

# Las Voces que Somos, an Indigenous Dialogic Media Utterance for Liberation

## *Las Voces que Somos, um Enunciado da Mídia Dialógica Indígena para a Libertação*

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### ABSTRACT

In this article I review Paulo Freire's theories of anti-dialogic action and of dialogic cultural action, as well as Bakhtin's notion of dialogue and utterances. Drawing from these, I focus on a communication project of Indigenous media and communication practitioners from the state of Oaxaca, Mexico, and on one of its media products which I consider a media utterance. I argue that the core themes of the communication project and a radio series that addresses them reflect the dialogue between Indigenous communication practitioners and the ongoing reality they face that menaces their territories and ways of life. Dialogue is a key component of a communicative process that shapes our understanding of the world-system and makes differences and inequalities evident.

**Keywords:** Paulo Freire, Mikhail Bakhtin, dialogue, media utterances, Indigenous communication

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### RESUMO

Neste artigo, reviso as teorias de Paulo Freire da ação antidialógica e da ação cultural dialógica, bem como a noção de diálogo e enunciados de Bakhtin. Com base nisso, enfoco um projeto de comunicação de mídia indígena e comunicadores do estado de Oaxaca, México, e em um de seus produtos midiáticos que considero um enunciado de mídia. Defendo que os temas centrais do projeto de comunicação e uma série de rádio que os abordam, refletem o diálogo entre os comunicadores indígenas e a realidade atual que enfrentam que ameaça seus territórios e modos de vida. O diálogo é um componente fundamental de um processo comunicativo que molda nossa compreensão do sistema-mundo e torna as diferenças e desigualdades evidentes.

**Palavras-chave:** Paulo Freire, Mikhail Bakhtin, diálogo, enunciações da mídia, comunicação indígena



## VIOLENCE AGAINST INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN MEXICO

**I**NDIGENOUS PEOPLES HAVE constantly lived in situations of violence in Mexico. From the racism instilled in everyday forms of life (Castellanos Guerrero et al., 2007), often disguised as cordial racism (Gómez Izquierdo & Sánchez, 2012), to the violence exercised by the authorities through public policies and assimilationist programmes that seek to annihilate Indigenous cultures under the pretext of development (Castells i Talens, 2011; Korsbaek & Sámano-Rentería, 2007). Indigenous women and men in Mexico live immersed in structural violence (Galtung, 1996) expressed by social exclusion, exploitation, as well as the denial of their culture and identity.

Through the exercise of violence and fear, various megaprojects of extractive nature have advanced in Indigenous territories. Extractive companies exercise violence both through the nature of their ventures and through the mechanisms they use to guarantee access to territories, which involve repression, coercion, and even criminal violence (Durán Matute & Moreno, 2021). Indigenous communities have resisted various attempts to include them in the dominant models of social, political, and economic organization. Although they have many differences that make them unique, they share a number of elements that allow them to identify with each other. One of these is the constant aggression and plundering of their lands and territories. The process of capitalist totalization (Tischler, 2013) has used cultural, territorial, linguistic, and other forms of colonization to expand and guarantee its survival. We are currently experiencing an escalation in the aggression against these peoples due to the proliferation of extractive projects and dispossession (Harvey, 2005) derived from neoliberal policies that have resulted in the excessive and uncritical increase of concessions to transnational companies for mining, wind energy, hydroelectric, large-scale agriculture, tourism development, etc.

This expansion attacks the Indigenous communities' ways of life, which have generated diverse mechanisms of resistance that obey the sociohistorical, political, and economic contexts of the moment. "The way in which indigenous people represent nature, their relationship with it and its conservation, is a key element in their struggle for self-determination" (Magallanes-Blanco, 2016, p. 135). The plundering of territory is also plundering of cultures, of ways of life, of languages, and of cosmogonies, in such a way that the Indigenous Peoples' struggle for the defence of land and territory is a struggle for life.

### The Oaxacan Context

The state of Oaxaca is located in southeast Mexico. It is divided into eight regions with 570 municipalities in 30 districts. In 2020, Oaxaca's territory was

inhabited by 4,132,148 people (Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Informática, 2020). Oaxaca has historically been one of the poorest states in the country. Overall, by 2018, 66.4% of the population lived in poverty, and 13.2% of the population aged 15 and over, according to the Inter-Census Survey 2015, was illiterate. Oaxaca is the entity with the greatest ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and natural diversity in Mexico, which is expressed in the presence of the Indigenous peoples Amuzgo, Cuicateco, Chatino, Chinanteco, Chocholteco, Chontal, Huave, Ixcateco, Mazateco, Mixe, Mixteco, Náhuatl, Triqui, Zapoteco, and Zoque, recognized since 1990 in article 16 of the local Constitution (Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Informática, 2020).

