

Indigenous communication in Latin America for social re-existence: communicative experiences in the Colombian Cauca.

“Words with no actions are barren.

Actions with no words are blind.

Words and actions outside the spirit of the community represent death”.

Proverb of the Nasa People.

Abstract

This paper is a contribution to the field of communication in Latin America through the theoretical proposal called communication for social re-existence. This concept arises as a result of the analysis of community practices in which communication and territorial defense are interrelated and led by the Nasa indigenous people in the Cauca region of Colombia. This communicative approach is represented through the metaphor of a fabric, built by knots (the participating actors), gaps (spaces for reflection) and threads (the strategies). This research hopes to be the beginning of a communicative methodology that will be useful within the organizational proposals of the subaltern movements.

Key words: communication, re-existence, indigenous, Cauca, Latin America, subalternity, territory.

Introduction

The paradigm of modernity built under the false idea of development is witnessing today a deep crisis worldwide, not only in the economic sphere, but evidenced in an undeniable civilizational

crisis that is the sum of multiple crises caused by the capitalist world-system, among them: financial, energy, global poverty, knowledge patterns and environmental. The latter refers to the destruction of nature and the irreparable ecocidal annihilation that some authors call capitalocene: (Moore, 2003), (Vega, 2019). In order not to perish, the hegemonic capitalist model deploys different strategies of extractivism and indiscriminate exploitation of resources worldwide and, in its voracity, persists in the dispossession, not only of common goods but of every space of existence.

The Nasa indigenous communities of northern Cauca, Colombia, consider that this hegemonic system has established an extermination plan over the peoples and territories in order to dispossess them of their natural wealth and their legitimate right to inhabit this region. They call it the "Plan of Death" and it is made up of four strategies of the capitalist project. Terror and war, co-optation, laws of dispossession and ideological propaganda. To counteract this system, they created the Plans of Life, which are the organizational instruments through which they determine the actions to be taken in response to the diverse problems and needs of the community.

Just as the Nasa community in Colombia has done through its Planes de Vida, diverse subaltern movements, especially indigenous peoples in Latin America have created multiple and alternative modernities through what Gaonkar calls creative adaptations, which are "the site where a people makes itself modern, as opposed to being made modern by alien and impersonal forces, and where it gives itself an identity and a destiny (1999: pp.16), are capable of overcoming this hegemonic domination and of re-existing, a concept that in this article we consider central and that we understand as the ways in which communities create their own organizational structures that transcend the dominant order and that allow them a relationship of respect with all forms of life.

In re-existence, community processes are fundamental because from them emancipatory struggles are strengthened, re-existence are new ways of existing, different from the existence that has been imposed in which economic value prevails over life itself. Here we wish to highlight the close relationship between the concept of re-existence and Gaonkar's theorization of creative adaptation. We consider that these modes of re-existence arise, following the author's argument, from non-functional creative adaptations to capitalist modernity, in the midst of multiple and alternative modernities with discourses proper to the South that no longer have a governing center or accompanying macro-narratives.

In this re-existence, moreover, the set of territorial behaviors necessary to give meaning (and feeling) to the group appears as a fundamental point of support: the territorial identity in movement, the materiality and subjectivity of the common, situated knowledge that defies the self-referential decontextualization of the capitalist, patriarchal and colonial world-system (Porto-Gonçalves, 2006).

For this re-existence to be possible, it is essential to defend the territory, understood not only as a physical substrate demarcated by the State, but also as those spaces inhabited by the different subaltern movements that have their own socio-cultural, political and economic organizational practices, in which they promote self-management practices in the fields of popular education, their own communication, agro-ecology, the preservation of Mother Earth and thus the care of all forms of life. This form of re-existence is already a reality for the Neo-Zapatista communities in Mexico, the CONAIE in Ecuador, the Mapuche in Chile and some Bolivian and Colombian indigenous communities.

Within these struggles and the different organizational strategies of indigenous movements, they have integrated communication as a central axis of community visibility and territorial defense. It is worth noting that the communication that these peoples build differs from

commercial communication or that of the media conglomerates. There, priority is given to the collective participation of the inhabitants through the active listening of their word and the realization of joint resistance actions in which they involve their own media to disseminate, coordinate and act.

This communication is carried out by the villagers themselves both to make it known among the communities and so that other people and groups outside the population can know the version of events from the protagonists themselves. This communication is centered on dialogue and reflection about the catastrophic consequences of the capitalist system for indigenous peoples and the need to defend life to the fullest.

The communication emanating from the Nasa people in Cauca has managed to revitalize ancestral word and action to defend all life. To crack the communication imposed by the conquest, modernity and everything that only allows propaganda and the commercialization of the word. To permanently understand the strategies of domination and dispossession that are embedded in the territory to contain and stop the emancipatory autonomous horizon. To recognize and wisely address the contradictions of the community. Converge and weave with others from the local to the global and vice versa, with the intention of sizing, dreaming, creating, recognizing and threading to the path of the peoples of the world who struggle and resist, and at the same time, are gestating and autonomizing their other worlds. (Almendra, 2017a: pp. 126).

