

OTDK PAPER

**COUNTER-NARRATIVES IN INDIGENOUS MEDIA: NEGOTIATING
IDENTITY IN BRAZIL**

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INTRODUCTION: THE POWER OF LANGUAGE FROM DANTE TO CURRENT MEDIA

“Whoever is so misguided as to think that the place of his birth is the most delightful spot under the sun may also believe that his own language—his mother tongue, that is—is pre-eminent among all others; and, as a result he may believe that his language was also Adam’s.” (Dante, 1986, p. 6). Since the writing of Dante’s *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, a long time has passed, but the issue of language dominance is still observable throughout history. Not only in the Appenin peninsula, but very evidently during colonial times in The Americas. As for instance, the ‘*Indian*’ *Directory* elaborated by Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo, even though it was sold as an attempt to integrate the indigenous peoples in Portuguese society and to extinguish the differences between them, it had one very clear objective: homogenizing the culture (Garcia, 2007, p. 24). The official publication goes as follows:

It has always been an unalterably practiced maxim in all nations, which conquered new domains, to immediately introduce their own language to the conquered peoples, as it is indisputable, that this is one of the most effective means of banishing the barbarity of their ancient customs from rustic peoples; [...] A truly abominable and diabolical invention [referring to a widely used indigenous language], so that, deprived the Indians of all those means that could civilize them, they would remain in the rustic and barbaric subjection in which they had remained until now. To eliminate this extremely pernicious abuse, it will be one of the directors' main concerns to establish the use of the Portuguese Language in their respective villages, not allowing in any way that the boys and girls who belong to the schools, and all those Indians who are capable of instruction in this matter, use the language of their nations... (ibid., p. 25¹.)

The example above is only one of many attempts of establishing only one standard language at the expense of extinguishing others. In an interview, linguist and anthropologist Bruna Franchetto stated that the estimate is that 80% of the original languages vanished from the now Brazilian territory, not only in consequence of the progressive invasion of indigenous territories, but also due to the process of adopting the neighbors’ languages and mainly, as mentioned above, adopting the enforced dominant language (Iamarino, 2024, 21:01). Before the establishment of Portuguese Language as official, a variety of indigenous languages were used in the territory by the colonizers. This happened because, at first, it seemed the logical way to persuade the indigenous peoples into converting to the catholic religion (Garcia, 2007, p. 26).

¹ Original translated by the author. Where not indicated, all texts quoted in this paper are translated by the author.

Later, however, it was recognized that enforcing the Portuguese language served as a tool of power—not only because establishing power relations is easier when controlling the dominant language, but also due to territorial disputes between Portugal and Spain, where linguistic differentiation was crucial (*ibid.*, p. 27). It becomes clear that the aim was to establish a dynamic of dominance and influence, limiting the forms of communication to the colonizer's language exclusively. Together with this comes the concept of assimilation, which indicates the erasing of one's own group characteristics in order to replace them with the ones belonging to the dominant group, considering it is seen as superior (Funari and Piñon, 2016, p. 22). In this case, it was the gradual erasing of the diversified indigenous cultures and identities in exchange for the success of the enforced Portuguese homogenizing society.

It is clear that language offers much power to those who know how to use it. Pierre Bourdieu explored how language functions as a symbolic power, where symbolic power is the capacity of constructing reality (1991, p. 166). In this case, language is a resource that enables those who master it to wield influence within social structures, echoing a similar concept of power dynamics in communication (*ibid.*, p. 166 – 170). On the same note, Michael Foucault argues that the property of discourse has always been confined to a particular group of individuals, suggesting that having control over language and discourse influences society's norms, values and perceptions, thereby holding power and establishing a relationship of authority (1972, p. 68). This becomes even more evident by taking the example of the constitutions of nation-states. According to Anderson, the rise of written language and, glancing at some period later, the popularity and profitability of print-languages -meaning, books and the press media- set the base for national sentiment (2006, p. 60). This happened in different ways, but the most pertinent one was that it culminated in the establishment of certain languages as the standard for printed media (*ibid.*, p. 61). This followed the same logic of language enforcement mentioned previously, -perhaps with a lighter approach- but within the circumstances of instituting a standard for producing and consuming media. Moreover, as Kamusella affirms, the later established as official/national languages of the states replaced other written languages traditionally used within the polity, whereas popular education and mass media contributed to leveling differences in speech, which meant the liquidation of these forms of oral language construed as dialects of the official/national language (2009, p. 9). Those were historical examples, but the relationship between language, media and power relations is far from being extinguished. That is especially because the development of media progressed in extremely fast ways in the past decades, with advances in audiovisual production, different forms of journalism and the advent of the internet. According to Stuart Hall's cultural concept,

