ORIGINAL ARTICLE

From Media to *Buen Vivir*: Latin American Approaches to Indigenous Communication

De los medios al *Buen Vivir*: enfoques latinoamericanos de la comunicación indígena

Das Mídias ao Buen Vivir: Abordagens Latino-Americanas para a Comunicação Indígena

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This article synthesizes the theoretical developments concerning Latin American indigenous communication formulated in the last decade (2005–2015). By conducting a review of the main theoretical frameworks that have deepened the issue, we observe a gradual progression from the dominance of external views to the emergence of indigenous people's own perspectives. We propose four analytical theoretical approaches that depict continuities (media and information and communication technology [ICT] appropriation; policies and regulation) and discontinuities (indigenous media; communication from Buen Vivir*) regarding traditional Latin American frameworks. We also discuss the limitations of the original literature on this topic, and we provide a set of conclusions and recommendations for further studies.*

Este artículo sintetiza los desarrollos teóricos relativos a la comunicación indígena latinoamericana formulados en la última década (2005-2015). A partir de una revisión de los principales marcos teóricos que han contribuido a profundizar esta cuestión, observamos una progresión gradual desde el predominio de visiones externas hacia la emergencia de perspectivas propiamente indígenas, e identificamos cuatro enfoques analítico-teóricos que ilustran continuidades (apropiación de los medios y las tecnologías de la información y la comunicación, y políticas y regulaciones) y disconti-nuidades (medios indígenas, y comunicación desde el Buen Vivir*). La revisión sirve asimismo como base para considerar las limitaciones de los primeros antecedentes en el estudio de la comunicación indígena, y sugerir líneas de investigación futuras.*

Esse artigo sintetiza os desenvolvimentos teóricos da última década (2005-2015) na área de comunicação indígena na América Latina. Através de uma revisão das princi-pais abordagens teóricas que aprofundaram esse tópico, nós observamos uma gradual progressão desde a prevalência de pontos-de-vista externos para a emergência de

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perspectivas advindas dos próprios povos indígenas. Propomos então quatro aborda-gens analítico-teóricas que representam continuidades (apropriação de mídias e TICs; políticas e regulamentações) e descontinuidades (mídia indígena; comunicação ancora-da no conceito de Buen Vivir*) em relação aos enfoques teóricos que fundamentam a comunicação indígena na América Latina. Discutimos as limitações da literatura que deu origem ao campo de conhecimento e apresentamos uma série de conclusões e recomendações para estudos futuros.*

Introduction

Communication theories in Latin America during the 20th century were character-ized by a limited number of concerns and topics, ranging from the unveiling of ide-ology in cultural industries to communication for development. In the 21st century, the growth of universities and scholarship led to a wider variety of research objects (Marques de Melo, 2007). Within this context, indigenous com-munication is now becoming an emerging topic of debate given its relevance for countries in which indigenous settlements are significant. Moreover, scholars, prac-titioners, and indigenous leaders analyze the communication practices of pre-Columbian people and their descendants, believing that those practices might shed light on contemporary communication forms (Beltrán, Herrera, Pinto, & Torrico, 2008; Ferreira, 2006) and debates such as *Buen Vivir*, a Spanish expression trans-lated from Andean languages that describes alternatives to development focused on "fullness life in a community, together with other persons and Nature" (Gudynas, 2011, pp. 441–442).

The category of *indigenous communication* is still under construction and the diversity of positions makes it controversial, since the own category of indigenous identity is unsteady (Schiwy, 2009, p. 44). Indigenous studies can be considered a heterogeneous field due to the complexity and diversity of cultural and sociological practices of indigenous communities along Latin America. This fact depicts the richness of communication practices but also limits the generalization of the con-cepts and topics discussed in this article to particular native cultures in the region. The differences between indigenous peoples on the continent are now deeper due to urban migration, access to universities, and relations with states. For instance, the urban Mapuches in Chile do not have the same communication agenda as the rural-dwelling Wayúu in Caribe, and therefore, the two groups use different media. However, despite this evident heterogeneity, theoretical approaches around indige-nous communication in Latin America might be considered articulated to a certain extent. This articulation means a search for common academic agendas and

practices while remaining aware of the different *epistemic regions* in Latin America (Reilly, 2014, p. 6).

Thus, we propose four theoretical topics that articulated the scholarly discussions in Latin America during the last decade: (a) media and information and communication technology (ICT) appropriation, (b) policies and regulation, (c) indigenous media, and (d) communication from *Buen Vivir*. These tendencies show continuities (a and b) and discontinuities (c and d) regarding former theoretical contributions from the Latin American School of Communication in the second half of the 20th century, which was recognized as a relatively homogeneous group of scholars who shared a common search for autonomy, critical thinking, and hybrid perspectives and methods (Marques de Melo, 2007).

In addition to academics, practitioners have also played a central role in the conceptualization of indigenous communication processes in the region, even if their insights do not frequently circulate through the academic circuit of high-impact journals. These practitioners come from communication groups of indigenous organizations or media[1] who actively participate in *mingas de pensamiento*[2] and other types of meetings, in which they have increased the systematization and interpretation of their own practices, even with a risk of over-romanticization, as we will develop in the last part of this article. This discussion is in line with other theoretical frameworks proposing that culture in the region merged *pre-* and *post*-modernity elements (García Canclini, 1995), producing a singular space in which traditional, imposed, and modern dynamics coexist as a result of typical miscegenation and hybridization processes, as evident in both Western and non-Western societies.

