèle Mattelart (Heram and Gándara, 2020), Piccini uses her research on mass media during the administration of the Popular Unity as a means of cultural and political struggle. Her early readings adhere to the rising structuralism and semiology (Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, Eliseo Verón), but also to the Marxist tradition. Armand Mattelart recalls that Piccini was the person who back then brought them closer to the reading of *Cuadernos de Pasado y Presente* [*Notebooks of Past and Present*], the collection edited by José Aricó:

> A group of Argentine activists and intellectuals used to gravitate around these notebooks, they supported the Gramscian movement, to which my friend Héctor Schmucler belonged. It was thanks to the researcher Mabel Piccini, also Argentine, who belonged to our research group at CEREN, that Michèle and I became aware of these publications (Mattelart, 2013: 92).

Along with Michèle Mattelart, she works at the Screenplay Departament of the national TV network. In the second semester of 1972, both undertook a study about the reception of TV series in the populations of Santiago, which was then released in 1974 in the magazine known as *Comunicación y Cultura [Communication and Culture]*. After the military coup, she is forced to escape and returns to Cordoba (Argentina) where she joins –as Adriana Musitano (2015) tells– the teaching staff of the Theatre Department and collaborates with the 'Canto Popular' movement in Cordoba. After the coup d'etat in Argentina in 1976, she emigrates to Mexico, where she settles permanently.

3.1 A Reading of her Pioneering Works (1970-1974)

In this section we shall address her works produced during the *Chilean period* (from 1970 to 1974). In *El cerco de las revistas de ídolos* [*The fence of fan magazines*] (1970), Piccini compiled a corpus of three main magazines addressing the youth –those which cover the highest percentage of readers and belong to the same publishing house[]– in order to ultimately get a concentrated ideological reading about one of them: *Ritmo de la juventud (The rhythm of youth)*.

The authoress intends to 'determine the implicit organization of messages' to reveal 'the ideologies which are crystallised in the media' (1970: 181). Based on the central category of *myth*, she attempts to identify those procedures which seek to 'shape a youth that is suitable for an indulgent and conformist acceptance of the system' (1970: 181).

Among the various juvenile representations under analysis, on the one hand, the ones that stand out are those in which 'any grouping or complicity principle among young people is suspicious' (1970: 196), while a greater integration to the big family of the magazine is valued and promoted. On the other hand, the construction of popular idols as demigods goes through different time points: from their original condition (only if they were part of popular sectors), to crossing social class lanes and its requirements (a natural gift), to the justification of a new successful status based on the restoration of the command of will (perseverance and sacrifice).

The cornerstone of the work is built upon the following binary structure: open magazine/closed magazine. Piccini stresses how the publication –of its interactions with the readers and its way of representing the magazine collective through various sections (readers' opinions section, letters, etc.)– recreates a 'simulation of a democratic microsociety' (1970: 182), which is also participatory. In the opposite direction, the magazine gets closed off from the social world, putting up a *fence* where trespassing would entail straying off course and submitting to suffering and unhappiness. In the authoress' own words:

> Beyond the family, an indestructible and monolithic front, and a guarantee of permanence, there is the world; that is, a blank space, the end of any sense. The objective reality, as presented in these messages, has lost all its thickness, it is simply a geographical space where so many other individual stories unfold, with no connection with one another. Material life and the laws regulating it, nature as a challenge for human's creative activity, the realm of antagonisms and contradictions appear as a mere simulation, a dream which does not threaten the irreducible unity of the family harmony (1970: 217).

In *La prensa burguesa, ¿no será más que un tigre de papel?* 'Los medios de comunicación de la oposición durante la crisis de octubre de 1972' [*The burgeois press: Won't it be just a paper tiger? The opposition media during the crisis of October 1972*] (1973), along with Michèle Mattelart, she analyses the role of the Chilean media (the newspaper called *El Mercurio*¸ but also radio and TV networks) as a 'priviledged platform for launching the burgeois offensive' (1973: 250) based on an event: the lorry drivers' confederation lockout, joined by broad sectors of the petty bourgeoisie, during October 1972, with an open line continuing in December 1971 with the 'banging pots and pans' demonstration.