In this way, the area of communication in which we have situated the present research is community, alternative and popular communication in Latin America, a critical aspect that dates back to the 70's and 90's and that recovers the pedagogical teachings of Paulo Freire. Here communication is conceived as a mechanism of social transformation, of organized and conscious participation around common demands to achieve greater community cohesion. This

field vindicates the conditions of production and social reproduction of life, giving great importance to organizational and mobilization processes, which have focused on generating alternatives to the dominant communication system, characterized according to Ramonet, (2011) by the relationship of political-media endogamy. That is, for serving as an instrument to the political and hegemonic powers, to the holders of power, as Castells (2009) has also pointed out.

In this sense, throughout the text we answer the research question about: how are they linked and what are the characteristics of the communicative processes of the Nasa indigenous people in the defense of the territory and the good living? And by answering this inquiry we will achieve the objective of this text, which is to articulate through their different communicative practices the construction of a theoretical proposal that we call communication for social re-existence, which is shaped by indigenous territorial knowledge and is considered as a transversal axis of their political strategies that claim autonomy, traditional knowledge, identity and culture.

The article is divided into three sections corresponding to the metaphor of weaving, formed by gaps (spaces for reflection), knots (the actors) and threads (the strategies) that we took from the Weaving of Communication and External Relations for the Truth and Life of the Nasa. Through this symbol we will explain what it consists of and what are the characteristics of communication for social re-existence.

Theoretical background

For the theoretical construction that we present here as a novel result of our research inquiries, it was necessary to recover different theoretical-conceptual categories and emerging proposals from the Latin American context, which made it possible to situate a deep analysis of the

historical and current situation of the region, in a complex world scenario of capitalist hegemonic domination, to glimpse the most pressing crossroads, challenges and alternatives to transform this model, taking into account communication as one of the transversal and possible alternatives. Thanks to this theoretical-conceptual interweaving, it was possible to define and characterize the existence of communication for social re-existence in Latin America, as a counter-hegemonic proposal that strengthens the defense of the territory (Mother Earth) and good living.

For these reasons we wanted to focus our theoretical approach from the notion of subalternity, because it allows us to critically understand the different power relations and social actors in a region that has historically been dominated as part of the periphery within the World-System (Wallerstein, 2016). Following Guha, (2002) we retake the importance of conducting historical analyses in which subaltern groups are seen as subjects of history. It is also understood that the culture of these groups is not a homogeneous space but a multiple palimpsest composed of cultural elements of very heterogeneous durations and historical validity, articulated in complex ways that are in a process of constant refunctionalization and systematic transformations (Ginzburg, 2014).

This theoretical decision allows us to question the Eurocentric conception of modernity as a single path, as these studies have already done in India, and more recently in Latin America, from where a multiple modernity emerges (Bolívar, 2005) and following Gaonkar:

"modernity is not one, but many; modernity is not new, but old and familiar; modernity is incomplete and in a necessary way" (Gaonkar, 1999: pp.18). And that is why in these multiple modernities converge a great plurality of uses and customs and identity diversity.

Bolívar points out that, in this multiple modernity in America, there is a modernity that he calls baroque, which arises with the fact of the conquest, with the destruction of the European world

of the American worlds, and with the submission or expulsion of the indigenous American populations. This baroque modernity is based on how the indigenous survivors create ways of living in the midst of the annihilation of their world. According to the author, this is typically baroque behavior "inventing a life within death" (2005: pp.68). It is important to emphasize the importance given to the value of the use of the world, a value that is being devoured by mercantile value.

In addition to the dispossession and the genocidal impact that decimated the indigenous population, the conquest in America led to the introduction of capitalism, which, following Wallerstein's postulates, can be explained by the modern World-System based on a capitalist mode of production that divided the world into three zones of production of unequal exchanges. The peripheral, semi-peripheral and central zones. Adding that: "There is always one group at the top of the hierarchical classification and one or several groups at the bottom. These classifications are both global and local, and both types of classification have enormous consequences on people's lives and the functioning of a capitalist world-economy" (Wallerstein, 2011: pp. 26).

However, after more than five centuries of hegemony of the world-system, today its consequences are becoming unsustainable, in what Wallerstein (2016) has called the current civilizational crisis, which is evidenced in the social crisis, the political crisis, the cultural crisis, the economic crisis and the environmental crisis. Regarding the latter, in Latin America, the current neo-extractivism and the commodification of nature have deepened conflicts of a socio-territorial nature, as Escobar (2010) amply exposes, in a constant dispute between the hegemonic system, which commodifies all forms of existence, and those historical struggles of the subaltern movements that refuse to disappear. As argued by Saldaña (2002), Rabasa and Sanjinés, (1994) these movements focus on the construction of alternative modernities

emanating from ethnic movements through their popular practices, elaborating new forms of organization in the face of the Nation-State and the global crisis.

Zibeche (2017) considers that in the region there is a wide diversity of subaltern movements, and defines the ethical and cultural framework of Latin American movements as a great "mestizaje" that comes from three major currents: the ecclesial base communities linked to liberation theology, the indigenous insurgency carrying a worldview different from the Western one, and the Guevarism of revolutionary militancy. However, in this theoretical framework we will focus on the indigenous movement and some of the decolonizing practices (Rivera, 2010) that give life and meaning to the achievement of this alternative modernity.

