

Representations of the Indigenous Peoples Movement in Roraima's ethnomedia

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Abstract

This research reflects on the ethnomedia practices carried out by the portal of the Indigenous Council of Roraima (CIR), in order to understand how the organization constructs meanings about the Indigenous Peoples Movement. To do so, we characterized the Indigenous Movement and Ethnocommunication; we discussed the relationships between media imperialism and representation through Mattelart (1978); and we used the precepts of Discourse Analysis by Souza (2014) to examine the narratives of the *corpus* of study, consisting of 89 publications by the CIR in 2018. The results unveil an ethnocommunicative practice that operates on the architecture of discursive representations that have as a principle the circumstance that the natives are original inhabitants of the areas delimited as Indigenous Lands, determining the transmission of this right to their descendants for their continuity as peoples with pre-Columbian ethnic relationships.

Keywords: Ethnocommunication. Ethnomedia. Indigenous Peoples Movement. Amazonian knowledge. Roraima.

Introduction

Since the release of the 2010 census data by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2010), Roraima has been recognized as the state with the highest number of indigenous people living in the country – about 11% of the population. The significant amount of self-declared native residents in the state provides us with valuable clues about the importance of the indigenous issues and their movements for the region and, consequently, about the importance of promoting studies about the counter-hegemonic spaces – journalistic, cultural, social, political, and scientific – that address the topic.

In the specific context of this paper, we aim to study the movement of the representational systems in the media discourse of the Indigenous Council of Roraima (CIR)¹ website concerning the Indigenous Peoples Movement and analyze how the CIR website represents the topics related to the Indigenous Movement. The discussion is supported by the theoretical contributions of A. Mattelart (1978), who considers the media field as an essential component in the reproduction of a given social construction. In the case of this study, the main determinants focus on the positioning of indigenous populations in the political scenario of Brazil and the state of Roraima.

The discussion established in this article resorts to a transdisciplinary research structure that intends to combine theory, method, and practice in developing the conducted analyses (MATTELART, A., 1978; MALDONADO, 1999). In order to do so, we selected as empirical sample an investigative *corpus* composed of 89 textualized publications found in the CIR website.

Regarding the analysis period, we selected as time frame (initial and final) the months of April and December 2018, which corresponds to the nine months after the 47th General Assembly of Indigenous Peoples – the most important annual event of political and organizational deliberation for the Indigenous Movement in Roraima.

The spark that fuels this investigation derives from the intense tension between sectors of the surrounding society (and their communication practices) – under the strong influence of an anti-indigenous policy – and the struggle for the recognition of the original territories, based on the precedent, identitarian, and ethnic right, as the principal framework that mobilizes the actors (from both “sides”).

In this scenario, thinking about Ethnocommunication practices, their representations and discourses is an essential task to understand how (and why), in contemporary times, communication is incorporated, appropriated, and instrumentalized by the native peoples in their social and political practices, trying to provide visibility to forms of communication deemed unconventional, but sanctioned in these spaces.

1 Available at: <https://cir.org.br>. Accessed on: 13 apr. 2021.

The Indigenous Peoples Movement

Following the perspective adopted by Mattelart (1978) and Maldonado (1999), it is not possible to understand the communicological present before it is situated in a larger historical process, which enlightens its relationships with the general social and philosophical problems of contemporaneity. In this sense, before approaching the ethnomedia practices of the CIR, we need to understand the historical process of mobilization of the Indigenous Peoples Movement and relate it to a theoretical weave that grants concreteness to the social movement.

The indigenous peoples have historically reacted to the occupation of their traditional territories and engaged in the defense of their cultures. According to Santos (2016), since the period of European colonization until mid-1889, marked by the establishment of the Republic of Brazil, the indigenous peoples merely served the interests of those who controlled power.

This context only began to change in 1908, during the XVI Congress of Americanists held in Vienna, in which Brazil was publicly accused of slaughtering the Indians. As a result, in 1910 the Service for the Protection of Indians and Localization of National Workers (SPILTAN) was created – from 1918 onwards, only the Indian Protection Service (SPI) – with the objective of solving the “indigenous problem” and transforming natives into national workers.

