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First submission: 7 March 2024

Acceptance: 25 September 2024

Published: 28 December 2024

DOI: https://doi.org/10.38140/aa.v56i2.8977

ISSN:0587-2405

e-ISSN: 2415-0479

Acta Academica • 2024 56(2): 161-179

The nature of communication and the communication of nature: revisiting critical theory and nature through decolonial environmental communication and human rights education in Brazil

The ways in which Western capitalist societies have exploited communication practices and media are similar to the exploitation and instrumentalisation of nature. In this paper, we want to argue that critical theorists' concepts such as instrumental reason and communicative reason do not allow for sufficient critiques of current lifeworld colonisation processes, hindering the prevention of more significant forms of violence against peoples, communication, and natural environments. We begin by problematising Western philosophy and its anthropocentric and instrumental approaches to nature, and contrast them with Global South concepts such as Amerindian perspectivism and good living. Then, through case studies of the Amazon news agency Sumaúma and

the Human Rights Observatory in Schools Project (PODHE), we reflect upon how decolonial and original peoples' concepts and principles may enable us to draw the elements of new relations between people, communication, and nature, which may embody a radical critical theory of communication and nature.

Keywords: communication, nature, critical theory, environmental communication, human rights education

Introduction

In this paper, we argue that critical theory's concepts of communication and nature, especially in Habermas, cannot provide a sufficient critique of lifeworld colonisation processes and hence do not offer a means of preventing current forms of violence against peoples, communication and nature. Our proposal is to renew critical theories of communication and nature by borrowing concepts brought by Brazilian indigenous people's writers, shamans, and commentators, having as case studies a decolonial environmental communication initiative from the Amazonian Forest and a human rights education project that works with public schools in the state of São Paulo.

Modern Western philosophy is based on a relation of humans' supposed domination of nature (Ianni 2003). One of the ways reason apparently transcends itself is by revealing the rules that govern nature, from living organisms to other elements of the environment. In this sense, the constitution of humanity itself is correlated to the objectification of nature, whose components and movements can be known and controlled objectively. In Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1995), the preconditions of knowledge and experience, such as the spontaneity of thinking (pure intuition, imagination, and representation), and the faculty of judgment, are the necessary causes of the objectivity of the natural and the social worlds.

Hegel's philosophy also presents this separation of the natural and the social worlds. However, it is considered part of a historical dialectic whose awaited synthesis consists of the reunification of humans and nature in the so-called "absolute spirit". In Hegel's lessons of Jena (1804 to 1806), when he conceptualises the formation of self-consciousness by contending with Kant's and Fichte's a priori concepts, nature is seen both as an object and as part of the development of the absolute spirit (Habermas 2006).

From the three concrete manifestations of the spirit proposed by Hegel – work, language, and family – nature would be present in work relations, through which humans satisfy their bodily needs and their instincts of self-preservation and, therefore, "become things". However, as Habermas points out in the essay "Work and Interaction" (Habermas 2006: 11-43), instead of leading to an

interaction "in the subjects' fashion", having nature as an "occult opponent", this relation results in an "astute consciousness", given that humans tend to forget about this dialectic as soon as they create instruments and tools to facilitate the "domination of nature".

This dialectic of work and conscience was taken on by Marx as the fundamental relation of modern subjects and societies. According to Habermas's reading, Marx focuses on the tensions between productive forces and relations of production, in which the exploitation of work by humans leads to the alienation and reification of workers, who are instrumentalised as nature. However, because Habermas is worried about the communicative (traditional or valorative) dimensions of language and culture, he sees Marx's account of bourgeoise ideology as a sheer consequence of the instrumental reason that derives from capitalist exploitation, that is, an astute, objectifying and economic relation with nature, and with social and cultural realms. In this reading, given that Marx's account of rationality is bound with the historical impulse to human work and to self-preservation, he would have ended up assuming instrumental reason as the only form of reason, only to project its dissolution – and reconciliation of humans with nature – in a philosophy of history that would end up in the overly idealised notion of communism (Habermas 2002, Avritzer 1996).