The authoresses' central thesis is that, in times of crisis or class struggle aggravation, the media abandon their principles: objectivity, information transparency, power independence, representation of the public opinion. The crisis bursts such mystifications. This is expressed as follows:

> When the interests of the dominant classes are not contested, a gap between information and action is set up, over which the burgeois press operates, and thus its essential objective is mass disorganisation. She addresses the individual man, the individual segregated from their class, the public opinion conceived as the sum of isolated consciences, which tacitly supports the domination system. When its interests are challenged, the bourgeoisie needs to specifically mobilise the opinion around the defence of its class project (1973: 253).

That is why, a 'mass line' (1973: 256)[] is identified for burgeois media which is expressed in the organisation of a political leadership, in the 'practicality of messages put into circulation' (1973: 252), in the questioning of inorganic recipients in order to get them organised around the imperialism and burgeoisie programme, in the persistence of certain topics against the government of the UP (a bust in the economy, the failure of democratic cohabitation and a threat to freedom of expression); in conclusion, in its conversion into means of agitation, propaganda and collective organisation, but relative to a counter-revolutionary front.

Finally, we shall underline the work called *La televisión y los sectores populares* [*Television and the popular sectors*] (1974), which results from a research project undertaken along with Michèle Mattelart. Based on 200 surveys conducted among popular sectors residing in four villages located on the outskirts of Santiago –with the presence of working-class and middle-class sectors to a greater or lesser extent, with varying degrees of organisation and a number of different political groups–, the authoresses intended to look into the place occupied by the television in everyday life, the kinds of consumptions (written press, radio, TV) classified by gender, and among the sectors that are somewhat mobilised, the television collective reception modes (in front of a small bunch of recipients), the representations of consumers themselves around the positive or negative effects of television.

These three works make up the first stage of Piccini's trajectory. If we assessed her production so far, we should point out that the authoress becomes one of the representatives and pioneers of ideological analysis, upon examining the myths of youth maazines or revealing the role of Chilean burgeois media under the administration of Salvador Allende from a political-ideological perspective. In line with the prevailing issues of the seventies in Latin American studies on communication, these research projects and publications gather the contributions of a semiology in which the Marxism conception of ideology converges with the structuralism methodology of mass language analysis. The appropriation of Roland Barthes' research programme presented in *Mythologies* (1957) is particularly revealing, as it is a book with an early and extended circulation in Latin America, intended to 'account in detail for the mystification which transforms petit-bourgeois culture into a universal nature' (1957: 11).

At the same time, in these first interventions, a concern for reception processes is displayed []. This is already present in her interpretation of youth magazines, where she distinguishes manipulation operations and their effects, an issue that –as she suggests– deserves a separate examination in order to determine the impact of such media on their audiences.

3.2. Continuities and Breaks (1982-1989)

After her Mexican exile (1976), working as a professor and researcher in the Department of Education and Social Communication (Autonomous Metropolitan University-Xochimilco), she makes a new academic intervention. Even though Piccini is still interested in the processes of social production of sense and reception, in the mid-eighties a clear change is observed.

In *Medios y estrategias del discurso político [Political Discourse Means and Strategies]* (1982), she procedes to a process of critical review of those theories which were hegemonic in the Latin American field of communication studies in the seventies. After outlining a theoretical and methodological model for discourse analysis (anchored in the French tradition of Michel Pêcheux, as well as Eliseo Verón and Emilio de Ipola), and after assessing the three main trends in Latin American studies regarding power structures, discursive formations and reception, Piccini points out that 'a reconsideration and a step forward' is required (1982: 84). In particular, she proposes:

> To go deeper –with a strategic sense– in power relations which, under various modalities and forms of exercise, are displayed in particular circumstances through different spaces which shape communication processes. It is not unreasonable to point out that this is a recurrent bias in many studies about the cultural issue in subordinate countries. On the contrary, the current challenge would imply, in our opinion, gaining a new perspective that may allow for articulating the global reality of the imperialist cultural penetration with the individual reality of Latin American social formations (1982: 85).