This article reviews and synthesizes the theoretical developments in indigenous communication formulated in the last decade (2005–2015) in English and Spanish by scholars in academic journals or books (e.g., Córdova, 2011; González Tanco, 2012; Martínez, 2009) and by indigenous practitioners in working documents (e.g., Almendra, 2010; CCAIA, 2012; Otero, 2008). Our aim is to clarify the dominant debates undertaken primarily by Latin American communication scholars and indigenous thinkers. We also aim to contribute to the contemporary claim of *de-Westernizing* (Curran & Park, 2000; Waisbord & Mellado, 2014), *decolonizing* (Herrera, Del Valle, & Sierra, 2016) and *internationalizing* (Simonson & Park, 2016) media studies. Although a significant part of indigenous people's knowledge is produced from autonomous logics that challenge the Western scientific method, we think that this cross-validated approach is a unique opportunity to uncover original categories that could inspire future research. We also believe that this approach will establish a program comparing regional discussions that could arise in other contexts that present similar or comparable concerns.

Scholarly classifications of indigenous communication research in Latin America are scarce, except for a few pioneering studies (Magallanes & Ramos, 2016; Sierra & Maldonado, 2016). Moreover, these early studies did not privilege indigenous people's own perspectives or employ any formal analytical approach to synthesize contributions and detect continuities and discontinuities regarding

previous theoretical frameworks. Thus, this article intends to fulfill this gap by bringing together the main theoretical proposals during the period 2005–2015.

We begin with a review of the frameworks that dealt with indigenous communication in Latin America until 2005. Certain elements of this review show that a progression might exist from the dominance of external views to indigenous people's own worldviews. Second, we explain the abovementioned four core topics and demonstrate whether they are connected to previous theories. Third, we discuss the limitations of the first studies on this issue and provide a set of conclusions and recommendation for further research.

Seminal steps in theorizing about indigenous communication

Historically, the creation of modern nation-states in Latin America involved an artificial homogenization of cultures that transformed indigenous people into a "negative other" (Mignoli, 2010). An academic agenda initially accompanied this process, and anthropology and other disciplines emphasized the *exotic* features of traditional communication practices (Szurmuk & McKee, 2011). Social anthropology studied the structural outcomes of post-colonial policies regarding minority groups and the transculturation effects of those policies. Simultaneously, Brazilian folk-communication (*folk-comunicação*) focused on the unstructured and informal channels used by the subaltern sectors—including indigenous people—with a special emphasis on their value to intercultural dialogue (Luyten, 1983) or their utility to spread development based on local knowledge (Mundy & Compton, 1991). All these anthropological approaches fueled a deeper conceptualization of native communicative practices and established theoretical grounds for further research despite acting as translators and *ventriloquists* of the voice of indigenous peoples (Guerrero, 1994).

The step from anthropological description to a seminal theoretical revision of indigenous communication occurred at the end of the 1950s. In fact, Everett M. Rogers marked the founding of the Center for Advanced Study of Journalism in Latin America (CIESPAL) in 1959 as "the starting point of indigenous communication research in Latin America" (Chaffee, Gomez-Palacio, & Rogers, 1990, p. 1018), though the advent of a permanent research line on the issue took time. Beginning at that point, indigenous communication research joined the discussion of Latin American social sciences and used their frameworks for theory-building. Thus, indigenous practices were read with exogenous interpretative points of view, such as dependency theories or cultural studies. In the 1970s and 1980s, the critique of U.S. cultural imperialism over the symbolic south (Marques de Melo, 2007) marked a rich tradition of debates around popular education or alternative media, but indigenous education and media were considered an *ethnic variant* at best, as scholars did not distinguish between indigenous alternative practices (Beltrán & Reyes, 1993) and the processes encouraged by pro-Indian—indigenist—institutions (Cortés & Rodríguez, 2003). The pioneering studies in this field emphasized the

emancipation potentialities of alternative media, but the question of identity and cultural rights was rarely discussed, even if groundbreaking projects such as the Bolivian miners' radio stations included programs on local cultures and languages (Herrera, 2006). While these scholars considered alternative media to be a tool to give *voice to the voiceless* (Simpson, 1986), it remained a loudspeaker that the *ones* offer to the *others*. Indigenous people were then embedded within the larger but often imprecise label of *oppressed* or *popular cultures* (Freire, 2000), which included peasants, social movements, and inhabitants of impoverished rural and urban environments.

From the late 1980s, cultural studies acted as a reaction against the progressive dominance of conservative ideologies in Latin America (Sierra, 2004). This paradigm situated *ethno-communication* as a part of indigenous cultures, studied those cultures' local and traditional bases, and concluded that native people had traditionally established a differential and peculiar communication system (Aguirre, 2002). This can be read under anthropological frames; moreover, cultural studies expanded reflections on the intrinsic connections between power and knowledge. From this perspective, analyses concerning the colonial domination constitutive of Latin American modernity (García Canclini, 1995; Martín-Barbero, 2002) underlined the dominance of external audiovisual industries in the region, where indigenous peoples were under- or misrepresented (Himpele, 2007). These studies also accompanied the progressive emergence of indigenous reflections by prominent Latin American thinkers (Bengoa, 2000).