The critique of instrumental reason was made by Horkheimer and Adorno as the main effort of the first generation of the Critical Theory of Society. According to Horkheimer and Adorno, in works such as *Traditional Theory and Critical Theory* (Horkheimer 1937), *The Eclipse of Reason* (Horkheimer 1946), *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Horkheimer and Adorno 1947), and *Negative Dialectics* (Adorno 1966), the radical critique of religious worldviews in the modernisation processes led to the dominance of deductive logics and empirical sciences over other forms of knowledge. With the gradual decoupling of this teleological and instrumental form of reason from practical, cultural, and aesthetic realms, modern Western societies developed economic, scientific, and administrative institutions that tended to spread to all other peoples and nature the same divide, or "logical violence" (Habermas 2006: 18) that separated subjects from objects.

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer suggest that the only way to criticise instrumental reason effectively would be through a determined negation of any conceptualisation. As Habermas would comment on Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*, only through a rationality that denounces synthesis as an inevitable objectification of nature would we find a "reminiscence of nature in the subject", and thus, an "almost magical" reconciliation of human beings with nature (Habermas 2002). This rationality would operate through an aesthetical *mimesis*, in which subjects imitate the incommensurability of nature by rejecting the temptation of the principle of identity.

However, Habermas believes that this path taken by Adorno and Horkheimer's critique leads to a point of no return and hinders critical theory's capacity to foresee another type of rationality that was buried by instrumental rationality. As we will see, however, by recovering the critical potential of symbolic and social dimensions of language and everyday communication, and sustaining the argument that the organic function of the human species demands domination over nature, Habermas arrives at concepts of communication and nature that are still stuck in the subject-object dichotomy, not being able to emancipate the human being, as well as nature, as a whole.

The nature of communication

In *Technique and Science as Ideology* (2006 [1969]), Habermas engages in a dialogue with Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* (1967). Although accepting Marcuse's account of the class domination project that underlies modern technology, Habermas argues that the way in which technology, as well as science and the human species itself, function, that is, by an inevitable separation between subjects and nature, makes infeasible Marcuse's suggestion of alternative concepts of technique and nature.

On the one hand, Habermas argues that Marcuse feels tempted to renew the idea of a "resurrection of the fallen nature", which is present in the works of other philosophers, such as Schelling, Marx of the Paris Manuscripts, as well as Benjamin, Adorno, and Horkheimer. It is worth recovering Habermas's quote of Marcuse:

> What I want to highlight is that science, *because of its own method* and its concepts, projected and fomented a universe in which the domination of nature has become bonded with the domination of men – a bond that tends to fatally affect this universe as a whole. [...] Thus, the rational hierarchy fuses itself with the social and, in this situation, a change in the direction of progress, which could break this fatal bond, would also influence the structure of science itself [...]. Without losing its rational character, its hypotheses would evolve in an essentially diverse experimental context (in a freed world), and science would arrive, thus, at *concepts* of nature that are *essentially distinct* and would establish *essentially distinct facts*. (Marcuse 1969: 180 quoted in Habermas 2006: 51) [emphasis by Habermas].[1]

1 Translated into English from the Portuguese translation by ourselves.

When explaining Marcuse's position, Habermas reiterates that this new scientific and regulatory paradigm would not be that of instrumental rationality but of a "'tender caring' that would free the potential of nature" (Habermas 2006: 51). However, a new project of technique and science would demand a greater effort than Marcuse seems to foresee. Instead of a new possible access to nature that would replace, through social work, that which has evolved to exploit nature and other humans, Habermas suggests that

> ...we could consider her [nature] as the interlocutor of a possible interaction. Instead of the exploited nature, we could seek the fraternal nature. In the sphere of yet incomplete intersubjectivity, we could presume subjectivity in the animals, plants, and even in the stones, and *communicate* with nature, instead of limiting ourselves to working her as a rupture of communication. (...) this idea conserved a peculiar attraction: the subjectivity of nature, still imprisoned, cannot free itself before the communication between men is not free from domination. Only when men communicate without coercion, and each one can recognise oneself in the other, could the human gender recognise nature as another subject – and not, as Idealism wished, recognize it as its other, but recognise oneself in her as in another subject. (Habermas 2006: 52-53) [italics by Habermas, bold by ourselves].[2]