However, it is in *Industrias culturales: transversalidades y regímenes discursivos [Cultural Industries: Transversalities and Discursive Regimes]* (1987) where a more far-reaching theoretical break is identified. Piccini points out that 'the questions relating to the power of communications are currently more numerous and consistent with the conclusions' (1987: 1). From a post-structuralist perspective (in particular, echoing Michel Foucault and Giles Deleuze), the authoress suggests a reorganisation of the field:

> This exercise of gradual desatirculation of enshrined knowledge –and its enshrining evidence– in the subject that concerns us, and in any social or cultural area that has been subject to disclipline abuse, exposes many of the alibis used by disciplines and their unifying categories to bridge the gaps and try to suppress the threats of dispersed events and senses. Let's make an attempt to take another angle of vision and let's gradually proceed, by incomplete saturations, to reconstruct the erratic objects, knowledge and concepts of collective communication (1987: 5).

The research should then change its approach: instead of examining stable objects (the TV, the mass media), systems bringing together a social totality which operates as a determination or cause (economic, social, political); now the aim would be to analyse 'condensation and intersection spaces of multiple cultural networks', 'spheres filled with polymorphic objects', which daily construct and deconstruct 'a plurality of voices' produced by official institutions but also resulting from 'the most diffuse practices and rumours of everyday life' (1987: 4).

This theoretical core leads the work called *El Desierto de Espejos [The Desert of Mirrors]* (1987), written with Raymundo Mier, which results from a task entrusted by UNESCO to carry out research on television and youth. Against 'the most elementary common sense', both writers seek to examine, rather than the relations established beforehand (television, youth), 'that network woven by television' (Piccini and Mier, 1987: 6) which is found at the core, but is much more extensive. It is an 'event' which encapsulates an interweaving of social discourses.

The 'interweaving' metaphor appears again in later work called *La imagen del tejedor [The Image of the Weaver]* (1989), where Piccini intends to analyse the Mexican cultural scene based on a synchronous study allowing her to identify 'the key strengths and fragility lines' (1989: 6) through which powers and other everyday-life registers move, far from being homogeneous.

This new perspective, which is a clear feature of the works from those years, connects to the larger displacement affecting Latin American studies on communication conducted in the eighties, and more extensively it is associated with the so-called *cultural turn*. In fact, those condensation and intersection spaces of cultural networks put forward by Piccini may be associated with the concept of *mediations* (Martín Barbero, 1987) or with cultural *hybridisation* processes (García Canclini, 1990), which are key concepts and, at the same time, act as a lighthouse in the stage of institutionalisation of the communication field.

We would like to close this new stage in Mabel Piccini's trajectory by making reference to a written work produced in cooperation with Ana María Nethol[], which –as far as we could disclose– would be the first introduction to communication pedagogy: *Introducción a la pedagogía de la comunicación* (1984) in Latin America, with many re-releases since then. The book is organised in three parts: an explanation of communication theories, a critical review of the concept of communication based on contributions from Linguistics and Discourse Analysis, and finally a programme to establish a communication pedagogy supported by the contributions made by Jean Piaget and Paulo Freire. The first part, carried out by Mabel Piccini, looks over and evaluates the School of Functionalism, the Frankfurt School's theory, critical political economy, ideological analysis and semiotics.

3.3. Critical Recoveries (1993-2002)

From the nineties onwards, Piccini defines her field of study as 'a micro-ecology of everyday life' (1996: 33). There are also continuities –the question of reception–, but mainly the restoration of critical perspectives that, on the one hand, focus on the inequality of popular sectors and, on the other hand, question some of the key categories of cultural and consumption studies which begin to prevail in Latin American studies on communication during that decade.