The initial rationale for indigenous representation in the media (González & Arteaga, 2005; Johnson, 2000) soon became more complex when scholars began to wonder how native people represent themselves in their own media (Castells-Talens, 2004; Jackson & Warren, 2002). This line of study—close to visual anthropology—brought the first insights into the way cultural traditions and worldviews influence the creation and appropriation of native media (Monasterios, 2003; Mundy & Lloyd-Laney, 1992; Salazar, 2002). According to Catherine Walsh (Richard, 2010), we cannot discuss "cultural studies" but instead must address "intercultural" issues, as proposed by the indigenous movement in Ecuador in the early 1990s. At that time, the ideological bases of the indigenous political movement were established in the Andean Region, yielding the recognition of natives as *political subjects* in several Constitutions. In the 1990s, the so-called self-discovery (*auto-descubrimiento*), which was a response to the 500th anniversary of Spanish colonization, and the 1994 Zapatista uprising in Mexico were milestones for creative ways to think communication from indigenous locus. The "informational guerrilla" tactics by Zapatistas (Castells, 1997) and the counter-hegemony discourse led scholars to stress that indigenous communication should be debated from a social mobilization paradigm and not strictly from a mass-media perspective (Martín-Barbero, 1993).

In this seminal stage, we underline the emergence of indigenous movements that became public to defend their symbolic values and their political demands in

order to promote other ways of imagining the world that were different from those based on an instrumental logic (Maldonado, Reyes, & Del Valle, 2015). To achieve this goal, indigenous organizations produced more of their own media in a process that Salazar (2002) referred to as *communicative ethno-genesis*. This public activity might have driven scholars to dedicate significant effort to studying native processes (Agurto & Mescco, 2012) while maintaining their original Western scholarly interests. However, as we argue in the next section, only with the coming of the new century did scholars become fully aware of the theorizing and self-reflexive role of Latin American indigenous peoples regarding their own media and communication processes, generating innovative concepts in the literature such as *Communicational Tejido [tissue]* (Almendra, 2010), *communication with identity* (CCAIA, 2012), *the own and the appropriated* (Aguirre, 2002), and recently, *communication from Buen Vivir*. Thus, this transition into exploring indigenous communication is possible because of the influence of indigenous thinkers on Latin American communication scholars, who have progressively framed indigenous communication studies within an alternative paradigm.

Latin American theoretical approaches to indigenous communication

The literature review in this section includes relevant journal papers and monographs in the field of indigenous communication, published by scholars of areas such as media studies, sociology, or anthropology, as well as documents generated by indigenous practitioners in Latin America during 2005–2015. As an analytical strategy, we inductively created four theoretical topics that organize the existing discussion reviewed in the literature. This division is based on the similarity of the debates and the specific issue they address (technology, policy, media, worldview) and each topic specifically depicts a central thematic issue that has generated a debate among scholars and practitioners during the abovementioned period. Topic a synthesizes the discussions about media use and ICT adoption by indigenous communities (Almendra, 2010; Goodwin, 2006; Rodríguez & El Gazi, 2007; Salazar, 2009; Toulemont, 2013); topic b refers to policymaking and regulation with respect to indigenous communication (Almendra, 2010; Hernández, 2013; Mignoli, 2010; Otero, 2008); topic c addresses the discussions between indigenous and alternative media (González Tanco, 2016; Hernández, 2014; Herrera et al., 2016; Rappaport, 2009); and topic d explains the application of the concept *Buen Vivir* to some indigenous communication practices (Barranquero & Sáez, 2017; Contreras, 2016; De Sousa, 2014; Torrico, 2013). The first two topics (a and b) depict a *continuity* of traditional Latin American discussions, whereas the second two topics (c and d) represent *emerging* issues. The first three topics (a, b and c) are more related to media studies (ICTs, laws, news outlets), and the last topic (communication from *Buen Vivir*) has an interdisciplinary nature and is the best-articulated approach that overtakes this discussion and may have a greater impact in international debates. None of these topics is entirely representative of

indigenous communication in the region and they tend to overlap. The next four theoretical topics intend to simplify the heterogeneous debates in order to illustrate the underlying discussions and trends.

Media and ICT appropriation

The adoption of ICTs by local indigenous inhabitants has been a core topic on the regional agenda over the last decade and represents a *continuity* of previous academic studies. In fact, beyond the issue of access, the main approach to this issue has been the hypothetical *reinvention* of ICTs by non-Western populations, or autochthonous appropriations of media and information technologies (Toulemont, 2013). In contrast with the very early framework of diffusionism (Rogers, 2005), field experiences have guided scholars to consider the *appropriation* of communication technologies and the way indigenous peoples use ICTs according to their traditional knowledge (Salazar, 2009). For example, Goodwin (2006) has shown how Yanomami communities in Brazil adopt computers to ensure their survival in a globally interconnected world. In this case, appropriation does not only mean adapting ICTs to indigenous traditions but also using media as a survival strategy.