It is understandable that Habermas presupposes this hierarchical logic between human beings and nature, considering that he was beginning his intellectual journey to formulate the theories of communicative rationality and communicative action. Another symptom of this hierarchy is Habermas's differentiation of human language and communication as directly accessible interaction elements, while nature's communication would only appear as a cipher. This would still lead to a separate and unequal relationship between humanity, nature, and the nature of their communication.

Nevertheless, let's take on Habermas's hints of a communicative trait of the human species that reveals itself through language and a possible communication with nature as a more significant process of intersubjectivity with nature and the planet. We can take this path further with the aid of the ideas of those who already have an intersubjective relation with nature: the indigenous peoples.

In the case of the cosmologies of the Amazonian peoples, as studied by Brazilian anthropologist Viveiros de Castro, the notion of Amerindian perspectivism gives us an idea of how each species sees themselves, others, and the world from their own perspective. In everyday life, because our bodies and minds are separated, we

2 Translated into English from the Portuguese translation by ourselves.

cannot freely speak to one another, even among humans who share a common language. However, humans, animals, and other beings can reach a free state of communication in the spiritual realm or the myths. This is the opposite of Western philosophy, which presupposes an objectivity of the natural world and a diversity of culture. In this "multinaturalism", the spirit would be whole, and bodies and nature the particulars. With some effort, we can see that this is not so different from Habermas's idea of an enlarged intersubjectivity of free communication between humans and nature. It also has a spiritual dimension, for it emerges in a communicative encounter between two or more subjects who recognise each other as such (Castro 1996).

Another way we can find the conditions of a more wholesome communication with nature and other human beings is through an expansion of the work of shamans in indigenous communities. The shaman has unique qualities and means that enable him to access the spiritual language of animals and other natural beings, and to translate their messages – and sometimes prophecies – to other people. In the case of the Yanomami shaman and writer Davi Kopenawa, in his co-authored "A Queda do Céu" (2010) with French anthropologist and friend Bruce Albert, and according to the profound preface by Viveiros de Castro, he paints a crude picture of the lives of white peoples and other peoples of the so-called "modern" cities, and also explains that the world – or *hutukara* – is a living super-organism that is protected by the *xapiri*, invisible guardians which are spiritual images of the world, and that even though we have created the "soul" and other modern "avatars" such as science, culture, and technology, they do not prevent us from "this uncoupling commitment to the world". Because, as Castro continues, according to the Yanomami, the world is a "soulful plenum", and "a true culture and an efficient technology consist of an attentive and caring relation with the 'mythical nature of things'" (Castro 2010: 13-14) [our English version of the Portuguese translation].

With this idea of recovering the "mythical nature of things", we should not be afraid to propose that, as is the case with nature, we need to change our lenses, and educate ourselves to a new relation with the spaces of communication that we have created in our everyday interactions, as well as through the mass and digital media. Before the individual and collective rights to free speech, information, and communication, as well as the notion of a public good, communication must be seen as a being. Not a transcendental being that is hypostasised above all subjects, but one that is spawned by our reciprocities, such as how our conscience, identity and ideas are bound with other peoples' in order to exist and be validated. And why not a being with spiritual qualities, deserving of dignity and rights? Because communication (including its technologies) is simultaneously the ground and the transcendence, or the materialisation of our enlarged intersubjectivity.

This means that we should reframe the questions about a diagnosis of the "pathologies of communication", and take more seriously analogies with social, environmental, and public health issues, such as when we talk about intersectional inequalities on the distribution of communication rights (or rights of communication), information pollution, and infodemic, or as Kopenawa puts it, "forgetfulness", "hearing loss", "blindness", "ghostly language", "smoky words" (Kopenawa and Albert 2010). Moreover, it should also make us realise that the respect and attentive care we provide our communication may finally, as opposed to what Habermas suggests, lead human beings to engage in uncoerced forms, or better, in shamanic forms of communication with each other.