Taking into account the above, within this wide range of emancipatory resistances, Latin American indigenous movements are protagonists of autonomous, anti-systemic and anti-capitalist processes (Aguirre Rojas, 2012). These native peoples have achieved de facto social autonomy in their ancestral territories, and vis-à-vis national states (Makaran, 2019). However, these struggles are not exempt from certain contradictions. Autonomies in Latin America are processes of resistance by peoples or ethnic groups that have been buried and denied, where they recover or strengthen their identity through the vindication of their culture, the exercise of collective rights, and the establishment of their own political-administrative structures with diverse competencies, spheres, or levels of application (Gabriel et al. 2005).

This is the result of the decolonising practices that indigenous movements are proposing for the construction of a world-other¹, from the exchange of knowledge and alternatives, from their traditions to defend the territory and life communally, and in the face of historical dispossession

¹ "Other World" is a concept used by Raúl Zibeche to refer to those social processes or experiences where the social justice prevails. The "Other World" is different distinguished by its propositional or performative dimensión. That is, by the constructive or practice dimensión that runs though it. (Donoso Romo, 2018).

and contemporary capitalism. Actions that Svampa (2019) frames in the conceptualization of ecoterritorial turn, understood as the birth of a common language between the communitarian indigenous matrix, the defense of the territory and the environmentalist discourse, which grant common frameworks for collective action, empowering the struggle with new forms of mobilization, focused on the defense of the natural commons (Composto and Navarro, 2014). Therefore, following Gutiérrez (2012), we agree in affirming that in Latin America there are possibilities of transformation of social relations of exploitation and colonial domination in the political, economic and social spheres, under a communitarian-popular horizon and a production of the commons.

Indigenous movements in the region have been characterized by horizontal decision making and the claim of new demands, not only in the economic and political sphere, but they also carry a great democratizing and transforming potential, where there are two common features according to Escárzaga (2014); (1) collective resistance actions that test alternative projects of coexistence and (2) social regulation for the defense of what is produced in common.

The return of this indigenist, socio-political and cultural worldview has become visible especially with the neo-Zapatista uprising in Mexico in 1994 and, subsequently, since the mid-2000s with the *suma qamaña* coined in Bolivia, and *sumak kawsay* in Ecuador, which translate into the multidimensional notion of Good Living, a concept which, according to Gudynas and Acosta (2011), shares a common policy in rejection of developmentalism, based on its own ethics, which recognizes the values of nature, and the knowledge and traditions of indigenous peoples as pluricultural knowledge, capable of building new and better possibilities for life, through the practices of the place (Escobar, 2010).

In sum, what has been built in these places are alternative modernities and the possibility of re-existence (Porto-Gonçalves and Hocsman, 2016). Such re-existence refers to territorial identity

in movement, to the materiality and subjectivity of the common, and to situated knowledges that challenge the self-referential decontextualization of the capitalist, patriarchal and colonial world-system. Re-existence is the way in which indigenous communities, besides struggling against hegemonic power, open cracks to the oppressive system with the creation of new ways of existing that link feeling, thinking, and acting as ways of inhabiting the world in harmony with Mother-Earth.

In order to make this social re-existence possible, indigenous movements organize themselves through different strategies that include the legal dimension, the economic dimension, the cultural dimension, the dimension of self-government and the dimension of territorial defense, where communication has been articulated as a transversal axis of the entire organizational framework. Therefore, we can assure that there is an intrinsic link between indigenous movements in Latin America and the different community practices, including contemporary and ancestral communication practices that have allowed them to socially re-exist in the territories.

It should be noted here that the type of communication promoted by the indigenous movements coincides with the purposes of other subaltern movements in Latin America over the last two decades. They coincide in developing a communication-other that consists of implementing "coordination processes between media and related entities, and thus weaving networks that seek to provide joint responses to common problems, ranging from the exchange of information and experiences to the implementation of technical training initiatives, through the agreement of actions and programmatic definitions" (Muñoz, G, 2018) and in turn, betting on the democratization of communication framed in terms of social justice, considering diversity and pluralism as the axis as basic assumptions of the Right to Communication (León, 2013). In this sense, they are an expression of counterpower to that of the network-society (Castells, 2009).

This communication that emerges from subaltern movements enables us, taking up the significant contributions of Dutta and Pal (2010), to explore new research perspectives in communication theory through the inquiry of how "the other" has been represented, and, at the same time, to build an emancipatory and critical dialogue that questions the neoliberal hegemonic context, and the discourse it has imposed. All this would allow us to fulfill the objective of transforming them, through the dialogue between researchers and subaltern movements.

In addition to this we want to emphasize the findings of Burch (2013) who theorizes about indigenous peoples, communication, culture and rights, and proposes that, for indigenous peoples, communication -from their traditional forms- is a central element of their work with a particular emphasis on orality and the visual. They claim and practice their own forms and rights of communication, create media and develop their own policies from traditional expressions and modalities to the appropriation of digital technologies. This is a statement that we consider central to our proposal.

Likewise, (Beltrán, 2008) allows us to position the theorization of communication before Columbus, as the modes of registration and transmission of data by these pre-Hispanic cultures through multiple languages and symbolic productions from four major modalities: men-nature, men-gods, elites-people, and man-man, expressed in turn in diverse communicational types with their respective forms of expression; oral communication, gestural-spatial-sound communication, iconographic and written communication, and spatial-monumental communication. In addition to this, we take up a concept that we consider fundamental for the theoretical construction; communication as *palabrandar* (Almendra, 2017b), which means to

walk the word², to listen, understand, dialogue and respect *Mama Kiwe* (Mother Earth), to speak is a communication-other that is constituted from the word and action from below, from the communities, for the indigenous peoples, from their own spaces and the appropriate means to defend life and weave resistances.