Scholars have collected empirical evidence to understand the adoption of different technologies for interpersonal and mass-communication aims, including the Internet (Salazar, 2002), social networks (Careaga, Jiménez, & Badilla, 2014), video and filmmaking (Schiwy, 2009; Wortham, 2013; Zamorano, 2017) and radio devices (Rodríguez & El Gazi, 2007). The diversity of appropriation practices, including imitation practices, reflects their heterogeneity and invalidates the idea of a general adoption or resistance pattern regarding ICTs (Rodríguez & El Gazi, 2007). These practices differ in *resources* (which media devices indigenous people have access to), culture (ritual and traditions within a community) and scope (the goal of communication, such as self-disclosure or cultural preservation). This perspective is in line with Latin American thinkers (García Canclini, 1995; Martín-Barbero, 1993), but underlines the idea that indigenous cultures are usually based on a complex system of values, rules and viewpoints.

Indigenous leaders and thinkers have expressed their own understanding about media and ICTs. Most of them agree that media can create *internal consciousness* regarding their own rights and problems, avoiding the exogenous frameworks that conceive communication as a way to *educate*.[3] Moreover, experiences with the Nasa peoples in Colombia reveal that non-Western communities find the Internet to be a means to establish an *external communication* with Western societies in order to report human rights violations (Almendra, 2010). These self-reflections have two implications. First, they show how media and ICTs depict internal and external communication channels for original communities, although in both cases these channels are modeled by their own concerns and not by global challenges. Second, these self-reflections confirm the abovementioned *continuity* of the approach regarding the *reinvention* or *re-appropriation* of ICTs by indigenous peoples.

Policies and regulation

In the last decade, scholars also focused on indigenous communication as a *right* (Hernández, 2013). Before 2005, many studies had addressed the economic, social, and cultural rights of indigenous people as matters of poverty or *marginalization*, but this approach progressively tended to emphasize the ethnic *differentiation* of rights, that is, "embodied in Aboriginal Rights," and goes beyond the individualistic UN principles of human rights (Kulchyski, 2011). This recurring topic is relevant since it indicates that policymaking and regulation with respect to indigenous media and communication deserves exceptional treatment, such as a measure of *affirmative action* based on restorative justice, historical claims, cultural preservation, and collective ownership. Thus, this differential approach might lead to a better understanding and prediction of future communication processes and in turn to the design of exclusive legal norms guaranteeing inherent indigenous rights.

A pertinent milestone for this perspective was the promulgation of the Argentinian Law of Audiovisual Communication Services (2009), in which indigenous people played an active role by proposing the notion of "communication with identity" (CCAIA, 2012). Mignoli (2010) states that the debates surrounding the law led natives to express their claims to be part of a *different category* regarding public, commercial, or community media. This identity perspective is one of the first public reflections concerning communication by Latin American indigenous groups. Moreover, similar laws in Bolivia and Ecuador had analogous effects because they included the differential approach to rights within their rationales. In the case of Bolivia, the 2011 Audiovisual Law dedicated a 17% of its content to indigenous media, while in Mexico, the 2014 regulation developed specific norms referring to indigenous representation, access, and rights for autonomy. The Argentinian Law was socialized at the first Continental Summit on Indigenous Communication in 2010, representing another breaking point for the reflexive praxis of these communities, and the differential approach actually became a warning against categorizing indigenous demands within the cultural sphere (Martínez, 2009).

Latin American scholars recognize that indigenous communication can be understood as the communication processes of a social movement that shares a specific identity (in this case, indigenous) within the communication system (Jackson & Warren, 2002). This process both reproduces and reconfigures identity based on the movement's ancestral epistemologies and worldviews, being at the same time crossed by sociological categories such as gender, age, and class. Additionally, indigenous leaders have considered their own communication rights on the following foundations: (a) the collective basis of these rights (Agurto & Mescco, 2012), (b) their right to choose between ancestral and modern communication practices (Otero, 2008), (c) the communicational praxis that preceded their claims of these rights (Almendra, 2010), (d) these claims express some of the current political aspirations of indigenous peoples, and (e) these rights demand a legal

base (regulation) to promote an aware action (León, 2013). This harmony between Latin American scholars and thinkers proves the strength of the differential approach as a theoretical framework for understanding indigenous policies and regulations regarding media and communication.

Indigenous media

In the last decade, Latin American scholarship has included a set of emerging theoretical debates regarding the study of *indigenous media* that introduce *discontinuities* from traditional *alternative media* reflections. These discussions are closely related to: (a) the cultural-political focus of indigenous communication, (b) the claims for a *differential* right to communicate, (c) an integral view of communication processes embedded in culture and worldview, and (d) an orientation towards the building of *Buen Vivir* and civilization reforms. Thus, we consider the dialectic relationship (in terms of similarity and difference) between *alternative media* and *indigenous media* as an emerging Latin American theoretical topic that can further enrich reflections when compared to the traditional approaches to alternative communication. After an extensive revision of the works that embed indigenous media within the alternativist tradition, we perceive a few differences in indigenous media, although an academic consensus on the delimitation of both forms has not been reached yet.