According to Di Felice and Moreira, researchers who approach communication in an ecological perspective, the shamanic quality of communication between human and non-human entities is a form of "contamination" which allows the sharing of a cybernetic language that also enables non-human beings to have a potent agency. In this sense, the different beings of the communicational process could aid as "auxiliary spirits" – in our view, complementary spirits – and therefore contribute through their different technologies with the forms of mediation and decision of the planet (Moreira 2014, Di Felice and Moreira 2018).

Given these reflections, we now discuss how, up to now, humans have tried to represent natural environments, or as Castro puts it, the "message of the woods" (Castro 2010: 11) [our translation].

The communication of nature

The photograph of planet Earth taken by NASA in the 1960s became a symbol of the emergence of environmental issues (Hajer 1995). It is no coincidence that the first record of academic use of the expression 'environmental communication' "appeared in 1969, in an article published in the inaugural edition of the *Journal of Environmental Education* by its founding editor Clarence A. Schoenfeld" (Aguiar and Cerqueira 2012: 12) [our translation].

The birthplace of the so-called environmental communication was the United States, in the 1980s, based on rhetoric studies. A frequently cited founding essay analyses the clash between preservationist and conservationist discourses at the beginning of the 20th century, published by Christine Oravec in 1981 in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* (Cox 2007, Milstein 2009).

Environmental communication has been growing as a field of practice and studies since the 1990s, with the holding of the Conference on the Discourse of Environmental Advocacy, which later changed its name to the Conference on Communication and Environment (COCE). It has been held biennially, and in June 2023, had its 11th edition in Harrisonburg, Virginia, USA.

In his classic essay, Robert Cox (2007) argues that environmental communication has an ethical duty in the face of contemporary ecological crises. Another reference in the field, Telma Milstein (2009), summarises the assumptions of so-called environmental communication:

> The ways we communicate powerfully affect our perceptions of the living world; in turn, these perceptions help shape how we define our relations with and within nature and how we act toward nature. Thus, environmental communication scholars often speak of communication as not only reflecting but also constructing, producing, and naturalizing particular human relations with the environment (Milstein 2009: 345).

In the trilogy *The Information Age*, Manuel Castells (1999) stated that there is a symbiotic relationship between the media and environmentalism – which he considered, alongside feminism, as the most striking social movements of the 20th century. An emblematic case would be that of activist Julia "Butterfly" Hill, who in 1997 climbed an ancient tree (which she named Luna) and spent 738 days there (many of them under siege from the logging companies, without food or rest). She became a celebrity, the subject of films and even a Red Hot Chili Peppers song, based on a tactical use of communication permeated by conflicts and paradoxes (Fox and Frye 2010: 435).

Another case widely analysed in environmental communication studies is the discursive shift from "global warming" to "climate change", promoted by Republican strategist Frank Luntz, advisor to the Bush administration (Lakoff 2010). He showed that the description of facts is so dangerously close to the prescription of a policy that, to stop questions about the industrial way of life, it is the facts that need to be cast into doubt (Latour 2020a).

Environmental communication, therefore, has the challenge of deconstructing naturalised categories, which support a hegemonic rationality. At the same time, it seeks to give visibility and political relevance to new proposed categories based on communicative processes that do not treat the public as an object of manipulation and control (Brulle 2010).

In other words, overcoming the instrumental view of communication is linked to the deconstruction of the instrumental view of the modern conception of nature itself. As Enrique Leff (2006: 288) [our translation] reminds us, "environmental crisis is the crisis of Western thought, of metaphysics that produced the disjunction between being and beings, which opened the way to the scientific and instrumental rationality of modernity, which produced a fragmented and reified world in its desire to dominate and control nature".