In the mid-1960s, under accusations of violence, genocide, and inefficiency, the SPI was investigated by a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry (CPI). During this period, the proposal for the creation of a new authority responsible for the indigenous peoples was intensified, and under the control of the Military Dictatorship, it had the duty to promote the acculturation of the native peoples and rush their economic integration. So, in 1967 the SPI was abolished and, in its place, the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI)² was created.

In addition to FUNAI, in 1972, the Catholic Church created the Indigenist Missionary Council (CIMI)³, which began to work alongside indigenous peoples in various regions of the country as a representative and political partner towards the national society, in their demands for their right to land and recognition that they were still native peoples. The Catholic Church is also responsible for summoning and organizing the first Indigenous Assemblies to discuss demands related to the demarcation of indigenous lands and the effective participation of indigenous subjects in public indigenous policies.

Such meetings were responsible for the awareness of the distinct ethnic groups of Brazil and their recognition in the struggle for a common cause. These actions strengthened their causes, paving the way that would eventually shape the current Indigenous Movement. The assemblies spread throughout the country and, by the end of the 1970s and mid-1980s, the indigenous leaders began to structure new organizational forms around indigenous and indigenist entities.

² Available at: <https://www.gov.br/funai/pt-br>. Accessed on: 13 apr. 2021.

³ Available at: <https://cimi.org.br>. Accessed on: 13 apr. 2021.

The foundation of the Union of Indigenous Nations (UNI) in 1979 is the first result of these articulations made during the meetings. After the creation of the first nationwide representative organization, the Indigenous Movement started to consolidate local and regional entities. Thus, in 1984, the Indigenous Council of the Territory of Roraima (CINTERR) was created in Roraima – and in August 1990 it would become the current CIR.

Today, in addition to the COVID-19 pandemic, the indigenous peoples of Roraima must face a new wave of invasion of their territories. According to Baines (2012), it has always been a belligerent context that the indigenous peoples of Roraima and the country had to face to start demanding more respect for their cultures and ethnicities. It is from this process of knowledge and recognition that the Indigenous Peoples Movement is configured as ethnic, distinct from other social movements in Brazil.

The media imperialism

The Indigenous Peoples Movement has historically reacted to the forms of oppression and genocide of the dominant national society. In this scenario, the media, as a power tool of the hegemonic capital, has contributed to the reproduction of this massacring social formation, as evidenced by the studies of Mattelart (1978), which bring vital contributions to expose the geopolitical control of the dominant classes over the means of communication in the world.

As Maldonado (1999) makes clear, Mattelart's critical concern (1978) lies in understanding in greater detail the relationships between capitalism and the power of the media in contemporary societies. From this perspective, Mattelart's interest focus on analyzing the ways in which dominant classes and exploited groups use media products – the former as a way to ensure ideological control over the less privileged layers, and the latter as a tool for counter-hegemonic fight.

In the view of Maldonado (1999, 2002), the thought Mattelart (1978) comes to situate the analysis of the production and circulation of communication and culture in the context of the global economy, evidencing the ways in which ideology operates and creates networks of domination, with a decisive role in mass communication in Latin America. It is worth noting that the works of Mattelart (1978), as well as those of Hall (1997), perceive ideology as representations that act to legitimize the interests of the dominant class for the conformation of senses in the social space in which daily life is shaped.

By working with Dependency Theory, Mattelart, Piccini and Mattelart (1976) address the organizing principles of ideology (representations) in the communication vehicles, especially the issues of information dependency of the populations in Latin American countries. These theorists criticized the media for reinforcing ideas of development dependent on international capitalism, thus benefiting the dominant classes that continued to privilege this system. They argued that this privileged minority, with its economic power, influences media production by imposing its own representations and meanings about the world and its subjects.

By evidencing that the media is inevitably related to economic power, Mattelart, Piccini and Mattelart (1976) conclude that information is just one of many commercial products developed and managed by a few privileged groups. Upon raising this reflection, the authors expose that the dominant class with its monopoly over the means of production tends to impose its particular view of the world as something unique.