First, even when both frameworks conceive that communication is not a neutral and disinterested act of information transfer, scholars recognize that indigenous groups place a special emphasis on the political and cultural role of alternative media in the preservation and legitimation of language and culture, as well as the political support of territorial claims. In this line, communication for indigenous people could be defined as a "new model of mediation based on the creative singularity of the cultures denied by the globalized capitalist colonial process" (Herrera et al., 2016, p. 83). This concretizes communication as a political tool to build autonomy and physical resistance and as a cultural tool to construct identity, counter-narratives, and self-representation (González Tanco, 2016; Schiwy, 2009).

In this sense, for some authors media serves a double *inwards* and *outwards* function, according to a concept extended among the Nasa people in Colombia or the Zapatistas in Mexico. These theoretical functions help to explain community media as spaces to reinforce self-expression and reaffirm the history and cultural identity of each indigenous group (*inwards*). At the same time, alternative media also help indigenous people connect to other communities (native or Western) and create solidarity networks, combat misguided media representations, or project themselves to the rest of the world (*outwards*). An alternative third function, called *the frontier*, may emerge from the hybrid practices of the Modernity (González Tanco, 2016; Rappaport, 2009).

Second, communication is perceived as an *immaterial* right that needs to be preserved in order to construct identity and participate in the political life of the

community. This perspective differs from Western approaches to community media, as native populations use encounters, *mingas de pensamiento*, and other dialogic spaces to make political decisions. Additionally, the functioning of indigenous community media substantially differs from the more structured patterns of Western decision-making processes (González Tanco, 2016; Herrera, Rugeles, Sotelo, & Vega, 2014). However, in line with the theorizing about differentiation of rights, some authors support that the holder of the indigenous right to communicate might be collective, resulting in a reconsideration of the Western individual bias of rights and citizen conceptions (Garretón, 2002) in which *citizen media* approaches are embedded (Rodríguez, 2001). This right departs from the idea that aboriginal communities maintain a *patrimonial feeling* over their media outlets based on communal property models and on equal access and participation in the media life and routines (Hernández, 2014). As we stated in the previous section, many indigenous communities do not feel represented in the *three-thirds* regulation (public, commercial, and community) promoted by recent policies (e.g., Argentina, 2009). Instead, they claim for a *fourth communication sector* based on criteria such as cultural identity, the critical relevance of communication for community-building, and their cooperative decision-making processes (Hernández, 2014).

Third, Latin American indigenous people do not usually approach communication from an instrumental point of view but from a more integral one that emphasizes communal work within wider cultural structures or worldviews. Although this conception connects with contemporary debates on the role of community media as spaces for social interaction and expression (Carpentier, 2015), different scholars have underlined the connection of indigenous communication with a broader *assemblage* of social organizations and cultural principles focused on endogenous development or *self-determination* (Salazar, 2009). In fact, the concept of *embedded aesthetics* by anthropologist Faye Ginsburg (1991) has been critically appropriated by Latin American scholars to refer to both the products and the *process making* embedded within the wider social and cultural systems in which those products are produced (Córdova, 2011; Salazar, 2009; Waisbord & Mellado, 2014). In other cases, a *media ecology* approach has been used to emphasize "the social solidarities of collective community media made [through] the appropriation and use of a wide range of information and communication technologies that include radio, print media, Internet, and traditional and symbolic forms of communication" (Salazar, 2009, p. 509).

Finally, many indigenous groups have adapted media to their own "cultural codes, life plans and political agendas" (Rodríguez & El Gazi, 2007, p. 460), although syncretism between indigenous popular cultures and mainstream contents, as well as "silences" in topics as gender or sex diversity, religion, taboo practices, or disability, can also be perceived in their content and programming (Ginsburg, 2016). Furthermore, the Declarations of Abya Yala Continental Summits of Indigenous Communication (2010, 2013) invited indigenous communicators to provide

explanations for the crisis of Western modern/colonial values and revalue indigenous knowledge as a way to provide sustainable alternatives for the civilization crisis. As Summits in 2013 and 2016 exposed, some leading organizations from Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Guatemala and Bolivia shared a common agenda that questioned colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism, proposing social economy and solidarity values, ethnic and gender-balanced relations, and natural preservation to challenge extractivism and capitalist abuses.

Communication from Buen Vivir

One of the most common debates among original communities is the necessity to articulate local epistemologies from the *side of the excluded*, which has been "the realm of the unthinkable in Western modernity" (De Sousa, 2014, p. 134). From this perspective, we consider *Buen Vivir* the best articulated emerging topic in Latin American indigenous communication in the last decade, even though it was originally derived from Andean indigenous worldviews (around the notion of *Sumak Kawsay* in Quechua or *Suma Qamaña* in Aymara) and its application is limited to only some indigenous communities. For example, in Colombia *Buen Vivir* is embodied in the Andean regions and populations whereas Amazonian or Eastern Plains peoples operate with other worldviews. However, *Buen Vivir* is proposed as an alternative to Western modern thought, which a number of indigenous communities hold accountable for the economic, social and climate crisis. Crystallized in the recent Constitutions of Ecuador (2008) and Bolivia (2009), the expression refers to the permanent fulfilling of harmonious living standards based on a non-utilitarian relation among humans and between humans and nature (Gudynas, 2016; Hidalgo, Guillén, & Deleg Guazha, 2014). *Buen Vivir* represents a partial synthesis of certain indigenous ancestral knowledge (merged with and into debates by Western anthropologists, environmentalists, and social movements), and it embodies discussions regarding the construction of new epistemologies, social relations, and development models (Escobar, 2015).