By 2020, 43% of the total population of the state was Indigenous, i.e., 1,780,303 (929,478 women); and 194,474 were considered Afro-descendant. In total, 31.2% of the population in Oaxaca speaks an Indigenous language, 89% also speak Spanish, and 11% do not speak Spanish (Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Informática, 2020).

According to Servicios para una Educación Alternativa A.C., “in Oaxaca there are areas or regions dominated by families who believe are the owners of people’s lives, where impunity and exceptions to the law prevail” (EDUCA, 2021, p. 2). In the territory of Oaxaca, the Interoceanic Corridor megaproject is planned as part of the National Development Plan 2019-2024:

The Interoceanic Corridor would cover 79 municipalities in the states of Oaxaca and Veracruz, or 98 including Tabasco and Chiapas. It includes the rehabilitation of the railway to transport goods and connect the two oceans [Atlantic and Pacific], but also the construction of highways to guarantee communication, ten industrial parks; an oil pipeline to connect with the Dos Bocas refinery and a gas pipeline to supply the region with natural gas coming from the United States. It also includes the expansion of the ports of Coatzacoalcos and Salina Cruz, and the construction of an oil-commercial port also in Salina Cruz. This corridor could also involve new energy and mining projects. (Durán Matute & Moreno, 2021, p. 28)

Although the government’s discourse on the project focuses on economic activation, in reality it would devastate the region, an area rich in natural assets that will become the property of large companies. Durán Matute and Moreno (2021) explain it as follows:

If carried out, they would alter the physical geography, cause changes in ocean currents, increase population density, affect the fisheries on which people live, further menace their lands, rivers and seas, generate social conflicts, cause water



shortages and land dispossession, make life even more precarious, and increase violence, insecurity and drug trafficking. Thus, the arrival of megaprojects in Mexico conceals a war of extermination disguised as “development”, “employment” and “welfare”. No consideration is given to the effects they will have on the Indigenous Peoples, the region and the planet. (p. 29)

In the Isthmus region where the Interoceanic Corridor is planned, three Indigenous community radio stations are part of the project Transformative Communication for the Care of Life and Territory from Mexico to Central America implemented by Ojo de Agua Comunicación.

### **TRANSFORMATIVE COMMUNICATION FOR THE CARE OF LIFE AND TERRITORY**

Ojo de Agua Comunicación (Comunicación Indígena S.C.) is a non-profit organization of communicators born in Oaxaca, Mexico in 1998, dedicated to promoting Indigenous and community communication, producing cultural and educational radio, and video programmes, as well as collaborating with other collectives and organizations in Indigenous and community communication processes and media in Mexico and other regions of Latin America (Magallanes-Blanco & Monteforte, 2019).

The objectives of Ojo de Agua Comunicación are: 1) strengthening capacities that enable the appropriation of tools and the creation of communication spaces, mainly for Indigenous peoples; 2) contributing to the understanding and respect of cultural diversity, streamlining information, communication and expression within Indigenous communities and towards the rest of society; 3) facilitating meetings, exchange, and feedback between Indigenous communicators in Oaxaca, as well as with other regions and countries; and 4) supporting other civil society organizations in strengthening their own communication strategies (Magallanes-Blanco & Monteforte, 2019).

Ojo de Agua's work is strongly rooted in the needs and challenges of community and Indigenous communication in Mexico today; in understanding, living, and exercising communication as a right, and using it as a tool for community, social, and political advocacy. “Given the climate of generalised violence and territorial depredation, and the scarcity of existing counter-hegemonic media and communication tools with a gender focus” (Ojo de Agua Comunicación, 2020, p. 1), Ojo de Agua Comunicación decided to carry out the project Transformative Communication for the Care of Life and Territory from Mexico to Central America.

With funding from Kultura Comunicación y Desarrollo (KCD), Ojo de Agua implemented the project between 2018 and 2020 with three main lines of action: 1) strengthening the capacities of Indigenous communicators from nine community radio stations in four regions of the state of Oaxaca by means of training through diploma courses, workshops, and meetings; 2) community organisation for the care of life and territory through community radios, with the affirmation of cultural identity and the contribution of the new generations. This was done through the production and broadcasting of radio content anchored in cultural identity and related to the care of life and territory with a gender perspective, and also through community events to make social issues visible and foster community links; 3) the articulation of a community media in Mexico and Central America for political advocacy, the visibility of rights violations, and sustainable alternatives. This was done through meetings, seminars, festivals, and exhibitions that allowed the sharing of products, experiences, knowledges, and forms of struggle and resistance.