In *La sociedad de los espectadores [The Society of Spectators]* (1993), she critically exposes a state of the art for reception and consumption studies. She insists on a certain vagueness around concepts (effects, decoding, appropriation, hermeneutic communities of consumers) and even in relation to the conception of subjects (audiences, public, spectators, communities). In the face of such confusion, also resulting from the interaction of different disciplines and theories, she aims to 'restore some aspects of the current thinking on the figures of the reader' (1993: 16). She draws a route that goes from rhetoric

to the contributions of Mijail Bajtín, Valentin Voloshinov, Hans Robert Jauss, among others, based on which she defines the text as 'the reading of the reading of the reading, it is a question and answer of previous questions and answers, it is thus a structured and structuring moment of reception' (1993: 22). Thence, she concludes that reception entails a 'dispersion zone', involving a permanent 'semiotic flow', a 'space of intertextuality' in which power flows operate and the silent majorities 'set, to a large extent, a horizon of possibility for saying' (1993: 28).

With these assumptions, Piccini conducts a field study addressiing the everyday life of families and housewives from popular sectors in the City of Mexico, and releases a set of articles: 'La ciudad interior: comunicación a distancia y nuevos estilos culturales' [The Interior City: Distance Communication and New Cultural Styles] (1994), 'Acerca de la comunicación en las grandes ciudades' [On Communication in Large Cities] (1996b), 'Culturas de la imagen: los fugaces placeres de la vida cotidiana' [Cultures of the Image: The Fleeting Pleasures of Everyday Life](1997) y 'El melodrama: de los registros de las pasiones tristes' [Melodrama: The Registers of Sad Passions] (2000). Let's summarise her reasoning:

a) In large cities a continuous displacement of the urban borders is observed towards small towns and rural areas, the emergence of the suburb 'as an underworld of extreme poverty and extreme wealth' being one of its manifestations (1996b: 29).

b) Thus, the city loses its center, becomes fragmented, produces dispersion, an issue that expresses itself in the displacement of traditional lifestyles in the city to the privatisation of everyday life, understood as 'seclusion practices in family and private spaces' (1993: 3).

c) Communication technologies play a relevant role in this displacement by producing integration but also divisions and sub-divisions in the social body. The culture reaches maximum visibility and, at the same time, maximum oblivion: 'what is displayed on the screen and not what is stored in our memory' is the most important thing (1996b: 36).

d) Audiovisual networks are 'domestic terminals' connecting the world, but with the main job of 'outlining in a uniquely effective manner the social life pathways of important segments of the population.' They fulfill 'the substitute functions of various dimensions of life in society' (2000: 135). Such domestic terminals 'represent a new phase of power features' (1994: 4).

e) Audiovisual media, by means of a routine syntax and discursive resources typical of short-lived cultures, favours 'a body of enshrined knowledge' and 'the remains of ideologies which are part of common sense and the prevailing ideas in certain urban sectors' (1996b: 39). Left with no other choice (in spite of the offer promoted from the State cultural policies), popular sectors take part in a cultural order that is dominated by conventional television rituals.

From these considerations, Piccini raises a key question for the field of communication: 'Is it possible to talk about hybrid cultures (for eveyone)?' (1997: 256). The authoress casts serious doubts on such concept restoring the presence of 'new styles of poverty culture'; that is, upon recapturing the axis of inequality that has been displaced by the axis of difference in the agenda of Latin American cultural studies during the nineties.