First, *Buen Vivir* points to the construction of ethical and culturally rooted practical knowledge that challenges the Enlightenment thinking and its tendency to universalize, and separate, on the one hand, theory and practice and, on the other, knowledge and values. In this sense, praxis is not merely a dialectical dimension of empirical work, as proposed by Freire (2000). It is also a key element in the construction of non-universal but multiple epistemologies (*pluriverse*) resulting both from the diversity of the existing cultures in Latin America (Gudynas, 2011; Restrepo, 2014) and communication that can help to "consolidate a path of valorization of the own, integration from the difference" and "redefinition of the modern/colonial universe, opting for a pluriverse/decolonial" (Maldonado et al., 2015, p. 172).

Second, this framework emphasizes a notion of community that moves beyond the traditional Western conception of a social, relatively homogeneous structure and instead understands it as a continuum of society and nature living in unity (common-unity). Based on reflections about the social economy forms that exist in

indigenous communities, this approach prevents the tendency in modern thinking towards individualism and the commodification of nature, which are central dimensions in modern thinking (Barranquero & Sáez, 2017; Huanacuni, 2010, p. 49).

Third, *Buen Vivir* challenges the dominant concept of development as a cumulative path from a state of underdevelopment to a phase of economic and technological progress. Many indigenous communities do not even share the idea of development as a linear process from scarcity to abundance in which poverty and wealth are determined by the lack or accumulation of material goods (Acosta, 2012, p. 195). Instead, *Buen Vivir* principle of solidarity is inspiring a number of self-managed social economy enterprises in indigenous settings such as Ecuador (Scarlato, 2013) or Chiapas (Giovannini, 2015). Far from notions of efficiency and competition, *Buen Vivir* is connected to other Western alternative views on development such as de-growth, post-development theories, and reflections on the commons (Escobar, 2015).

As an analytical and theoretical approach, this concept has been incorporated into the Latin American agenda of communication studies using different reflections as an attempt to avoid the Eurocentric and colonial biases that prevail in communication for development studies (Barranquero & Sáez, 2017; Contreras, 2016; De Souza Silva, 2011; Sierra & Maldonado, 2016). The works by Torrico (2013) regarding a "communication to leave development" or those by De Souza Silva (2011) about a new order for development are samples of this perspective. Thus, the inclusion of *Buen Vivir* categories (human integration into nature, cooperation, reciprocity, etc.) in the Latin American theoretical discussions depicts a *discontinuity* in relation to the former traditional frameworks. Since there is a risk to turn Good Living into an empty signifier used by the *dispositive* of power (Bretón, 2013), there is a need to transform these categories into measurable indicators towards testing the role of communication in the relationship between humans and the Earth (Pachamama, the earth/time mother for many Andean indigenous) or determining to what extent reciprocity can explain indigenous communication processes.

In fact, *Buen Vivir* has become a central notion in the current debates of the so-called *Modernity/Coloniality* framework, which is coherent as a new research program (Escobar, 2010). Rooted in previous theorizations (Mariátegui, Freire, etc.), *decolonial thinking* constitutes a renovation of critical theories that review the modern/colonial heritage in Latin America from a perspective that separates postcolonial theories (Fanon, Bhabha, Said, etc.), from their Middle-East/South Asia diasporic origin, and their trend to analyze 19th century colonialism (Bhambra, 2014). This generation of scholars (Escobar, Mignolo, Quijano, Walsh, etc.) rethinks colonialism when observing it not as a stage but as a continuum—coloniality (*colonialidad*)—that emerges from the Conquest of America and that is strictly connected to the expansion of modernity as its "inevitable reverse side" (Mignolo, 2000, p. 22). Decolonial academics try to construct "Epistemologies of the South" (De Sousa, 2014) that legitimize the "subversive frameworks" derived by

the subaltern groups that represent a rupture regarding the modern/colonial project and globalization as its more visible manifestation today (social movements, indigenous communities and their *Buen Vivir* conceptions, etc.).

In practice, the community media network Latin American Association for Radio Education (ALER) is currently encouraging a process of institutional innovation inspired by *Buen Vivir* principles. ALER 2020 is a strategy to systematize experiences and rethink the "for what" of popular communication and education towards the construction of "communities with sustainable lifestyles, moving away from the mandate of 'development'" (Cabral, 2013, p. 123). Furthermore, there are also valuable case studies inspired by *Buen Vivir* that might provide other theoretical inputs: Ecuador's FLOK Society (Free-Libre, Open Knowledge), the Zapatista autonomous education system, and Argentinian Usina de Medios (Barranquero & Sáez, 2017). Finally, there is an emerging movement of indigenous universities that attempt to construct autonomous curricula as a way of challenging the "epistemic violence" of Western frameworks and revitalize indigenous identities (Eschenhagen, 2014).