In this theoretical line we recover Rozental (2017), who proposes to "indianize ourselves", which is the verb to seek ourselves in the Indian, in the face of capitalism and modernity allied to capital rescuing the collective memories of struggle, making decisions collectively, in assembly, to resist, to defend life and Mother Earth harmonizing thought and actions. Therefore, placing ourselves in a subaltern approach we make this proposal from the history itself, the history against the grain of this indigenous people that allows us to build theoretically taking into account their social, political and cultural agendas in order to re-exist.

Methodology

Research site

This is a qualitative research, which made use of ethnography and was carried out in the territory of Cauca, between 2013 and 2015. After that period and until now there has been a

² For the indigenous communities of Cauca, "Walk the word" means being able to reach agreements through dialogue without imposing oneself over others. Each opinion is important to the community and it has a deep value in which the word is synonymous with truth and honesty. "Walk the world" means that actions, thoughts and agreements have a coherence to fight against fear, terror, hopelessness and against state abandonment. So the joint purpose between word and action is to recover the land, which has been usurped historically. "Walk the world" is reciprocity between word and action. It recognises that the collective imaginary and rooted in the principles and the territories (our word) and it taking shape in different mechanisms, forms, structures and particular functions, according to contexts and challenges (our action). Both word and action are subject to the aspirations and dreams which define us as a group of people, as a community. Moreover, they difference the community and make it incompatible with the power logic which has conquistated them. This guiding spirit must always guide word and action (Almendra, 2917, 283).

continuous updating of the information, which has been contrasted with new interviews and continued dialogues with the actors to determine if there has been any substantial change. The place of focus was Santander de Quilichao, a Colombian municipality located in the northern sector of the department of Cauca 97 kilometers north of Popayán and 45 kilometers south of Cali.

Compilation of data

This research was guided by the Participatory Action Research (PAR), which consists of a communicating and reciprocal interaction with the reality of the communities themselves, and in which the importance of the knowledge that arises from popular knowledge is shown (Fals Borda, 2015).

In that sense, in this research we consider primordial the knowledge that this indigenous people makes possible in the understanding of communication studies in Latin America, making visible the main actors that produce it and that have traditionally been denied in academic research in the communicative field. That is why we highlight the voice of this community, among them indigenous women (Almendra), including the significant contributions of their situated knowledge, which has allowed them to theorize about communication. Thus, this article is an advance in relation to the communicative studies that continue to privilege research that reproduces the colonial dynamics of knowledge.

Access to the site was possible because the community welcomed the researchers, who were already known for their previous work with other communities, including the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, the Peasant Reserve Zones of the Cimitarra River Valley, both in Colombia, and had been peace volunteers in Zapatista communities in Chiapas through

the Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Center, in addition to accompanying other neighborhood experiences in Bogota.

Data collection was based on the compilation of field diaries and the collaborative practice of the researchers in community activities, which allowed a closer approach to territorial and communicative practices.

In the field diaries, elements of daily practices were recorded, such as the planning carried out through the editorial boards of the communication network to determine the topics to be addressed, both in the communicative pieces and in the accompaniment of actions in defense of the territory. One of the cases in which PRA can be evidenced was in the accompaniment to the harmonization of one of the hills in northern Cauca, where through the performance of ancestral rituals, including the offering of animals and fruits, Mother Earth was asked for forgiveness for the irreparable damage caused by mining, and was asked to instruct them in the necessary knowledge to ensure that this practice was eliminated from the territory. From this practice, written texts were produced to disseminate this action through the media of the fabric. In addition, thirteen semi-structured interviews were conducted, with communication, territory and culture as the main themes. The actors participating in these interviews were active members of the Cauca communication network and former members, including founders of this process who later went on to create other initiatives, such as the Minga de Comunicación Indígena (Indigenous Communication Minga).

In addition, four semi-structured interviews were conducted with researchers, community leaders from other experiences related to the defense of the territory and the process of indigenous communication in Colombia.

Likewise, the research team participated in the II Abya Yala Indigenous Communication Summit, held in Tlahuitoltepec Oaxaca, in October 2013 in which unstructured interviews were conducted, and also participated as students of the first grade of the Escuelita Zapatista in Chiapas, Mexico in 2013. There, a structured interview was conducted with the Junta de Buen Gobierno del Caracol III, La Garrucha.

The commitment and reciprocal interaction with this indigenous community from the PRA, is materialized through continuous communication with them, and through the dissemination abroad of their demands, by the researchers. It also takes place through participation in different community activities, among them, accompanying the Minga that arrived in Bogota in mid-October 2020 to demand security, peace and land-related petitions, in which more than 8,000 members participated.

During the PRA process we faced certain tensions that were resolved. The team realized that without participation and reciprocity, without talking and listening, it is not possible to achieve satisfactory results. That is why, after carrying out these communicative processes, we proposed the importance of critically processing all the information obtained, so as not to fall into essentialism or an uncritical view of the movement.

Data analysis

From the data analysis we were able to build a Grounded Theory about communication for social re-existence. Grounded Theory is a research method in which the theory emerges from

the data, and which aims at identifying basic social processes as the central point of the theory. This was possible in the relationship between the concepts addressed in the theoretical foundation and the data produced and examined from the data collection throughout the research.