From this perspective, the media analysis should discover what is beyond the apparent reality, working on the identification of discourses and their inherent meanings. Mattelart and Mattelart (2004) also add that, in reading the representations, the messages prove to be full of meanings, manifesting the marks and interests of a society.

Given this, we realize that the media has a remarkable role in the construction and structuring of what is real and becomes an object of dispute. As a result, as Maldonado (2002) warns, the media becomes the binding fruit of communication conglomerates, which usurp much of the media space to employ their representational matrices, contributing to the strengthening of the various forms of oppression established in capitalist societies.

If the media is under the control of privileged individuals and institutions, it is up to the marginalized populations to find counter-hegemonic and alternative forms of communication to begin negotiating meanings that revitalize their existence in the world. These alternative expressions of communication emerge as forms of resistance to the representations imposed by the large media conglomerates.

Ethnomedia and the principles of Ethnocommunication

In view of the discussions held in the previous section, we ponder, based on Maldonado (2002) and Mattelart (1978), that alternative forms of communication would be necessary to subvert the domination of capital over marginalized populations. Therefore, we intend, in this section, to discuss the relation between ethnic communities and media communication, along with the representative role of indigenous ethnomedia in the construction of discourses.

We adopted, as a perspective to think the ethnomedia practices, the experiences of indigenous communicators, emphasizing the relevance of the personal process as part of the knowledge construction process (MALDONADO, 2002).

Santi and Araújo (2019) explain that in a scenario of discursive battles, indigenous ethnomedia practices emerge and consolidate – philosophically oriented, geographically localized, and politically useful. These hybrid communicational practices arise from the process of mediatization, in which various fields of society, here including ethnic fields and social movements, appropriate the languages and logics of the media. According to Tupinambá (2016), in a scenario of violence and land disputes, the appropriation of digital communication tools enabled the natives to be “their own interlocutors”.

For Tupinambá (2016, n.p.), such appropriation allowed the indigenous people to make their voices heard and defend themselves, proving that tradition and modernity can be allies in

the preservation of their cultures and their people. Based on these considerations, the journalist conceptualizes ethnomedia as “[...] a tool of cultural and ethnic empowerment, through the convergence of various media within an ethno vision. That explains the use of this prefix”.

On the other hand, Baniwa (2017), one of the founders of Radio Yandê, in an interview for the Usina Magazine website⁴, when asked about the concept of indigenous ethnomedia, answered: “[...] it is a media that is not chewed up for the masses, but for the understanding of a group, a group that suffers the same things, that sees the same things, and that longs for the same things”.

The considerations of Tupinambá (2016) and Baniwa (2017) reveal the possibilities for indigenous peoples to seek their denied protagonism through alternative media, as Mattelart (1978) had clarified, a process that starts from the appropriation and re-appropriation of the logics and tools of the media field.

Ethnomedia emerges, then, as an alternative for the expression of ethnic identity and political and social autonomy of the indigenous peoples. The use of this form of communication by the Indigenous Peoples Movement is characterized as an alternative and popular mode of expression that reconfigures the media tools according to the needs and interests of its collectivity.

According to Baniwa (2017), the phenomenon related to the emergence of various platforms that focus on ethnicity in the production of content is known as “Ethnocommunication”. The journalist recalls that, in this construction, each people establishes its own formats to meet its needs.

In the search for new regimes of visibility, the indigenous ethnomedia then conjugates media practices, sociocultural processes, and political aspirations in a specific communicational configuration – in order to project the indigenous person beyond the earlier, later, or exterior societies – causing discomfort. Indigenous people appropriate media tools to construct and evidence their existence and the existence of their ethnic social movement, already in tune with this new format of sociability instituted by the media field.

Ethnocommunication emerges for the indigenous peoples as a need and an opportunity to work with communication in an alternative, non-stereotyped form that adequately represents the culture, social policies, and the identity of their people in face of the new forms of organization of society. It emerges as a mechanism that guarantees access to communication for a group historically dislocated from the hegemonic context of the conventional imperialist media.