Limitations of approaches

Studies of indigenous communication and their media have substantially progressed in the last decade, advancing in diverse directions, from research about technological appropriation by indigenous people to new theoretical frameworks for communication for social change (e.g., *Buen Vivir*). Nevertheless, there are a number of limitations that should be considered when advancing towards more nuanced and complex knowledge on the issue.

First, most studies explore the potential of indigenous communication to express ethnic demands and alternative views on development or modern science, but thus far, little attention has been paid to gender, age, ethnic, and class inequalities among these groups. In fact, discrimination is practically absent in the literature, and there is a trend to fall into romantic and naïve positions that reinforce the myth of united indigenous communities in which conflict is absent, such as "little happy preindustrial arcadias to be preserved or reconstructed" (Ullán, 2008, p. 80). In this sense, Martínez (2006) has documented the tendency towards *cultural essentialism* in part of the research and theorizing, as many analyses neglect the long history of injustices within indigenous communities, from labor exploitation to gender/sexual discrimination. This trend is especially evident in the indigenous discourses themselves. In the last decade, we perceive an incipient interest in incorporating gender issues (León, 2013; Schiwy, 2009) as "a disputed terrain of interactions between elite and subaltern discourses and practices, traversed by gender inequalities and power relations" (Chaves & Zambrano, 2009, p. 218). Nevertheless, attention to social inequalities regarding social class, sexual orientation, religion, and physical and mental disabilities is still practically lacking in this literature.

Second, media-centrism is negatively perceived in the majority of the studies, forgetting the connections among the different communication forms and the social interactions they allow from a broader *media ecology* perspective. This characteristic illustrates a confrontation with international research and its traditional focus on media transfer to communities and its effects on cultural identities—i.e., transculturation (Dyson, Hendriks, & Grants, 2007). Nevertheless, a number of recent studies (Fuller, 2007; González Tanco, 2016) and the discussions during the first, second, and third Abya Yala Continental Summits have recognized that communication is *constitutive* for indigenous people, since it is present in their conceptions about territory, organizational processes, resistances, and plans for life (León, 2013, p. 82). Still, further approaches should connect indigenous media within the larger indigenous worldviews, such as *Buen Vivir*, in which some of them are embedded. These approaches should also explore how traditional and contemporary communication systems interact and the multiple *mediations* they determine. This latter statement becomes relevant when considering the excessive attention given to topics such as stereotypes of aboriginal peoples or media/ICT effects on indigenous cultural identities (Dyson et al., 2007; Fuller, 2007).

Third, despite the advances collected in this article, theorizing in the field is dominated by non-indigenous thinkers who *translate* the voice of the indigenous people into Western concepts and frameworks and "often ignore the epistemic potential of indigenous peoples to go beyond the hierarchical dichotomies that underlie the modern/colonial world" (Mignolo & Schiwy, 2002). However, this trend coexists with an emerging but still marginal sector of native intellectuals whose theorizations usually reveal self-generated agendas on the basis of strong political activism and experimentation with both native and Western knowledge (Rappaport, 2008, p. 615). This group comprises not only senior and traditional leaders but also a generation of young people who act as intermediaries and translators between their communities and the outside world since they are expected to develop a strong ethnic and collective conscience after their passage through universities (Mateos, Dietz, & Mendoza, 2016).

Furthermore, indigenous intellectuals are also inspired by *invisible* knowledge practices (Mato, 2002, p. 39) that do not circulate among the major Western publishers but constitute parallel circuits in which endogenous views are problematized. These practices do not follow positivist standards since they are basically inspired by and oriented to praxis and action. They also do not separate knowledge from ethical values as modern science does. Toledo and Barrera-Bassols (2008) have analyzed these intellectuals from the perspective of what they call *traditional indigenous knowledge*, which refers to integral structures that include belief systems (*kosmos*), sets of knowledge (*corpus*) and productive practices (*praxis*). Other scholars have emphasized their mestizo basis, since indigenous people understand the intercultural exercise not as an appropriation of foreign structures but as self-knowledge that opens dialogues to integrate other frameworks (Rappaport, 2008, p. 618). Indigenous worldviews can therefore serve as a basis to build a new "ecology

of knowledge," an expression popularized by Boaventura de Sousa to invite scientists to recognize the plurality of heterogeneous knowledge (including modern science), and dynamic interconnections of that knowledge without eliminating the autonomy of each scientific framework (De Sousa, 2014).

Conclusion: final remarks

Latin American research on indigenous communication has progressed extensively in the last decade from media-related approaches to more integral conceptions such as communication from *Buen Vivir*, incorporating insights from perspectives such as media theory, anthropology, and political science. Advancements in this topic have raised new challenges for media theory in general and for the traditional concerns of Latin American communication thinking in particular. These challenges include cultural imperialism, alternative media, and communication policies. Although there is not a particular *indigenousness* that defines the contributions of indigenous communities, these intellectual traditions are generating a particular body of knowledge that complements rather than rejects Western communication thought, providing inputs for future reflection and paths for epistemological decolonization.