For the data analysis, a categorical matrix was made in which we decided what information we were going to expand, and which allowed us to find, from the interviews conducted, the codes in common for the conceptual definition. After this, we selected which themes would be the main ones in the construction of the theory.

In addition to this, the discussions of the Latin American and Caribbean Forum on Popular and Community Communication and the II International Congress on Southern Communicology in CIESPAL (Quito) in 2016 were taken into account. Likewise, a review of hemerographic material (documentary, sound and audiovisual) was carried out and that entered into dialogue and comparison with situated work, field diaries and interviews. All this allowed us to extract descriptive categories in order to, subsequently and by interrelating them with the information obtained, be able to build the central categories and the proposed Theory.

1.0 Communication for social re-existence woven by Knots, Gaps and Threads

In this section we address the community practices of the Nasa indigenous people in Cauca and the link they have built with the communication originating in their territory, which is symbolised through the metaphor of a fabric made up of knots (the actors), gaps (spaces for reflection) and threads (the strategies), which allow us to explain how these three axes weave together the proposal of communication for social re-existence, making a novel contribution to communication studies from the indigenous peoples in Latin America.

For this purpose, like other indigenous peoples in Latin America, the Nasa people have a central purpose focused on defending their territories, identity and autonomy by means of life strategies of a harmonious life with nature. The Association of Northern Cauca Indigenous Councils (*Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte del Cauca — ACIN*) is ruled by the ten principles of Cauca's Indigenous Regional Counsel Combat Platform (*Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca — CRIC*) who advocate: 1. Recovering the land of the *resguardos*³ and defending the ancestral territory and spaces of life of the indigenous communities. 2. Expanding the *resguardos*, 3. Reinforcing indigenous Councils⁴, 4. Refusing to pay rent for the land, 5. Disseminating the knowledge of legislation about indigenous peoples and demanding its fair implementation, 6. Defending indigenous history, language and customs, 7. Training indigenous teachers, 8. Boosting economic and community companies, 9. Recovering, defending and protecting the spaces of life in harmony and concord with Mother Earth and 10. Defending the Family (CRIC, s.f.).

To achieve these goals, *los Tejidos de Vida* (lit. Life Weavings) were created in the year 2005: *Economic and Environmental Weaving, People and Culture Weaving, Justice and Harmony*

³ Indigenous *resguardos* or reservations are the common property of indigenous communities. Articles 63 and 329 of the Political Constitution declare that these reservations are inalienable, imprescriptible and nonseizable. *Resguardos* constitute a peculiar legal and socio-political institution made up of one or several indigenous communities who hold the common property of their territory which they run autonomously based on indigenous laws and regulations. *Article 2.14.7.5.2. Management and administration:* Taken from: <https://www.minagricultura.gov.co/Normatividad/Paginas/Decreto-1071-2015/CAPITULO-5-Naturaleza-Juridica-de-los-Resguardos-Indigenas-Manejo-y-Administracion.aspx>

⁴ Act 2001 of 1988, repealed by Act 2164 of 1995, governed the establishment of land *resguardos* and defined the Indigenous Council as a peculiar public entity whose members are indigenous persons elected and recognized by a group settled in a specific territory. The council legally represents the group and performs the functions as established by applicable legislation, uses and customs. The councillors must be members of the community who appoints them and they shall be elected in accordance with article 3 of Law 89 of 1890 or in agreement with their own forms of traditional organization. Taken from: <https://www.funcionpublica.gov.co/eva/gestornormativo/norma.php?i=19418#:~:text=El%20decreto%202001%20de%201988,un%20territorio%20determinado%2C%20encargado%20de>

Weaving, Weaving for the Defence of Life and Communication and External Relations Weaving for Truth and Life, with the purpose of transforming the State's organizational structure imposed upon the territory. Each of them reflect on the importance of interweaving and of liberating Mother Earth (Uma Kiwe) using peculiar political and organizational forms for good living (*Wët wët fxizenxi* in the Nasayuwe language).

The notion of good living—according to Svampa, one of most stimulating concepts of the eco-territorial approach—constitutes a critical proposal of alternative modernity as opposed to the promise of “development” and lineal advances towards progress set forth by a project of modernity which became unfeasible. “Good Living” resumes the idea of a good life, of welfare in its broadest sense, beyond the limitations imposed by material consumerism, and reclaims spiritual and convivial notions. “Plenitude of life”, austerity and the refusal to live “better” at the expense of others are expressly emphasized. Some classical notions also apply such as ensuring that “freedom, opportunities, capacities and real potentialities of individuals blossom and expand” (Gudynas & Acosta, 2011).

Thus, the Communication Weave for Truth and Life was born as a different communication proposal, a "Puutx We'wnxi Uma Kiwe" (communication from Mother Earth), that is, a counter-hegemonic response that consists of informing, reflecting, deciding and acting collectively. As we mentioned, the organization of the Communication Weaving is represented in a symbolic manner which encapsulates the joint construction of unity to face capitalism's Death Plan and its strategies. Thus, **threads, knots and gaps** are used to describe its setup, just as a *jigra* (bag) is woven. To various indigenous communities, the *jigra* contains life. These

three axes will allow us to reflect on who, how and for what purpose they produce this communication.