Discourse analysis and heuristic questions

After that, we use the Discourse Analysis (DA) as a methodological tool with the purpose of understanding the place of counter-hegemonic culture in the process of construction

⁴ Available at: <http://revistausina.com>. Accessed on: 13 apr. 2021.

of the media text enunciated by the CIR. Since, according to Souza (2014), the role of DA is to highlight the process of creation of meaning through language and clarify the reason for which the meaning is one and not another. It is in the analysis of the media text – that is, any material production that conceives interpretation (news, photographs, videos, audios, silences, etc.) – that we seek to delimit the Discursive Formations (DFs) and connect them to the Ideological Formations (IFs), so we can understand the place of speech of the subject and the meanings in the textual productions that we operate (SOUZA, 2014). The IFs represent the senses in their primitive condition, and ideology is their raw material. As it is not possible to access ideology without a system of signs that gives it materiality, it needs to organize itself through language in DFs.

Following the postulates of Souza (2014), we tried to retrace this path in reverse, seeking in the speeches published by the CIR on its portal and in the so-called “textual marks” to clarify what they can mean in the discursive process and what are the characteristics of its discourse. Thus, we were able to identify which DFs they integrate and know the FI that sustains their meanings.

Such textual marks worked as entry points for our analysis and were established after a floating reading, in which we sought the main characteristics of the texts to be included or excluded from our *corpus* of investigation. After the reading of the materials for their identification, we started the second moment of analysis, with the delimitation of the concept-analysis. In this article, the identified concept-analysis is related to the very object of the investigation – the Indigenous Peoples Movement. With it, we seek to identify how the texts of our corpus constructed meanings about the social movement.

With the definition of the concept-analysis, we perceived who has something to say about the topic in the material, which helps to identify in the texts their main enunciators. In this step, we gathered as *corpus* 89 texts published on the portal of the CIR; among those, by saturation and exhaustion of the themes, we selected two publications about the Indigenous Peoples Movement published between April and December 2018. Then, we organized the publications through Discursive Sequences (DSs) to highlight the textual marks that support the DFs.

After delimiting the *corpus*, we started the activity of decoding and interpreting the selected texts. Here, a second reading of the materials was essential to improve our perception about the catalogued elements and their discourses. Along with this second analytical reading, we used Souza’s (2014) three heuristic questions – namely: (i) What is the concept-analysis present in the text?; (ii) How does the text construct the concept-analysis?; and (iii) To what discourse does the concept-analysis belong in the way the text constructs it? –, with the intention of better clarifying the meanings present in the discourses of the selected texts.

We must note that the first question was answered in the first moment of analysis with the definition of the concept-analysis. With the second question, we started searching for a meaning for the concept-analysis during the actual process of interpreting the text. We continued

describing and decoding the *corpus* until we saturated this meaning, and then we moved on to the third question. Here we seek to identify the meaning constructed in the discourse to clarify the exercise of ideology in the textualization process (SOUZA, 2014).

It is important to keep in mind that the choice of the analyzed texts prioritized listening to the voice of the CIR. In view of this, we circumscribed the analysis to the nine months (April to December) following the 47th General Assembly of the Indigenous Peoples of Roraima, held at the Lago Caracaranã Cultural Center, in the Indigenous Territory Raposa Serra do Sol. The Assembly annually brings together the Macuxi, Wapichana, Ingarikó, Patamona, Saporá, Taurepang, Wai-Wai, Yanomami, and Yekuana peoples in an extensive program of debates, conjunctural analyses, and cultural events. Therefore, it is recurrent to find texts about the consequences of the Assembly in this time frame.

Out of all the available material on the website, we have chosen only the textualized media content originally written and published by the CIR; thus, excluding interviews, opinion articles and republished texts. All the texts used for analysis were written by Mayra Wapichana, an indigenous journalist who, at the time, worked as the organization's Communication Advisor.

For the sake of organizing the analysis process, we will follow the recommendations of Benetti and Lago (2007), labeling as DS the excerpts clipped for analysis and using them in the answers to the heuristic questions.

The results and the attempts of answers

Let us not forget that the (possible) answers we pursue with this investigation are guided by the principles of Indigenous Ethnocommunication, based on Baniwa (2012) and Tupinambá (2016); by the precepts of the Dependency and Representation Theory of Mattelart (1978) and Hall (1997), and by the DA postulates of Souza (2014).