This article has addressed a gap in academic literature by examining a decade of academic production (2005–2015) and recognizing four analytical theorizing approaches that depict continuities (*media and ICT appropriation*; *policies and regulation*) and discontinuities (*indigenous media; communication from Buen Vivir*) regarding traditional Latin American frameworks. One significant feature that connects all these trends is that indigenous communication is rooted in, and committed to, the cumulative and ever-changing wisdom and identity of diverse indigenous groups throughout Latin America. Thus, reflections tend to be openly political and associated with the reclaiming of cultural rights or the recuperation of memory. Furthermore, all the analytical theoretical approaches have gradually evolved from an exogenous and Western-oriented perspective towards a more reflexive evaluation that recognizes indigenous people as legal subjects and qualified voices.

Despite the recognition of continuities and discontinuities, theorization on indigenous communication represents a wide prolongation of the perspectives and methods of the Latin American Communication School. This school has been characterized since its origins by its tendency towards *hybridization* and its blurring of the limits of the traditional positivist distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods and *administrative* and *critical* perspectives (Marques de Melo, 2007). In fact, these advancements connect with debates of the 1990s on notions such as miscegenation (*mestizaje*) and syncretism (Martín-Barbero, 1993) and hybridization (García Canclini, 1995), which highlight the dynamic tensions produced by dominant and subordinate cultures within the political processes of modernization and the building of nation-states. By contrast, the indigenous research line is paving the way towards a more "cosmopolitan scholarship" (Waisbord, 2014, p. 18) that will help to unveil "the confluence and crossings of pre-Columbian

and migrant cultures and the production of multiple mediations and creative hybridizations at the origin of another possible modernity that is sensitive to this rich diversity" (Herrera et al., 2016, p. 84).

Nevertheless, Latin American studies have scarcely dialogued with international debates on indigenous communication, although similar concerns about media appropriations, alternatives to development or critiques of Eurocentrism can also be heard in Africa, Asia, and in research on ethnic communities in the United States, Canada, and Australia. Even if a number of readers are currently building bridges between different regions (e.g., Downing, 2010; Fuller, 2007), further dialogues need to be promoted either through the reinforcing of supranational research networks (e.g., International Communication Association, International Association for Media and Communication Research, Asociación Latinoamericana de Investigadores de la Comunicación) or by transcending the historical, geopolitical, and economic divides that impact knowledge produced in the North and in the Global South (De Sousa, 2014). In this sense, Latin American indigenous communication provides a substantial input to delve into the search for a decolonial, autochthonous, and critical communication theory for the region (Marques de Melo, 2007), which has been at the core of Latin American debates since the 1970s (Beltrán, 1976). In this line, the openness to dialogue of many indigenous communities is a fruitful path towards an *ecology of knowledge* that admits the incompleteness of every cultural sense or scientific framework (De Sousa, 2014). This dialogue also contributes to the *decolonial turn*, suggested by the modernity/coloniality research program (Escobar, 2010), towards the construction of new *epistemology from the South* from the peripheries and regardless any national border (De Sousa, 2014).

This article has contributed to diagnose and summarize four interrelated theoretical tendencies that are guiding current debates in the field. This is a positive exercise since it provides an analytical tool by which to organize and classify knowledge in the area, although any meta-theoretical revision will remain incomplete if we consider the extensive production on the issue as well as the complexity of indigenous communication itself. In addition, the visibility of knowledge produced in the region is an important limitation to our work given that many original articles and explorations are not indexed in international databases, constitute gray literature, or are not easy to find. Additionally, except for the timeline, this revision did not implement reproducible criteria to select, scrutinize and synthesize the surveyed contributions in the field. Thus, future revisions or meta-studies might use a more systematic revision and the construction of specific variables or categories, although the trends reported in this article could be helpful in comparing Latin American work with the approaches of other regions in which indigenous communication is on the agenda.

Finally, there are at least two more limitations in our work. First, indigenous communication is an emerging field in which new experiences and academic materials are constantly developing, especially since the last decade. Therefore, we argue that the core approaches we have analyzed may change their emphasis or provide

new categories, since indigenous communities are dynamic and subject to ongoing debates and reflections. Second, more effort should be made to systematize the wide variety of living media and communication experiences given that praxis is a key factor for the generation of indigenous thinking that will further enrich the field and might guide the future research agenda both within and outside the region.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1 Organizations such as Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca and Tejido de Comunicación (Colombia), Ojo de Agua (Mexico), Confederación Mapuche (Argentina), Cefrec (Bolivia), and Video nas Aldeias (Brazil) and media such as Mapuexpress (Chile), or Servindi (Peru).
2 *Minga de pensamiento* is a dialogical space for the collective construction of knowledge shared by a number of Latin American indigenous peoples. This space is inspired by the principles of complementarity and reciprocity of the most traditional indigenous work mingas (*mingas de trabajo*).
3 For instance, Eperara peoples in Colombia refused to create their radios in the past decade, while the same peoples in Ecuador developed their own.

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