Figure 1. Bag from the Cauca region. Taken from:

<http://mochilasnasa.wix.com/mochilasindigenas#!modelos/albumfotos0=5>

1.1 Knots (The actors)

The **knots** represent the actors at play inside or outside the territory, the social organizations or networks with whom exchange relationships exist to support the communication proposal, for instance the Indigenous Guard, devised as an ancestral organism and an instrument of resistance, unity and autonomy for the defence of the territory and of the Life Plan of indigenous communities, or the alliance with other farming Afro-Colombian communities to promote the reestablishment of life balance, accepted as one of the central and foremost mandates of the “land for the people and the people for the land”. To recover the land as collective subjects in search of the supremacy of life and the conquest of comprehensive global autonomy.

Thus, based on the "we", on "command by obeying" and on "we cannot do it alone", they build a network between peoples and processes in different parts of the region, together with other subaltern movements. Together they resist the powerful and build alternative modernities. To achieve this, they have strengthened autonomous projects guided by a strong community matrix.

Thus, the knots (actors) in communication for social re-existence are not media experts, communicators and journalists, but the social bases themselves, the workers, peasants, indigenous people, students, the popular classes immersed in the subaltern movements, with the aim of generating a liberating, emancipatory, autonomous and collective communication that allows them to defend Mother Earth in order to re-exist.

Mother Earth is the weaving of territories harmonically balanced where not only us human beings live but all the creatures that belong in nature, what we do is to revitalize our Life Weavings and our own forms of communicating, of learning, of healing, of having our independent governance, of owning our own word... Defending *Pachamama* is defending ourselves. For this reason, let us be like water: joyous, free and in motion. (Almendra, 2015)

1.2. Gaps (The spaces for reflection)

From this point of view, the Weaving perceives **gaps** as areas of critical encounter and of reflection that feed the others. Assemblies, video conferences, schools of communication or any of the moments when they sit to converse and discuss are based on the Nasa way of thinking. Some of these encounters take place around the *tulpa*, the stove where *mote*⁵ is brewed to be shared at community assemblies or *mingas*⁶ (communal groups); the *tulpa* is made with three stones symbolising father, mother and daughter who also represent the Nasa principles of life: organization, culture and territory. There they discuss the main issues of the Plan of Death, which for them takes the form of four strategies:

⁵ A soup from the Cauca region made of peeled white corn boiled on charcoal.

⁶ *Minga* is the collective work made with a purpose by us.

- 1) *Terror and war*. In the midst of the internal conflict that the country has been experiencing for more than six decades, the indigenous territories have been the preferred scenario for exploitation and plundering by the different actors in the armed conflict (military, paramilitary and guerrilla), the arrival of transnationals with the implementation of mining megaprojects, the planting of monocultures endorsed by the national governments that seek to privatise the indigenous territories, and the privatisation of the indigenous territories, the sowing of monocultures supported by national governments seeking the privatisation of resources, the sowing of illicit crops, drug trafficking and with it consequences such as prostitution, militarisation, forced recruitment of community members, constant harassment and massacres of indigenous people who refuse to hand over their ancestral territories.
- 2) The *co-optation* to destructure the processes of struggle and organisation carried out by the indigenous communities, both the government and the multinationals, identify the leaders of the movement in order to make agreements with them to hand over territories in exchange for economic benefits, creating internal disputes that destabilise the community.
- 3) The *laws of dispossession* that consist of the implementation of policies to benefit the large conglomerates of power through agribusiness, extractivism and economic agreements such as free trade agreements that guarantee them greater profitability while those who oppose these measures are prosecuted, which not only affect indigenous peoples but also other subaltern sectors such as Afro-Colombian and peasant communities.
- 4) And the *ideological propaganda* that is produced through what they have called cultural invasion, exercised by different social institutions such as the church, the school and of

course by the mass media, which, by pointing the finger against the processes of resistance, spread rejection and stigmatisation, while favouring the capitalist model, encouraging consumerism, the loss of the mother tongue, of traditional medicine and of their own communication.

1.3. Threads (The strategies)

The **threads** refer to strategies that create union, the fabric is woven using knots for exchange and joint construction, either by their own means, as weavers do, or accompanying the process of Liberation of Mother Earth⁷ while fortifying the Communal Communication Group (*Minga de Comunicación*) to meet this purpose⁸.

The *Minga de Comunicación* is the mechanism we devise to narrate this epic. To tell what is happening and while doing so, to unwire⁹ and while unwiring, to keep weaving. Telling, unwiring, weaving to shorten the path to the liberation of Mother Earth (*Minga de Comunicación*, 2016).

The Nasa people observe five major community rituals in accordance with the moments or paths of *Uma* and *Tay*, (sun and moon).

⁷ The historical resistance to defend autonomy, territory and all forms of life has advanced since the end of 2014 with the recuperation of some land and six haciendas totalling 9,000 hectares of land that had been occupied by Carlos Ardila Lülle (one of the country's most powerful tycoons) to create a cane monopoly for the production of biofuel.

⁸ Despite the weakening experienced by the Communication Weaving since 2016, it should be pointed out that the *Minga de Comunicación Indígena* of the process of Liberation of Mother Earth is beginning to gain momentum.

⁹ Unwiring the word means rescuing it from excessive market trade and the exploitation it endured under the capitalist economic system which turned it into barren land. Unwiring the land means that the land recovers the features of Mother Earth for the defence of life because a link of respect and reciprocity exists with the land.