The project had three thematic axes: gender perspective, care for life and territory, and a culture of peace.

### **Gender perspective**

In 2015, Ojo de Agua Comunicación decided to mainstream a gender perspective in the organisation and in the project it was implementing with various community radio stations in various regions of the state of Oaxaca. By 2017, they incorporated gender as a transversal axis both within the organisation and in the work developed with the community radio stations. “For those who are part of the collective, working from a gender perspective implies assuming a political stance, an ethical commitment to not allow injustices and violations of women’s rights, and to contribute to closing the gender inequality gap” (Zurita Cruz, n.d., p. 4).

Ojo de Agua seeks to provide information for the prevention not only of aggression but also of alcoholism, as well as physical and gender violence. To this end, they are certain of the benefits of using radio formats to inform, raise awareness, and potentially prevent gender-based violence. They say “our work is to talk about gender in an intelligent form that provides a way out. We want to talk about gender in order to change violence” (Magallanes-Blanco & Di Lauro Bentivogli, 2021, p. 11). They believe that this approach to gender allows for a broad view that includes the perspectives of women and men, as well as adolescents and children, in order to build dialogues in and from



the community, and give rise to contents focused on prevention. They are also aware that it is necessary to make alliances at the community level or with authorities so that if a woman wants to make a complaint based on a radio soap opera or socio-drama, she knows who to turn to.

### **Care for life and territory**

Ojo de Agua's commitment in relation to the care of life and territory is to inform in an assertive way, including in its messages elements that people can relate to and that are useful to them. The defence of territory is closely related to health, education, and food. The defence is against megaprojects, so it is important to make clear what they are, what model of life they respond to, who benefits from the development model they propose, and how it harms communities and peoples. The threats posed by megaprojects are common to all territories, so it is necessary for them to unite as communities and emphasise values such as reciprocity and collective celebrations (or *Guelaguetza*) in the radio productions so that the people recognise themselves in the stories, and ideally, awaken or maintain the desire to sow the land.

They believe that it is necessary for the communities to discuss the conditions in which they live and the decisions regarding the cultivation of the land. Ojo de Agua feels that it can contribute by providing information and encouraging reflections because, although there is a defence by the population of the territories and ways of life, there are also abuses of resources and power, and large extractive projects installed or being installed in community environments such as mining, hydroelectric, monoculture, tourism, and development projects.

Ojo de Agua developed a communicative and formative agenda that seeks to inform in a clear and accessible way who benefits from megaprojects. This agenda has the role of counter-information in a society permeated by a dominant Western system that is rooted in what they call "the braid of power". This is made up of capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy, three connected forms of domination that demonstrate that the exploitation of land, racism, and poverty go hand in hand. Ojo de Agua's role is to expose this web of power and respond to it through its communicative work. They know that it is necessary to think of a multi-component strategy that encompasses emergencies, urgent and felt needs in the day-to-day life of the communities, as well as long-term elements that place the human above economic interests, and the relationship between living beings in conditions of equity, contemplating intergenerational dialogues that allow for long-term thinking from specific contexts that give rise to enjoyment and pleasure.

**Building a culture of peace**

This thematic axis is the most recent in Ojo de Agua's work agenda. The construction of a culture of peace, or the theme of the culture of peace, emerged from the lived experiences in the territories where the radio stations are located. In these communities, people constantly commented on the situation they lived (and continue to live) in relation to drug trafficking, abuse by authorities, the theft of young women, and lynching. Ojo de Agua had to take into account this context of multiple violence as an important part of its work with the radio stations and advocacy in the communities.

Ojo de Agua recognises that sometimes the threats and problems are not external, but internal to the communities, the radio stations, or the collectives. Hence, it has approached the issue of conflict resolution so radio broadcasters can work without being so exposed or vulnerable, and learn how to handle complex issues in a harmonious way. They recognise that conflict is a constant element of everyday life, that it is not fixed, and that thinking in static terms is not the best way forward. In addition, they agree that it is not possible to talk about peace at a time when the context is full of conflict and violence. However, they consider that community radio stations anchor their work in community values, which is why they build a culture of peace, and that is why Ojo de Agua can provide them with tools for this construction, and for community defence, strengthening the communal fabric.