In this fight for the decolonisation of territories and minds, there is a lot to learn from the so-called forest peoples, who teach us that existence and resistance are inseparable (Brum 2021), and how to survive the ends of the world or postpone them, telling other multiple stories (Krenak 2019), which question the representations, centralities, and universes (single story) of the commodity people (Kopenawa and Albert 2010). The commodity people are those who believe in the linear arrow of progress, whose ideology is the accumulation of wealth at the expense of the objectification of nature and people, not by chance treated as resources (natural or human) (Brianezi 2024). The people of the forest, on the other hand, already practice counter-hegemony, resisting colonialism, which Bruno Latour (2020b) defined as the need to replace production systems (ideas of freedom, central role for human beings, mechanistic vision) by generation systems (recognition of dependencies, agency beyond the human, vision of coexistence). More than mere concepts, they provide us with experiences (Acosta 2016), such as those united around the paradigm of good living, whose political meaning is challenging modernity not to be hegemonic but to strengthen plurality and reciprocity (Acosta 2021).

The expression 'good living' comes from the Andean Amazon and refers to languages originating in Kichwa, Ecuador *(sumak kawsay*), and Aymara, Bolivia (*suma qamaña*). The best translation into English would be life to the fullest, translated into 13 principles: knowing how to eat, knowing how to drink, knowing how to dance, knowing how to sleep, knowing how to work, knowing how to meditate, knowing how to think, knowing how to love and be loved, knowing how to listen, knowing how to speak, knowing how to dream, knowing how to walk, knowing how to give and receive (Mamani 2010).

This is not about romanticising original knowledge and falling into the trap of nativism or the naive defense of localised identities, as if they were culturally frozen and without conflict. Recognising that all cultures are hybrids (Canclini 2015), perspectives such as Latin American good living help us to broaden horizons and connections, to ground ourselves, which "does not mean becoming local – in the most usual metric sense – but rather being able to find the beings we depend on, no matter how far they are in kilometers" (Latour 2021, p. 87).

Perspectives such as good living reveal how the binary opposition of realism (nature) and idealism (society) is mistaken and oppressive. Linked to it are visions based on mono naturalism (one nature, several cultures; unity in the hands of the exact sciences, multiplicity in the hands of the human sciences) and multiculturalism (there are different cultures and different claims to define reality, and they are incommensurable). Therefore, environmental communicators

need to overcome the authoritarianism of supposed objective certainties and multiculturalist tolerance (which sits at the edge of contempt) and act like diplomats: invest in dialogue, in the search for the language of the common home, the Earthly (Latour 2004, 2020a, 2020b).

A decolonial environmental communication experience in Brazil

The so-called socio-environmentalism is a striking characteristic of the history of the Brazilian environmental movement, which combines the struggle for human rights and, more recently, for the so-called rights of nature, in an intersectional perspective that recognises the articulations of inequalities (and the mobilisations to combat them) of race, gender, disability status, class and species (Santilli 2005). This is the context of the creation of "Sumaúma – Journalism from the Center of the World" in September 2022, whose mission is to be a trilingual news agency (Portuguese, Spanish and English) in defence of new centralities (of life, not of the marketplace).

Sumaúma is an Amazonian tree with extensive roots. The agency's founder, Eliane Brum, is the most awarded reporter in Brazil (Portal dos Jornalistas 2024). Since 2017, she has lived in Altamira, a small Amazonian town in the state of Pará, which is the epicentre of deforestation and resistance to it, to cover the impacts of the construction of the Belo Monte hydroelectric plant and the struggles of the forest people. In 2022, she won one of Brazil's most important awards in journalism and human rights, the Vladimir Herzog Prize, with the book report "Banzeiro Òkòtó: the Amazon as the Center of the World". In this work, she explains why she decided to leave the largest Brazilian metropolis, São Paulo, to settle in the Amazon region, joining the Xingu Alive movement (Xingu is the name of the river on which the construction of the aforementioned hydroelectric plant has had an impact).