whoever controls the meanings, controls the debate, which directly impacts the way a given culture writes policies, laws and elect politicians (Benshoff, 2016, p. 198 - 199). If this idea is applied to what is known to be media and to the ways it is widely used in the current world, it is possible to affirm that the impacts do not affect only policies and laws formation, but also the way elements of society are perceived, especially if they go against the dominant structure. As Benshoff argues, in a postmodern, hypermediated world, the portrayal of concepts - the image - may matter even more than “reality” itself. (ibid., p. 199).

Bringing this to the context of Brazil and connecting with the example of indigenous languages mentioned previously, it can be noticed a pattern in media representations regarding indigenous communities, in which an ethnocentric vision still prevails. As Batista, Silva and Simas argue, “indigenous people are not valued, and the media has a tendency to strengthen prejudices against native peoples, through the publication of distorted news or in which the indigenous voice does not appear to oppose the voice of the non-indigenous” (2015, p. 142). Considering that the image, or representation may matter more than the facts, it seems that the popular image of indigenous people and the perception about their identities are disconnected from reality. However, if media is such an important and prevalent instrument in this day and age, it is more than reasonable that indigenous people propose a counter narrative against the ethnocentric media representations. Considering all of this, the question that rises and that this paper aims to answer is: *does media representation work as a tool for indigenous communities to renegotiate their identities?* Instead of giving more stage to the recurrent and constantly negative portrayals of indigenous peoples, the objective here is to observe and analyze the attempt of indigenous communities of taking control over their narratives.

Referring back to Foucault’s idea of authority establishment through the means of controlling discourse, the lack of accurate media representations of indigenous people implicates on the social weakening of their cultures. If the dominant discourse keeps taking over the control of society’s perception, this can implicate on the loss of indigenous communities’ identities. Therefore, this paper aims to better understand the mechanisms of resistance and identity preservation of marginalized communities, analyzing the dynamics of media usage in order to give power to the enforced powerless.

1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper takes an interdisciplinary approach in order to understand and interpret the dynamics of identity building through media representation in Brazil. The paper is framed with theories

and concepts taken from linguistic anthropology, representation theory, and also uses arguments from sociology, semiotics, minority studies and relies on terms from critical theory.

The data collection for the research was made using two methods: case studies and interviews. The choice for case studies seemed the fairest to fulfill the need to examine how media devices are used to build the narratives and in which way it happens. In this sense the main tool to perform the examination was discourse analysis, where the context of each case was considered. The analysis was divided into three spheres. The first one had a more artistic tone to it, since the object of examination was the documentary *Martírio* (Martyrdom), produced by Vincent Carelli. The second analysis took a more practical approach and was focused on a media channel run by indigenous people, called *Mídia Indígena* (Indigenous Media). Finally, the third case was an insider's perspective kind of approach, since it consisted of the analysis of Alice Pataxó's Instagram profile, which she uses to represent indigenous people, as she is an influencer, communicator and activist. According to Gerring, case study "constructs cases from a single unit while remaining attentive to inferences that span similar units outside the formal scope of investigation", and it also is "a study of a single unit with an aim to generalize across a larger set of units" (2004, p. 352). Many documentaries that represent indigenous people were watched before the writing of this paper, and most of them follow approximately the same structure, in the sense that they are produced in partnership -or by- with indigenous communities and allow them to choose how the story is told, how they are going to be represented. This, together with the fact that social media, and in this case, Instagram have a kind of pattern of publications and posts, made the choice for case studies methodology seem reasonable. However, since Gerring also agrees with the widely known idea that "the inference(s) pursued by a case study may be either illustrative or falsifiable", two interviews were conducted, in which the questions were related to the discussed and analyzed topics in the case studies (ibid., p. 352).