With these terms in place, we move on to the analysis of the first text selected, which was published on the CIR website on April 12, 2018, about a month after the 47th General Assembly of the Indigenous Peoples of Roraima was held. The text has the headline "Sustainability and the well-living of the indigenous peoples of Roraima". After a floating reading of the text, we chose to describe and explicit what sense of concept-analysis is constructed by the piece. We used the heuristic question number two to identify in this text the following syntactic textual marks: "the product of the work of traditional leaders" (DS1), "the achievements and challenges of indigenous peoples" (DS2), "besides facing territorial problems" (DS3), "The main achievement" (DS4), "achievement of the 32 demarcated and homologated indigenous lands" (DS5) and "exclusive enjoyment by the indigenous peoples" (DS6).

Through an interpretative exercise, these textual marks lead us to a certain concept of Indigenous Peoples Movement, through the DS1, as part of a historical process of struggles and achievements fought by traditional leaders. It is in the DS2, DS3, DS4, DS5 and DS6 that the concept-analysis starts to acquire the shape of a movement for fighting for political

opportunities and for the guarantee of indigenous constitutional rights, which are essential in the current organization of the communities in the state of Roraima. These elements become clear when the text addresses the challenges, achievements, territorial problems, the homologated and demarcated lands, as well as the exclusive enjoyment of the land by the natives of the region.

Finally, the selected marks show the Indigenous Peoples Movement as a historical activity responsible for guaranteeing the rights of the natives of the region, as a collective action that should survive in the hands of the new indigenous leaderships that need to continue fighting to guarantee the rights already achieved and for new advances in this area.

The second text selected was published on August 9, 2018, the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples. The piece is entitled "VII March of the Indigenous Peoples of Roraima: two thousand indigenous persons demanded the enforcement of the rights granted by the Brazilian Federal Constitution of 1988 and the ILO Convention 169". Here, some marks draw attention: "rights granted by the Brazilian Federal Constitution" (DS9), "threats that attack indigenous rights" (DS10), "remind the Brazilian State of its constitutional obligations" (DS11), "protect and guarantee indigenous rights" (DS12), "Remembered the 23 deaths caused during the long fight over the lands" (DS13) and "concern about the advance of gold miners, loggers, fishermen and other invaders" (DS14).

Placed into paraphrastic relationship, these marks build a certain concept of Indigenous Peoples Movement that dialogues with the meanings found in the first publication of a representation marked, by the historical presence and tireless struggle of the native populations of Roraima, even references to the losses suffered during the movement's demands were found in DS12 and DS13. The DSs the representation performed by the CIR as a political action aimed at the preservation of rights earned in previous fights, as well as a constant reminder of the sacrifices necessary for the achievement of these rights. The value of these achievements is evidenced for future generations that, like the previous ones, should strive to preserve their legacy.

These discursive marks also add new meanings and contexts to the concept-analysis. For instance, the DS09 and the DS11 remind us that the indigenous accomplishments are constitutional rights. These are textual marks that construct the sense of the Indigenous Movement as an articulation of a fight for a right that is assured in the Constitution (BRASIL, 1988), thus holding the same level of relevance as other rights.

The last and most recurrent of the meanings concerning the concept-analysis presented in the textual marks is found in the DS10 and DS14. These discursive sequences address the recurrent threats to the native populations that live in the state of Roraima. These are issues that in most cases threaten the integrity of the indigenous territories through the exploitation of activities carried out illegally in the native land, such as the exploitation of gold mines, wood, and fishing. The indigenous movement, in these situations, assumes the position of defender of their territory.

These elements clearly demonstrate how the Ethnocommunication principles— ethnicity, territoriality, and recognition (SANTI; ARAÚJO, 2019) – act in a reciprocal and interdependent way in the CIR's media products and in the conflicts of representation summoned in the texts – which emerge through manifested media discourses, formatted by the (media) representation constructed by the CIR website about the issue. Here, the media tools also act as technological concretization of representations; as staging of a predefined nature and/or as tools for transposing perspectives and representational patterns (MATTELART, 1978; HALL, 1997).