In a conversation between Néstor García Canclini, Raymundo Mier, Margarita Zires and the authoress, a discussion around the concept of 'hybrid cultures' opens up. Piccini insists on the following:

> I am interested in a discussion about these topics, specially because it has recently become an intelectual fashion to put emphasis on the so-called forms of resistence of popular sectors against media messages, or on the variety of possible 'readings' by social groups, or on the need for decentring the idea of a 'power verticality' in relation to the new cultural technologies and political practices. These positions have undoubtedly paved the way to understand the cultural life of groups and clases in our countries, as well as to settle the issue of social conflicts and domination. But I think it is necessary to keep in mind –in case we have forgotten– that, along with the new utopias of democracy, we are witnessing new forms of domination, and such dominance is essential to understand the behaviour of our political systems and the exercise of cultural power. [...] I am interested in reconsidering all these aspects placing the emergence of hybrid cultures, generalized syncretisms, domestic seclusion technologies, the simultaneity of information and cultural contacts within the frame of new control and domination systems in our societies (García Canclini, 1995: 83-84).

In one of her last works, *Tiempo de oscuridad: el rayo que no cesa [Time of Darkness: The Ray that Never Ceases]* (2002), issued in the magazine called *Debate feminista [Feminist Discussion]* [] and dedicated 'to the memory of friends and peers who have been tortured by the military dictatorships of Argentine and Chile during the seventies, and who are still missing' (2002: 21), Piccini rehearses a reflection on

global violence based on the attack on the Tween Towers. There, after reading Pierre Clastres, Michel Foucault, Carl von Clausewitz and Hannah Arendt, she states that 'war is a constituent dimension of those societies' (2002: 29), resulting from 'behaviour correction and domestication machines' (2002: 25) or 'collective machines of exploitation and extermination' (2002: 28). Her starting point is a disheartening description of the intellectual field:

> The effort of reflection has coagulated in terms like post-history, the end of ideologies, the unlimited opening of markets and consumers, and also markets of dreams. Civilised posmodernism has celebrated –and I think still celebrates– the vertiginous development of audiovisual technologies as the modern means of liberation and encounter of worlds and cultures: multiple 'local' rationalities could burst through them to eventually take the floor and come to an encounter that triggers the isolation of peoples, social movements, individuals. The idea of pluralism in action, also called 'audiovisual democracies' and even 'semiotic democracies' in theory (2002: 21-22).

As may be noted, Piccini questions the theoretical presuppositions that were hegemonic in the Latin American field of communication from the eighties until then. The hopes woven around the saving nature of the market, the democratising promises of new communication technologies and the rise of consumption as a space for the construction of identities and cultures result in the global violence that presents to the authoress upon the attack on the Tween Towers and before the crisis situation the whole region has been faced with by the 2000s.

In addition, she gets involved in the feminist discussion in order to point out what she understands to be her pending tasks; namely, the need for broadening cultural reflection: 'towards the search for certain keys that may allow us to understand the persistence of submission cultures and power modalities: in this case, in a place that looks subordinate but which affects the human race as a whole' (2002: 41).

4. Discussion and Conclusions

This article aims to reconstruct Mabel Piccini's trajectory, as she is one the pioneering female researchers in the Latin American field of communication studies with the purpose of recognizing and making her accomplishments and contributions visible. In other words, we intend to exhume her work from the few references made in footnotes or occasional quotes in order to re-insert it in the general history of the field of communication.

From the earliest stage, we have focused on her ideological criticism analyses and, in particular, her work on television reception (1974) conducted with Michèle Mattelart. The latter, viewed in perspective, acts as a hinge in the field of research in Latin America during the seventies; firstly, because it addresses the media phenomena from the standpoint of reception, but still examining the production processes, either from the viewpoint of political economy or ideological analysis. Secondly, because, even though the television mystifying nature is underlined, reception processes are believed to show greater complexities than those which may derive from a monolithic communicational model, considered only on the basis of domination. Finally, because co-relations are established, both between forms of reception and a greater or lesser political mobilisation and instruction on the part of audiences, and between audiences and information and entertainment television genres.

Besides, from the eighties onwards, we have identified displacements which more extensively affected the Latin American studies on communication with the passage from production to reception and consumption, from the paradigm of domination to hegemony, from the importance of structures to the actions of subjects. At the same time, we have highlighted certain cases of persistence: in particular, a perspective that restores the critical tradition of the foundational stage of the field and allowed for its delimitation with respect to the agenda of the nineties, when research projects on communication in Latin America caused 'the feeling that a dull wind of obviousness and resigned conformism sweeps through the continent' (Schmucler, 1997: 153).