Brum (2021: 251) stated that "living in the ruins, among ruins, ruining myself too, I understood that nothing changes, not even the forest has a chance of continuing to exist, as long as people – everyone and not just human people – are treated as remains" [our translation]. This non-objectification perspective on humans and more than humans, in line with the challenges in the field of environmental communication, requires new epistemologies and languages:

> It is impossible to face the climate crisis with the same thinking that managed it. The future depends on our ability to transform radically how our species views itself and what it calls nature. To do this, it is necessary to generate not only other knowledge but another structure of thought and even another language (Brum 2021: 343) [our translation].

The coverage from Sumaúma helps to understand the grandeur and complexity of an Amazon that is plural and is not compatible with grotesque simplifications or opportunistic generalisations (Godim 1994). The largest tropical forest on the planet extends to nine countries (Brazil, Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Suriname, Guyana, and French Guiana). Different indigenous peoples live there – in the Brazilian area alone, there are around 355 000 indigenous people from 190 different communities (RAISG 2021).

The Brazilian Amazon occupies more than five million km^2 (the whole of Brazil is 8.5 million km^2), larger than all of Western Europe. If numbers are insufficient to demonstrate the diversity and complexity of the region, they serve the purpose of giving the dimension of its breadth and importance, which is often neglected (Brum 2021).

It is increasingly evident that interpretations of the Amazon can no longer be reduced to "a few metaphors, canonical dates, natural pictures, and cycles or a few hyperbolized literary constructions" (Almeida 2008: 14). This is because collective subjects exist and resist in the region, which presents mobilising, decolonising ideas that offer alternatives to the commodification of nature and development (Arkonada and Santillana 2011).

Since its birth, Sumaúma has had the publishing house "Voices of the Forest" in line with these movements. The first report published by the agency denounced the rape of Yanomami women by miners operating illegally in their territories. It was produced by editor Talita Bedinelli with the support of anthropologist Ana Maria Machado:

> In Sumaúma we recognize that we are at war, and this report was a military operation: we needed to remove women from their territories to places where they could give statements anonymously. Another challenge was that they could not appear: therefore, we asked them to draw, and these works illustrated the material (Bedinelli 2022) [oral report, our translation].

The other creator of Sumaúma is the British journalist Jonathan Watts, Brum's husband, global Environment editor at The Guardian, and one of the founders of the Rainforest Journalism Fund (which has been helping to promote publications about the Amazon in the so-called traditional media). He is responsible for the text of the comic series "Guariba", published by the agency, whose protagonist is a monkey, a victim of forest fires, who has lost his memory and, in search of his home, gradually reveals a non-human vision of the history of the Amazon. In this series, Sumaúma offers us the voice and perspective of non-human animals, traditionally not heard by standard journalism – or seen only as mass or commodities (Freeman et al. 2011).

It is important to recognise the limits of these attempts to expand communication between humans and non-human animals, as they are always mediated by human language. And they also call into question which voices are authorised to translate non-human animals: scientists or activists (Freeman, Bekoff and Bexell 2011). Assuming, however, that this otherness can be significant (Haraway 2021) and that it is necessary to know how to doubt spokespeople without losing trust in them (Latour 2004), the Sumaúma series "Guariba" can be seen as an example of translation and possible dialogue.

Another unique feature of Sumaúma is the partnership with the Wayuri Indigenous Communicators Network to produce a fortnightly podcast: "We have a lot of respect for orality, which is the way the forest communicates and passes on knowledge. The people who are here are the ones who made us exist, and we want to honor that trust" (Brum 2022) [oral report, our translation].

Founded in 2017, the Wayuri Network is linked to the Federation of Indigenous Organizations of Rio Negro (FOIRN). It comprises 55 communicators from 11 ethnic groups, speaking six languages. Its headquarters, in the municipality of São Gabriel da Cachoeira, is the only one in Brazil that has, in addition to Portuguese, indigenous languages recognised by law: since 2002, Baniwa, Tukano and Nheengatu, and, since 2017, Yanomami.