“Ipx Kaa’th” The *tulpa*. The heat from fire, charcoal, family union when feelings are expressed and advice and learning are shared. In this space, silence is an essential form of communicating, of listening.

“Pkhakhecx Mjinxi”. The *minga*, a space for communication and learning. Through the work of the *minga* news, problems, issues and projects become known. It is a space of communication for daily and natural contact.

“Puutx We’wnxi”. Communication at the *Chicherías*. A space for communication and learning. Traditionally, in Nasa territories and communities there are places where *guarapo* or *chicha* (traditional tea) is shared. The *chicherías* are spaces where ideas, feelings and knowledge are expressed; intimate news, experiences are shared, things that do not seem so relevant or are not widely disclosed.

“Puutx We’wnxi”. Communication using forms and symbols. Nasa communication takes place from practice. To the Nasa people, the symbols, colours and fabrics are the expression of feeling, force, suffering and joy. “When a woman presents a man with a fabric, a profound feeling of respect is conveyed. Fabrics carry massive spiritual force. This is a form of expressing from deep inside, not using words but actions.”

“Puutx We’wnxi”. Communication through art. Art is another strong space for conveying nature’s messages using fabrics, hieroglyphs, paintings, music, dance and traditional food and drinks.

“Puutx We’wnxi”. Communication with animal creatures. Understanding messages from animals. Animals provide information, warn us before things happen. The visit of

a humming bird, snakes, bees, butterflies, they each convey different information that we should all be able to interpret. (Muñoz, 2018, p. 125)

Additionally, the Nasa people identify nine senses that facilitate communication with Mother Earth:

Yafxa's Phadecxa. Looking and watching. **Thuwa's kat Txajcxa.** Staying alert, knowing how to hear, to listen and to understand the sounds. **Ichuc Mu'susna.** Smelling, identifying what sweet, bitter, strong smells convey. **Jxadxna.** Touching, knowing how to touch and analyse feelings from contact. **Tecxna.** Tasting and identifying strong, smooth, simple flavours. **Iesen.** Signs, the pulsations of the body, movements and their messages. **Ksxa'Wnxi.** Dreams, understanding and interpreting the messages that spirits convey through dreams. **I'khnxi.** Visions, the special ability to see beyond what we watch. **Iwehnxa.** Love, understanding and feeling the moment, being able to fall in love physically and spiritually. Feeling from the heart, exchanging energies. All the beings in the universe possess the **Ksxaw** spirit or energy, some energies attract and complement each other, others clash. Different energies allow us to communicate. (Muñoz, 2018, p. 126).

Creative means such as radio programmes, fanzines, graphic material, murals and even documentaries¹⁰ broadcast on the website, on digital social networks or on printed material are

¹⁰ One of the documentaries produced by the Weaving which reached greater dissemination is titled *Somos alzados en bastones de mando* (ACIN, 2006). It discloses the suppression of the indigenous movement exerted by the National Army in May 2006 in the Reservation La María, in the Cauca, when a national referendum was demanded concerning the Free Trade Treaty with the United States and the devolution of land. The documentary also addresses the covering up of national mass media under the deceit of neutrality. The documentary *Y siguen llegando por el oro* (ACIN, 2013) deals with the complex question of mining in the Cauca Department. It narrates

used to disseminate worldwide community issues and resistance actions as well as to self-represent the struggle of the community.

Proper communication refers to the technologies and their advancements such as the radio, video, photography, internet, smartphones, tables, digital safety, free software use, as well as other tools and devices which have been recovered from the own conception from above to fight against the Death Plan.

In our contemporary world, we know that the liberation of Mother Earth must use everything in her power so that her rebellion has an echo and increases its strength. We cannot be naive, facing the “loyalties” and the chains which are been imposed by the big communication and ICT companies. Having a conscious use and the know-how of the circuits of a new cybernetic era are part of the liberation of our thought and hearth, that our Mother cries out for (Minga de Comunicación, 2017).

Taking into account the communitarian and communication practices exposed, we can focus on communication for social re-existence, which is led by subaltern movements. They are the ones who propose alternative modernities to face the capitalism system, though different forms and though the communication acts. Communication in terms of territorial defense and good lives. For this reason, are organized into meeting spaces in which they reflect and build action strategies that involve three major components. First, spiritual, which are the practices and knowledge of spirituality of the communities. Second, political, which refers to the history of

the story of Ezequiel, an inhabitant of the indigenous reservation of San Francisco, who claims that due to economic hardship, lack of land and a large family to provide for, he was compelled to work as a miner. Unfortunately, transnational companies and gold-related mafia settled in the Cauca region, in places such as Canoas in Río Mondomo, inflicting irreparable damage to the environment with false promises of development. More recently, Radio Pa'yumat broadcast the documentary: “*La Liberación de la Madre tierra no se vende ni se negocia*” (ACIN, 2016).

resistance and the political wisdom of the communities. Third, technician component, related to the own communication and the appropriate communication.

Self-communication is the connexion with ancestrality, the sense of listening, the permanence of oral tradition as a form of recovery of collective memory. It encounters the word though the assemblies or in mingas that give the word a dialogical character, horizontal and interaction with the Mother Earth character and allow to achieve the interpretation of her messages. For example, they are able to speak around fire, which is an articulation between word and action to defend all the ways of living. All this set of elements consolidates what we have called communication for social re-existence.