The three thematic axes of the communication project are anchored in issues that reflect the colonality of power (Quijano, 1998) which Indigenous peoples face in their everyday lives. Gender-based violence, violence against the territories and traditional ways of life, and violence perpetrated by organized crime and individuals with opposite interests are deeply rooted in the modern, colonial, capitalist, and patriarchal world system (Sousa Santos, 2018). They are updated forms of conquest and continue to promote division amongst Indigenous individuals and peoples. The defence of life and territory is a defence of culture and cosmovisions, of ways of knowing and of beliefs which have been erased, undermined, or misrepresented by mainstream media and diverse institutions (educational, political, and religious). The oppressors have many strategies and discourses to manipulate Indigenous peoples and to divide them and make them believe that their ways of life are inferior or the reasons why development cannot be reached by the larger national society. Cultural Invasion is pervasive in all areas of life and is deeply connected with the core themes of the project developed by Ojo de Agua Comunicación: gender, defence of life and territory, and peace-building.



By the same token, the diverse activities and media productions connected to the communication project promote the collaboration of indigenous individuals and communities in making their realities visible by discussing, problematizing, and enunciating them. The collaborative nature of the projects brings people together in their recognition of the world-system and how it operates to transform it. This transformation is sought through diverse organized activities such as music festivals, gastronomic fairs, and radio productions, which are all cultural actions. Hence, they illustrate the relation between the elements of Freire's theory of anti-dialogic action and dialogic cultural action. They seek a transformation inside the communities that can expand beyond their boundaries to confront the dominant world-system.

### PAULO FREIRE ON DIALOGUE

Our human existence is deeply related to our use of words. Words give meaning to the world we inhabit and connect us with it. For Freire (2008), "there is no true word that is not an unbreakable union between action and reflection and, therefore, that is not praxis. Hence, to speak the true word is to transform the world" (p. 105).

To transform the world, we must pronounce it, that is to say, we must be able to describe, problematize, reshape, and imagine it according to our needs, desires, and realities. The pronunciation of the world is not the privilege of a few, although there is a small group of people who, throughout history, have defined what the world looks like, how it is organised, and who should have access to what (resources, rights, benefits, and privileges) (Sousa Santos, 2018).

We live in a modern, capitalist, colonial, patriarchal world-system (Quijano, 1998; Sousa Santos, 2018; Walsh, 2013) in which Indigenous peoples, amongst other groups, have been dehumanized and segregated because of their allegedly inferior condition. This inferiority was forced upon them by the colonizers. Based on the notion of *race*, the colonizers imposed a system of dominance and repression, setting the basis for what Quijano (1998) named the coloniality of power.

Coloniality of power is the ongoing pattern of domination based on the notion of race, supported by institutions and mechanisms of dominance to preserve social classification. Thus, those who were classified as inferior are dispossessed of their identities, practices, cultures, beliefs, and ways to relate with the world and to name it. There is a coloniality of being (Maldonado Torres, 2007) as the individuals interiorize the marginalized category in which they have been placed. This way, the lives of individuals are devalued along with their culture and knowledges.



Those who are colonized are impeded to objectify images, symbols, and subjective visual and plastic experiences (Quijano, 1998). They must surrender their pronunciation of the world to that of the colonizers (Freire, 2008). They are incapable of representing the world as their own, in their own terms, considering it being susceptible of being changed by their own means and according to their goals (Nakata, 2014; Smith, 2012; Sousa Santos, 2018). Therefore, self-representation is a fundamental part of the political and cultural agenda in the struggles of Indigenous Peoples.

For Linda T. Smith (2012), the issue of representation is part of the agenda of research and production of Indigenous knowledge. The main vehicle for Indigenous Peoples' self-representation is communication, materialised in various processes, media, and messages which include Indigenous peoples' true thinking. For Freire (2008), true thinking is "a thinking that perceives reality as a process, that grasps it in constant becoming and not as something static" (p. 112). Critical thinking is a key element of communication. For Freire, "obstructing communication is tantamount to transforming people into objects" (p. 166), which is the task of the oppressors. When communication is not possible people are alienated and reduced to mere things. Dialogue, then, is a praxis that connects people amongst each other, and in and with the world. It humanises individuals and makes an authentic revolution possible to transform reality. Such transformation can only be made by those whose lives have been oppressed and are seeking emancipation.

Freire developed a theory of anti-dialogic action to explain the mechanisms of oppression. He also developed a theory of dialogic cultural action to describe the mechanisms that make emancipation possible.

### **Theory of anti-dialogic action**

Freire's theory of anti-dialogical action is based on four characteristics: conquest, division, manipulation, and cultural invasion. They are interrelated and work to continue the anti-dialogic relation of individuals and groups with each other and with the world.