After verifying the textual marks, constructing the concept-analysis of the interpreted texts, and delineating the main DE, we can finally pursue the adopted IF and the answers concerning the third heuristic question to identify to which discourse the discursive object belongs as constructed by the text (SOUZA, 2014). For this, we chose to re-ask the third heuristic question including some specific elements related to the studied topic.

With this rearrangement, we can enunciate it as follows: what discourse represents the Indigenous Peoples Movement as a collective action of struggle and guarantee of rights related to the homologation and demarcation of territories, construction of political representations and environmental preservation, as well as the recognition and respect for the indigenous ethnic identities?

We realize that the answer to this question can be found in the surroundings of an FI that goes beyond the media and is added to the discourse of the Indigenato. But what would this speech be? And what is its relationship with the construction of the concept-analysis of the Movement of Indigenous Peoples in the articles published on the CIR portal?

According to Barbosa (2009), the expression Indigenato refers to a reconfiguration of indigenous territories by Portuguese Law, when the Royal Charter of April 1, 1680 established the principle that indigenous peoples are the original owners of their lands, and that their right to them is always guaranteed. In other words, an original right of the indigenous peoples to their traditionally occupied territory that predates the creation of the Brazilian State, therefore prevailing over every other title of ownership.

Santos (2016) explains that the Indigenato is in fact operationalized through the concept of permanent possession, which is not regulated by civil law, thus being declaratory and a guarantee for the future. Thus, it is up to the Union to proceed with the demarcation, as established by Article 67 of the Transitional Provisions Act of the Magna Carta of 1988.

Another important factor about the Indigenato discourse is that, according to the Brazilian Constitution of 1988, indigenous territory is defined by occupation and not by demarcation. In this way, the Union needs to use anthropological parameters for recognition, such as the criteria of organization of a community, its practices, customs, and ethnicity.

The issue of ethnic recognition thus emerges as the basis of the Indigenato discourse, because it is not only used as a form of sociopolitical organization by the groups to which it is relevant, but also for the achievement and demand of collective political opportunities granted to ethnic groups by legislation (BARTOLOMÉ, 2006).

Therefore, the discourse of Indigenato, responsible for determining the representations of the Indigenous Peoples Movement made by the CIR portal, incorporates an IF whose principle is the circumstance of natives being the original inhabitants of the land, determining the transmission of this right to their descendants for their continuity as peoples with pre-Columbian ethnic and identity relations.

Final Remarks

In this paper, the media field stands out as the main diffuser of the representational matrixes. The way these representations are made contribute to the organization of social agents and the subsequent updating/maintenance of cultural, economic, and political positions imposed on the various collectivities and subjects (MATTELART, 1978). It is in this context that different fields of society appropriate media tools in order to update discourses that normalize certain power relations, favoring some groups at the expense of others.

Throughout this study, we understand the ethnomedia practices carried out by the CIR's website as a space of struggle and resistance (MATTELART, 1978). In this sense, we demonstrate the essentiality of thinking about the relation of indigenous communities with media communication and the representative role of ethnomedia in the construction of discourses.

With this in mind, we can verify that the CIR portal is established in this field using the principles of Indigenous Ethnocommunication in the search for new regimes of visibility, combining ethical-philosophical, geographic-territorial, and ethno-political aspirations. Indigenous people appropriate media tools to promote the existence of other ethnic discourses, even if using the form of visibility instituted by the media field. For this is the tool most at hand.

Thus, through DA, we understand how this appropriation occurs and what are the logic of the internal organization of the discourses and their intentions. We understand, then, that the CIR uses the media tools to give voice to and present its own representations of the Indigenous Peoples Movement – that come from the represented subjects themselves to fabricate their own discourses.

In summary, the most important thing to take from this article is the perception that in the scenario of representational and discursive conflict (MATTELART, 1978), ethnomedia practices emerge and are strengthened from a historical context marked by struggle and resistance (SANTI; ARAÚJO, 2019).

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Authors' contribution

Vilso Junior Santi e Bryan Chrystian Araújo actively participated in all stages of the manuscript's preparation.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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