Moreover, communication for the social re-existence is also a response to the conspiracy silence and the continuous signals designed by the media conglomerates. Subaltern movements decided to de-commodify and decolonize the world, free it to walk alongside the actions that allow them to unravel the territory and defend life. That common-action, which refers to a communication-action, mobilizes communities to emancipate themselves. This communication transcends the defensive scope to creatively transform the territories, strengthening the political-cultural processes. Thus, using different communicative tools, communities have broken the informative fence of the commercial and paid media, which are involved in one of the most important crisis in the face of other forms of non-commercial critical communication. Internal organizations and the diffusion of the different demands have played a fundamental role to consolidate these communications for the social re-existence actions. They make echo though the consolidation of global solidarity network. Internet has facilitated some of these exchanges, but the main work has been articulated against the capitalist model that these groups have set as their primary objective.

In short, communication for the social re-existence is a word and a collective action for mobilize consciences and transform the Death system, weaving the territory together with other rebellious threads. It is important because of the resistance against the dispossession of multiple and creative forms in their own times and geographies. Body as territory communicates with other languages to reconnect with life, identity, history and autonomy in order to dignify the being and existing.

This is also a fight for the de-commodification of this universal right, therefore, it has a marked anti-capitalist character. It has been reflected in different analysis of the critical content issued from the singularities and the creativity. Their communitarian media are open to give the floor to the bottom people to denounce and enunciate. They understand the utopia as a plural rebellion and a self-manages, which gives them freedom in the dissemination of content.

Communications for the social re-existence is in motion as the water. It is articulated thanks to the rhythm of the word and the action, so it is relevant to make communication pedagogy to create a multiplication of the technical and political knowledge and to promote generational generational relays based on mutual trust and harmonious coexistence.

Conclusions

In the face of the exploitative model of hegemonic modernity, there have always been initiatives on the part of subaltern movements demanding new possibilities for a dignified life. In the face of the capitalist onslaught, some indigenous populations have built alternative modernities to defend all forms of life, and from the practices of commanding obeying and good living, they resist, in multiple ways, the territorial dispossession that different States execute through their economic development programs of the dominant hegemonic model.

The political-organizational strategies embodied by different indigenous movements in Latin America, among them the Nasa in northern Cauca, are the response to the exploitation, dispossession and historical exclusion reflected in the current civilizational crisis of the capitalist system, present in the ecological, political, social, cultural and paid media spheres, which have lost spaces. These spaces have been won by free, alternative, popular and popular media for social re-existence, which undertake urgent tasks, among which are rigorous research, analysis, critical information and action.

In this research it was fundamental to recover the theoretical studies from a subaltern Latin Americanist perspective, which allowed us to identify the different emancipatory social movements in the continent, focusing on the indigenous movement, and from this theoretical position to highlight the different alternative strategies that have been built to re-exist, focusing on one of them, communication. For the analysis of communication, we resorted to the literature published in the area, also from a subaltern approach, which allowed us to obtain several clues for the formulation of this communicative theory.

In this line, having analyzed the communitarian and communicative practices of the Nasa in Cauca allows us to propose as a theoretical contribution, the term "communication for social re-existence". This term would be within the field of communication applied from a subaltern perspective, and nurtured by the Latin American indigenous perspective. This concept is articulated from the metaphor that these peoples have about the fabric made up of knots (actors), gaps (spaces for reflection) and threads (strategies) where three main principles are present: the spiritual, the political, and the technical. The technical, in turn, is divided into two: their own communication, with which they have always connected to Mother-Earth through their senses, and the appropriate communication, in which they make use of ICTs and other information mechanisms.

We also consider that the theory outlined here on communication for social re-existence can serve as a theoretical-analytical framework for those researching communication in subaltern movements. What we have shown as a case study will allow them to identify the actors, spaces for reflection and strategies in these organisational processes and at the same time to analyse whether these axes are linked to the defence of territory and good living. It also allows them to understand the disputes, tensions, conflicts and challenges present in their communities.

Another element that can be added to the research of those who investigate based on the theory of communication for social re-existence is that it is not only limited to the analysis of technological media, but also recovers the communities' own ancestral forms of communication as a mechanism for dialogue, interaction and harmony with Mother Earth.

Derived from this research, we highlight the need to break the hierarchical relations between the intellectual and social elites and the subaltern movements. There must be a rupture between observer and observed that enables the dialogical construction of knowledge, assuming the leading role of the communities.

As stated, communication for social re-existence contains in itself an emancipatory potential that has allowed them to act in the face of the crisis and the devastation they are experiencing in their territory as a result of the strategies of capital and the State that persist in the Cauca through the laws of dispossession, terror and war, ideological propaganda and co-optation that are part of the Plan of Death of the capitalist system.

Finally, communication for social re-existence makes it possible to understand not only the cultural aspect of the subaltern movements but also the ethical-political foundations that shape their entire organisational process. In that sense, it also allows us to understand the disputes, tensions, conflicts and challenges present in their territories, but also the Life Plans and articulation where communication is the fabric that runs through them and is made up of their

gaps (the spaces for reflection), knots (the actors) and threads (the strategies). Several questions remain unanswered concerning how to build a methodology of communication and defence of the territory that may be useful to the communities, which is also the scope of communication for social re-existence, and what are its greatest current challenges. These questions will undoubtedly serve as the subject of future research.

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