Conquest is the way to keep individuals alienated. In conquest, authentic communication cannot occur. Instead, there are communiqués that produce and circulate myths that are "indispensable for the maintenance of the status quo. The myth, for example, that the oppressive order is an order of freedom. That everyone is free to work wherever they want" (Freire, 2008, p. 182). In Mexico, these myths have prevailed throughout time in presenting Indigenous peoples as backward, inferior, and barbaric. They are criminalised for defending



their territories, and caricaturised and reduced as folkloric elements for touristic purposes. By the same token, the myth of development as a keystone for the growth and wealth of a nation (rather than only of a few) is the basis of the process of capitalist totalization. Violent conquest still occurs to this day in many Indigenous territories. It is materialized in the Mexican state, extractive corporations, and the mainstream media and continues to further extend the divide between those who count and those who don't.

Another dimension of the oppressive action contained in the theory of anti-dialogic action is to divide and subdue the popular masses through division. Those in power have the need to keep the oppressed divided for the continuity of their power. The oppressors "cannot afford to accept the unification of the popular masses, which would undoubtedly pose a serious threat to their hegemony" (Freire, 2008, p. 184). Therefore, it is imperative that the oppressed do not perceive the rules of the world-system. There are several methods and procedures to create and deepen divisions, from state bureaucracy to forms of cultural action, to manipulate people. The Interoceanic Corridor project has been sold as the means to activate the economy in the region. The project has divided many people in the Isthmus area as some see it as a source of jobs and means to get a basic health and education infrastructure for the communities. On the other hand, there are those who oppose the project as they see it as a menace to the territories, the environment, and Indigenous cultures. Social and mainstream media have played an important role in creating a unified official discourse about the project which contributes to the manipulation of information.

Manipulation is another element of the anti-dialogic action. It is done through a series of myths and discourses. For Freire (2008), one myth was of particular importance: "the model that the bourgeoisie makes of itself and presents to the popular masses as it is possible to ascent, establishing the conviction of a supposed social mobility. Mobility is only possible to the extent that the masses accept the precepts imposed by the bourgeoisie" (p. 192). Manipulation serves to impede the oppressed recognizing the organization of the world-system. It distracts them by creating illusions of social mobility or of development. According to Freire, "if the masses associate with their emergence, or their presence in the historical process, a critical thinking about it or about their reality, their threat becomes concrete in revolution" (p. 194).

The oppressed need to unveil this manipulation to comprehend the logic of social classification and the functioning of the world-system. They need to be able to pronounce the world as they live, experience, see, and imagine it. Manipulation prevents them from looking at it with their own eyes. This is

what the communication project implemented by Ojo de Agua Comunicación aims at doing. On the one hand, it makes gender inequalities visible inside the communities. It seeks to raise awareness on the different forms of gender-based violence and prevent them. It also focuses on discussing the nature of extractive projects being implemented in Indigenous territories and their relations with the larger set of power relations at regional, national, and international levels that include issues related to organised crime, drug, and human trafficking, forced migration, amongst other themes.

According to Freire (2008), another form of manipulation takes place in pacts between the oppressors and the oppressed. Those pacts might be presented as resulting from dialogues between differences parties. Yet, they are anti-dialogic and often result from the submission of one party to another in exchange for benefits or privileges for a few. These pacts reinforce the status quo and the functioning of the world-system. In different Indigenous regions, local authorities have colluded with mining companies, state governments, and even with drug cartels, allowing them to enter the territories without the knowledge or consent of the population.

The final element of the anti-dialogic action is cultural invasion. “Cultural invasion consists in the penetration of the invaders into the cultural context of the invaded, imposing on them their vision of the world, to the very extent that they curb their creativity, inhibiting its expansion” (Freire, 2008, p. 198). Cultural invasion is always violent. It is deeply connected with the coloniality of knowledge (Mignolo, 2007), the coloniality of being (Maldonado Torres, 2007), and the coloniality of representations (Salazar, 2009; Schiwy, 2009), as those oppressed are convinced of their inferiority by looking at the world through the eyes of the oppressors, they introject the patterns of domination and even reproduce them.

The values of the invaders become the standard for the invaded. The more the invasion is accentuated, alienating the being from the culture of the invaded, the greater the desire of the invaded to resemble the invaders: to walk like the invaders, dress in their way, speak in their way. (Freire, 2008, p. 200)

Community Indigenous media have a major role to play in counteracting cultural invasion as they have strong roots within the communities, safeguard and promote Indigenous culture and languages, and act in favour of the interests of the communities. They are key spaces for the circulation of information regarding the world-system and its many menaces and are essential in the shaping and naming of the world in Indigenous terms.