Since its launch, Sumaúma has sought to be a collective engagement project in the search for "readers who form a community, not consumer readers" (Brum 2022) [oral report, our translation]. Inspired by the London media startup Turtles, which works with the slow news paradigm, Sumaúma has been promoting monthly online meetings with readers who contribute financially to the maintenance of the agency.

Maybe not accidentally, the turtle is also chosen by anthropologists Gustavo Chiesa and Luz Gonçalves Brito as the image of the "immanent sacredness of nature". According to the authors, by "learning how to walk with turtles", as a constant and calm reach for the contiguity of persons with nature, we may seek "contiguities", "similitudes" and also accept a poetic, and therefore, affective relation with nature, instead of instrumental specialised exploitation (Chiesa and Brito 2020: 10). This is why Sumaúma can be seen as an attempt to bring about communication *with* and *of* nature.

Furthermore, on its one-year anniversary, Sumaúma began publishing reports resulting from the Forest-Journalists Co-training Programme, called Micélio: "We call it co-training because we teach the rigour of journalism, of checking, and we learn from them how to tell stories" (Brum 2022) [oral report, our translation].

This programme is aimed at young indigenous people, young riverside residents living in extractive reserves, young urbanites from Altamira, and young peasants from settlements in the region.

Micélio can be considered an educommunicative experience because it is in line with this dialogical perspective of "doing with, not doing for". In this case, it is not only done with local reporters but also with the forest itself. In educommunication, critical reading of the media adds to collaborative media production and democratic communication management (Soares 2014). In this way, it can also be summarised as exercising the right to communication, which promotes individual and collective learning, favouring participation and strengthening democracy (Brianezi and Gattás 2022).

A decolonial human rights education experience in Brazil

Our second case study is on a human rights education project in schools as an example of how communication can be seen as an intersubjective being with spiritual qualities, and a dignity of itself that should be protected, cared for, and looked after. Human rights education is an approach to education inspired by popular and informal education practices, whose objective is to promote the integral development of students, from children to adults, and to fortify values such as autonomy, equity, solidarity, and respect towards diversity. It is based on Global South critiques of liberal human rights. It therefore stresses concepts such as contextualised and local civic action, collective problem-solving, youth proactivity, intersectionality of power relations, as well as critical thinking, and some level of rebelliousness (Candau et. al. 1995).

The project we look at is the Human Rights Observatory in Schools (PODHE), an intervention and research initiative from the Centre for the Study of Violence and the School of Communications and Arts of the University of São Paulo, Brazil. The project works weekly with public school students and teachers from middle and high school levels through collaborative workshops within regular classes. The workshops follow a yearly methodology that begins with sensibility towards human rights issues, workshops for human rights experiences and training, workshops for monitoring human rights in school and community environments, and initiatives for transforming school spaces with the results of the works of the year. We use artistic, audiovisual, and ludic languages during the workshops and propose educommunication activities, especially in the monitoring phase.

Since the beginning of the project in 2017, we have had a number of experiences that lead us to believe that careful attention to communication among participants plays a central role in the project's goals, revealing its unique character as intersubjectively shared experiences of dignity. The first experience was an activity where the students took PODHE's educators to tour the school's neighborhood to show places they enjoy. As we walked together, issues related to human rights came out spontaneously, and we shared our views on them without any attempt to convince one another. Then, we realised that human rights were not a result to be reached by the end of the project but rights communicated through a caring relation of reciprocity.

This long-term bond we began to form with each other, students, educators, teachers, and other school members was also paramount in another case. We invited the young feminist collective "*Atreva-se*" ("Dare yourself", in a free translation) to play a card game with high school freshmen. A male student from the class interrupted the explanation of the game, and a member of the collective told him to be quiet, because the women should be the first to be heard. This was not well received by the male students in the class, who began to question the activity and the whole project. This only ceased after a long and disputed dialogue circle in which we restored a breached communication in a process of mutual learning and understanding. On that occasion, we recovered our long-lasting relationship. We affirmed our wish to continue working together, even though our conceptions and experiences of human rights were different and sometimes divergent.