In the face of a 'light thought that speeded up to get rid of the remains of Marxism after the fall of "real socialisms" and the Berlin Wall' (2002: 21), Piccini maintains her view on inequality, violence and domination systems, that which travels over her first work on youth magazines in Chile or television consumptions by women from popular sectors.

Given all the above, we have noted that it would possible to build a recorded history of the field or develop a programme about communication studies in Latin America –addressing the main trends, problem areas and tensions– just starting from the pathway covered by Mabel Piccini and many other female researchers. Shall we conclude then with a proposal to reverse the tendency?: To move from a history *with no* female researcher to a history *exclusively based on* female researchers. This would be quite simplifying. In every case, we believe that it all comes down to completing such history, with many pages still remaining to be written.

5. Specific contributions of each author

Contributions	Authors
Research design	Yamila Heram and Santiago Gándara
Documentary search	Yamila Heram and Santiago Gándara
Data collection	Yamila Heram and Santiago Gándara
Critical data analysis and interpretation	Yamila Heram and Santiago Gándara
Review and approval of versions	Yamila Heram and Santiago Gándara

6. Acknowledgement

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7. Notes

1 . To ensure anonymity, we have not included research project details or references.

2. Released between 1963 and 1973, it was one of the emblematic publications in the cultural and theoretical renovation of Marxism in Argentina.

3 . We selected a publication on Roberto Arlt's work (1970) and an introductory study to a novel written by Augusto Roa Bastos (1976).

4. This refers to Lord Cochrane who belonged to the Edwards family, who owned the newspaper called *El Mercurio*.

5. This idea of 'mass line' is shared with Armand Mattelart: 'The alterations caused by the bourgeoisie to its communication model with its clientele ultimately depend on its political alternatives. Here, to illustrate the class enemy mobility in the ideological battle, we shall try to show how the alternative chosen by the 'mass line' and its main journalistic body, *El Mercurio*, progressively equipped its public to result in the explosion of trade union power and channel its seditious action' (1973, pp. 213-241).

6. Against the topic that the problem area of reception was absent in the foundational stage of the communication field in Latin America, this concern reveals that a more extended consideration was becoming solid by the mid-seventies. If we consider the female researchers who addressed reception processes only, we can mention the study about public at the Museum of Fine Arts, carried out by Regina Gibaja (1964); considerations about reception in childhood developed by Paula Wajsman (1974); expositions about mass media as the recipient of the social sectors represented, which were presented in a research job conducted by Margarita Zires and Héctor Schmucler (1978).

7. If we underline Mabel Piccini's pioneering interventions in this article, we may do likewise with the actions carried out by the Argentine professor and researcher, Ana María Nethol. She has written a very early article about 'Linguistics and Social Communication' (1978), issued in the magazine called *Comunicación y cultura [Communication and Culture]*, she reflected on communication pedagogy in this work as well as in many others, and she undertook the dissemination task with her translations of *Teoría de la literatura de los formalistas rusos [Russian Formalists' Theory of Literature]* (1970) and Ferdinand de Saussure. *Fuentes manuscritas y estudios críticos [Ferdinand de Saussure. Manuscripts and Critical Studies]* (1971), both released in México by the publishing house called Siglo XXI.

8. This is an academic magazine run by the Autonomous National University of Mexico (UNAM)'s Gender Studies and Research Center, created in 1990. Mabel Piccini took part in the Editorial Board and published many articles. In 'Desde otro lugar: verdad y sinrazones del feminismo' [From Another Location: The Truth and Wrongs of Feminism] (1990), she gets involved in the discussion about 'equality feminism or difference feminism' (p. 273), she questions some of the certainties experienced by the movement and she posits the need to change 'the terms of a phallocentric reality without falling into the schemas of phallocentrism' (p. 277).