### **Theory of dialogic cultural action**

Opposed to the theory of anti-dialogic action, Freire discussed the theory of dialogic cultural action. This is also constituted of four elements: collaboration, union, organization, and cultural synthesis.

“In the dialogic theory of action, the subjects meet, for the transformation of the world, in collaboration” (Freire, 2008, p. 218). Collaboration occurs at the level of the being. It is not a sum of individualities, but a dialectic relation in which two “yous” become two selves. Indigenous communities have a communal basis that enables collaboration in the Freirean sense (Martinez Luna, 2013). The dialogical action occurs only between subjects, in full humanity, with differences, yet not inequalities. To fully achieve dialogic action inside the communities, gender equality is of the utmost importance. Indigenous women need to be recognised fully for all they do and bring into communal life. They need to be able to exercise their rights. By the same token, internal conflicts need to be sorted out either inside the radio stations or the communities. Peace-building relies on collaboration between beings and it can only be realised in communication.

Collaboration requires subjects to turn to the reality on which they depend to problematize, to pronounce, and transform it while being transformed by it. Ojo de Agua Comunicación has fostered the production of different radio productions, as well as songs and film festivals, seminars, workshops, and meetings as part of the project Transformative Communication for the Care of Life and Territory. These have all been spaces for Indigenous voices, knowledges, and ideas to be pronounced, heard, and circulated. They are enunciations of the world-system from the realities of Indigenous peoples. They analyse, criticize, and connect diverse forms of domination that demonstrate that the exploitation of territories, cultures, individuals, and the environment are part of what they call the braid of power, from which they seek liberation.

According to Freire (2008), liberation can be achieved with the union of the oppressed among and with themselves. To achieve union, the oppressed learn the mechanisms and ideologies of their adherence to the reality that has colonised them and gives them a false understanding of themselves. Dialogic action in unity provides the recognition of how the world-system operates and how they have adhered to it to transform an unjust reality.

In seeking unity, the oppressed must be organised as liberation is a common effort. Freire (2008) considered testimonials constitutive elements of revolutionary action. Testimonies provide critical knowledge of the historical moments in which the dialogic action takes place. They allow individuals to share and build a unified world view, a perception of the contradictions of society,

and the possibilities of change. Testimonies are the vehicles for the organisation of the oppressed. Whereas in the anti-dialogic theory manipulation is used for domination, in the theory of dialogic action, for the organization of the masses and, with them, the need for liberation.

According to Freire (2008), “all cultural action is always a synthesised and deliberate form of action that has an impact on the social structure, in the sense of maintaining it as it is, of verifying small changes in it or transforming it” (p. 235). Hence, cultural action serves either the domination or the liberation of beings. When put to the service of liberation, cultural action seeks to supersede the antagonistic contradictions of the world system and overcome the manipulation and the surrender of the (colonized) self to the (colonizer) other.

The pronunciation of the world, the praxis of dialogue, allows individuals to identify what Freire (2008) called “generating themes”, that is to say, the themes that are meaningful to the people according to their circumstances and in their own terms. The project Transformative Communication for the Care of Life and Territory has three core themes that function as generating themes. They were defined between Ojo de Agua and Indigenous broadcasters from the nine community radios. Gender, defence of life and territory, and peace-building are at the core of everyday life in Indigenous communities, not only in Oaxaca, but throughout the world. For Freire (2008), through the knowledge emanated from conversations around the generating themes, from the praxis of the true word, it is possible to get organised and to begin the process of cultural action, which he calls cultural synthesis.

I consider different media productions and communicative activities derived from the project Transformative Communication for the Care of Life and Territory as examples of Freire’s theory of dialogic cultural action. The media and communication products are dialogic discourses that reflect the praxis of enunciating the world. To discuss some examples, I refer to Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism as it provides the basis for the understanding of media discourses as substantive elements of dialogue.

### **BAKHTIN’S THEORY OF DIALOGISM**

According to Bakhtin (1986), dialogue brings about opinions leading to understanding, and creating the possibility of change. Bakhtin’s dialogism pays special attention to the multiplicity of meanings resulting from human perception, because meaning is what makes an event relevant, that is to say, the shared construction of an event between different individuals at a certain time and space that would be a way to enunciate the world from situated perspectives in equal



terms despite their differences. Indigenous peoples in different regions of the state of Oaxaca (and of the world) share a construction of their realities facing the menaces of the model of development of the modern capitalist, colonial, and patriarchal world-system. They have been denied by the oppressors the right to enunciate the world according to their perspective. However, they are using diverse media and communication technologies to give shared meanings to the events taking place in their territories.