This shows that aside from the need for well-thought-out communication in the workshops, it did not matter in the end if students, teachers, and PODHE educators have had different and sometimes opposing views about human rights; maybe what matters the most is this long-term relation of mutual trust with the schools, the students and teacher, as well as the wish to continue sharing experiences and ideas about human rights. Only in this way can we effectively learn from each other and form an intersubjectivity that goes beyond the dispute of validity claims and reaches personal and institutional bonds of respect and friendship. The same can be said of the relations among the educators of PODHE's team.

This reminds us of when Kopenawa narrates how he became a shaman. One of the elements we witness is the need for patience and a careful effort to build a relationship of mutual trust and admiration with the guardians of nature. After he showed himself, in fact, to be interested and able to listen, understand, and talk to the *xapiris*, they finally came down from the mountains and danced for him. They sang together, and their voices and shared messages became crystal clear.

This is when the shaman becomes a father to the *xapiris*, which is another way of saying that he should look after them and that although they are different from one another, one can see the other as an extension of themselves. That is when the shaman can dialogue directly with nature, helping the *xapiris* protect her by holding the sky above us.

Final remarks

We began this paper by addressing the limits of Western critical perspectives on communication and nature, such as Habermasian concepts of communicative and instrumental action (Habermas 2006). Secondly, we attempted to reveal the deep seeded reciprocity, or the life condition (Leff 2006) among people, communication, and nature, and suggested that aside from being public goods and complementary to human beings, communication and nature can be considered as beings in themselves. This means that they carry a kind of sacredness (Chiesa and Brito 2020), in the sense of sharing, through enlarged notions of intersubjectivity and public discourse, transcendental and authentic personalities, or "spirits" with other beings. From that, we morally derive that we have to start attributing communication and nature their own dignity, making an effort to listen to them, to care for them, and recognise their rights and demands. We can see legal efforts in this sense when we talk about penalties for criminal fires in woods, when we recognise the legal person of rivers and territories, and when we demand accountability from big techs on the prevention of hate speech in their digital communication spaces.

Third and last, we reflected upon decolonial and original peoples' concepts and principles of multi-naturalism, perspectivist shamanism (Castro 1996), good living and educommunication, through two case studies: the Amazon news agency Sumaúma and the Human Rights Observatory in Schools Project (PODHE). The projects can be seen as examples of more horizontal approaches to the communication of nature in mediatic and in interpersonal/educational settings. Both cases and the questions they raise may enable us to draw the elements of new relations between people, communication, and nature, which may embody a radical critical theory of communication and nature.

Our first argument was that critical theory's critique of instrumental reason and communicative rationality are not able to breach the hierarchical relation between humans and nature, and this prevents them from engendering a literally more radical critique of capitalist exploitation of society and colonisation processes, both of natural environments and of lifeworlds. In order to provide this radical critique of domination in the areas of communication and nature, we recovered indigenous authors', anthropologists' and a shaman's concepts of

nature and good living and proposed to approach communication and nature as intersubjective beings that should be respected and have a dignity of their own. But for communication and nature to be seen in fact as a "we", and reveal the radical bonds between different, and in many times opposing subjects, we need more than linguistic reciprocity. Only a kind of shamanic communication, which demands time, patience, effort, care, and will to trust and be together, will, in fact, enable one to be oneself in the other.

In this way, overcoming instrumental views of communication demands overcoming instrumental views of nature too. Our inspirations on this matter are environmental communication projects such as Sumaúma, which strives to listen to and translate the messages of the forests, and can therefore speak to journalists and jurists about "more-than-human rights". Moreover, as we have been able to experience in the Human Rights Observatories in Schools project, this effort of engaging in shamanic communication demands a long-term relationship of respect, approximation, and will to listen, understand, and talk to ourselves, to others and to nature.

The practical implications of these reflections are yet to be formulated, be they in terms of public communication or public policies. But the effort was needed. It is not about going back to naturalist ontologies or to animist mythologies. It is a new way to bridge subjectivity and objectivity, because every once in a while, we have to remember that communication, nature, and humanity are not much more than "beings together".

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