According to Bakhtin (1986), dialogue allows us to make sense of the place we live in, and of the way we relate to this place. This is close to Freire's idea of the praxis of dialogue which includes action and reflection. The way the dialogic interaction takes place is through the exchange of discourses, including discursive events. For Bakhtin, language, as a code that allows its users to share meanings, is the basic element of discourse. Ken Hirschkop and David Sheperd (1989) state that there are a variety of styles in the articulation of language that have various discursive meanings dependent upon the contexts in which they are used. The internal differentiation and stratification that is characteristic of any language is what Bakhtin defined as heteroglossia (as cited in Holquist 1981). Heteroglossia reveals specific points of view about the world that are manifested through utterances.

### **Media utterances**

An utterance can be a single word, a novel, or a video production. It is the product of the interaction between the specificities of language and its context (Todorov, 1984). According to Todorov (1984), an utterance embodies the understanding and positioning of interlocutors in a given context. This positioning makes possible for interlocutors and the discourse, combined, to create a unique thing.

I consider utterances the media productions created by Indigenous and community media makers as part of the project Transformative Communication for the Care of Life and Territory. I understand them as social phenomena anchored in the three core themes that allow for the enunciation of the world from the perspectives and positions of Indigenous Peoples. Utterances cannot be separated from particular interlocutors and from specific social situations (Todorov, 1984). "No utterance in general can be attributed to the speaker exclusively; it is the *product of the interaction of the interlocutors*, and, broadly speaking, the product of the whole complex *social situation* in which it has occurred" (Voloshinov, 1927, as cited in Todorov, 1984, p. 30). I consider media products such as radio shows or podcasts utterances, units of speech

communication and of dialogue. Media-utterances share a language, a code that gives them meaning. Media-utterances cannot be attributed only to media-makers and communicators since they are “the product of the whole complex situation in which [they] occur” (Todorov, 1984, p. 30). Media-utterances are the result of the interaction between interlocutors and the social events during which the utterances are constructed, emitted, received, and understood. Therefore, media utterances I discuss incorporate the word of media makers as well as that of the communities, the different radio stations, regions of Oaxaca, and even from Indigenous communities in other Latin American countries.

Community Indigenous media producers give meaning to the world according to one time/place and context and share their experience and knowledge about it through their media productions. They orient their different media-utterances towards one referential object, the model of development based on accumulation by dispossession that is materialized in several projects of extractive nature. In focusing on this referential object, they also deal with complex and relevant issues such as violence, gender inequality, politics, distribution of power and wealth, flow of capital, global solidarity, democracy, freedom, human rights, and Indigenous rights. The different media-utterances intersect and engage in dialogues amongst themselves. These dialogues seek to undermine the official discourse provided by mainstream media networks, official governments, and corporative sources.

## **LAS VOCES QUE SOMOS, A DIALOGIC MEDIA UTTERANCE**

*Las Voces que Somos* is a live radio series broadcasted online and in diverse community radios in Oaxaca and other territories. The series was produced as part of the community cinema and radio festival entitled *El Lugar que Habitamos* (The Place we Inhabit), a yearly activity organized by Ojo de Agua Comunicación as part of the project Transformative Communication for the Care of Life and Territory. The radio series consists of live radio shows with the participation of different male and female Indigenous broadcasters from different radio stations in Mexico and other parts of Latin America. Each show is devoted to one main theme related the everyday life and pressing needs of Indigenous Peoples. In 2019, the radio series was described as follows:

from different corners of Latin America, the voices of the earth are expressed, proud and dignified, to denounce, to learn, to reflect, to propose and demand respect for life and the territories. A commitment that exhibits two antagonistic ways of seeing and being in this world: the unsustainable capitalist model based



on extractivism and dispossession, versus the vision of *Buen Vivir*, the harmonious coexistence with Mother Nature that preserves life in all its manifestations in the Place We Inhabit. (Ojo de Agua Comunicación, n.d., para. 1)

The series included Indigenous community broadcasters from Mexico, Brazil, and Colombia. There were three shows entitled: Strong Women, Violent Worlds; Weavings of Life, Fighting Against Megaprojects; and We Are Life, We Are Hearts that Transform. In each show there were sound bites produced by different Indigenous and community media from Oaxaca in Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, and Bolivia.

The radio series is a media utterance because it embodies the positioning and understanding of interlocutors about the generating themes they chose to discuss at a given time and space. *Las Voces que Somos* is the product of the interaction between interlocutors and the social context from which they speak. In sharing the language of radio, there is an underlying shared meaning between media and communication practitioners about the orality of radio and the codes to produce radio shows. This common code allows individuals from different Indigenous nations and different countries to build one mediated message. The radio series incorporates the voices of the people doing the live show as much as those from different radio stations and media collectives via the sound bites included in each show.

Sound bites include small dramatizations, on site journalist reports, informative sound bites, songs, or episodes from other radio series. For each show of the series, the themes vary. Some are related to women's rights, violence against women, masculinities, migration, and sexual exploitation. Others deal with Indigenous cosmovisions, the relation with nature and the territories, and the value of water as a source of life. They also refer to megaprojects of extractive nature such as the Interoceanic Corridor in the Isthmus region, highways on the Bolivian Amazon, or to the capitalist, racist, and patriarchal world-system.

*Las Voces que Somos*, as a media utterance, gives meaning to the world Indigenous peoples inhabit. It incorporates the reflection of different individuals and communities, and it is a mediated product that calls for actions to transform the world. It brings about opinions that lead to understanding and open the possibility of change of ideas, preconceived notions about Indigenous Peoples, development, and the manipulative official discourse.

The radio shows, live conversations, and sound bites used in each broadcast describe and problematize the world from Indigenous perspectives. They discuss and analyse aggression against women, capitalism, racism, megaprojects, development, water, life, history, drugs, alcohol, and communal life, amongst



other themes. They also imagine the world as it could or should be. For example, with Indigenous men helping in domestic chores, or governments complying with international agreements and providing good quality public services to Indigenous communities. Also, extractive megaprojects being stopped or people living in a harmonious relation with nature and amongst themselves. The radio shows contain a multiplicity of meanings for each phenomenon or theme they address. These meanings on different issues addressed in the radio series make them relevant.

The media utterance is constructed between different Indigenous individuals and community media, as well as territories situated in a certain time and space. It enunciates the world from situated perspectives that, although unique in their specificities, are commonly shared amongst many Indigenous communities in Latin America that are oppressed and whose territories are in danger of being plundered. The media utterance allows Indigenous Peoples to make sense of the place they live in and of how they relate to it, but it also allows audiences to relate to those places and stories from their own situated realities despite the heteroglot nature of the radio series.

Heteroglossia is acknowledged in the radio series from the title *Las Voces que Somos* (The Voices We Are). It refers to an array of voices, languages, and speech types that carry within them cultures, histories, traditions, and cosmovisions. The series is a media utterance made in collaboration amongst Indigenous broadcasters from different media and different Indigenous Peoples. It is a conversation between individuals in full humanity, with differences, yet not inequalities. Hence, there is a dialogue between their world views that includes the sound bites that complement the human-to-human conversation. The media utterance includes sounds from the territories, local music, and different languages, and bring to the show the presence of women, men, the youth, and children, as well as that of territories and cultural practices.

The radio series is a vehicle for self-representation. It contains traditional knowledges and a contemporary perspective of world issues demonstrating that Indigenous cultures and knowledges are not stagnant. It is an exercise of Indigenous rights via media, making communication possible and displaying Indigenous Peoples' full humanity against the oppressors. It is a way to seek emancipation.

The union of different Indigenous Peoples, voices, cultures, music, traditions, and knowledges in one radio series brings Peoples, individuals, and territories together amongst themselves. The media utterances embody the dialogic action, which, according to Freire, provides recognition of how the world-system operates and how to transform it. The radio shows and sound bites state



the profound comprehension Indigenous peoples have about how the world-system operates and how it keeps oppressing and marginalizing them. They discuss the intersection of capitalism, patriarchy, and racism in different areas of everyday life such as family roles in the care of children and of housework, expressing emotions, struggles of Indigenous and Afro-Latin American women, sexual exploitations, forced migration, the benefits of infrastructure and development projects to a few and not to the communities, and the lack of government assurances, to mention a few.

The radio series is both a media utterance that includes the heteroglossia of diverse Indigenous individuals, communities, and territories and the materialization of one form of organisation of media and communication practitioners. As a media utterance, it relies heavily on testimonies which Freire (2008) considered sources of critical knowledge of the historical moments in which dialogic action occurs. The live shows and the sound bites included in them are testimonies of these times, and the ways to face their menaces and reap their opportunities. The media utterance shares a unified world view from different Indigenous peoples bringing forward several contradictions of society and opening possibilities for change.

The media utterance *Las Voces que Somos* is a concrete contribution to an Indigenous cultural action put to the service of liberation. It is a discourse that counteracts the manipulation of the oppressors, and the monolithic official discourses about Indigenous cultures and development. It is also an example of Indigenous self-representation that presents individuals in their full humanity as well as cultures, knowledges, and cosmovisions in equal terms as those from the Western, colonial, dominating world-system. ■

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