The first interview was conducted with Marcos Kaingang, indigenous of the *Kaingang* people, and leadership of the Gyró village, located near the city of Pelotas, Brazil. The second interview counted on Karine Emerich, who graduated in journalism and social communication and has worked in the production of different documentaries connected to social causes, including in NGOs. Both of the interviews followed a conversational structure, in order to leave the interviewees free to add any information they felt was important. Nevertheless, some questions were asked to guide the topics of the interview. In both interviews, the questions were related to: (1) the role of media content produced by indigenous people or that give them the space to represent themselves and its relation to identity (2) the matter of being represented

using their original languages in media contents and its relation to identity (3) the matter of being represented realizing their rituals, chants, and being differentiated as having a different culture (4) the issue of how using different words in media reports can influence in the perception of the media piece.

2. NEGOTIATING IDENTITY

There are many approaches to the concepts of identity, particularly from sociological viewpoints. This is an important idea to understand due to the fact that identity is a central issue to how individuals or groups of people interact with the context that surrounds them. Stets and Burke discussed the similarities and differences of the concept of identity regarding the Identity Theory and the Social Identity Theory (2000, p. 224 - 237). In relation to the former, McCall and Simmons' 1978 study (p. 65) defined it as *identification*, and in relation to the latter, it was called *self-categorization* (Turner et al. 1987, p. 2), and both referred to a process of self-classification in relation to existing social categories. Another perspective considered by Jürgen Habermas proposes the term “social identity”, which indicates that a society actively produces its own identity and cannot be seen as a trivial object to which it is possible to ascribe concepts (1974, p. 91). A recurring theme across the diverse meanings of identity is its function as a categorization within social roles or groups, where the associated meanings and expectations align with an individual's self-identification. This article adopts that perspective on identity, emphasizing the interconnectedness of the individual and social structures, where one influences the other. The relationship between social processes and identity is thus reciprocal, highlighting the dynamic interaction between personal and societal dimensions. (Stryker, 1980, p. 5). Other than that, the Symbolic Interactionism Theory, by George Herbert Mead also attests that society and identity are related, in the way that the meanings associated with people and objects are negotiated through social interaction, as Griffin discloses:

As human beings, we have the ability to name things. We can designate a specific object (person), identify an action (scream), or refer to an abstract idea (crazy). Occasionally a word sounds like the thing it describes (smack, thud, crash), but usually the names we use have no logical connection with the object at hand. Symbols are arbitrary signs. There's nothing inherently small, soft, or lovable in the word kitten. It's only by talking with others—symbolic interaction—that we come to ascribe that meaning and develop a universe of discourse. (2012, p. 56.)

Moreover, according to the theory, language is the tool that allows the generation of meaning. With language it is possible to create shared symbols, which are the lenses used by people to

make sense of the world (ibid., p. 56). This can also mean that the shared symbols are created and understood within cultures, since the meanings depend on the system they were generated. Since language is such a powerful tool and influences directly the way world and societal views are constructed, it seems undeniably necessary to conduct a more profound investigation into the relationship between language, culture and identity building.

2.1. Language and identity building

This article takes two main perspectives regarding the relationship between language and identity building. One is very much related to the cultural aspect of it, that is to say, the interconnection between language and culture, as explores the Linguistic Anthropology field. The other takes a constructivist point of view, where language plays a role of negotiating the meanings, as argues George Mead's Symbolic Interactionism, the Semiotics field of study and the proposed theories by Stuart Hall, where the concept of representation will be related to media. The aim here is to show how interconnected these visions are. They complement each other, and are not opposites, and my attempt in the next subchapters will be to demonstrate that.

2.2. Language and culture

There is an unquestionable relationship between language and culture as language is an essential tool and component of culture (Langacker 1999 p. 16). It is the instrument through which humans make sense of and, at once, structure their culture, and therefore, interpret the world. In the words of Palmer and Sharifan: "Language is a cultural activity and, at the same time, an instrument for organizing other cultural domains. Speakers take account of discourse situations, which are structured by culture." (2007, p.1). As complicated as it might sound, this basically means that language and culture are connected in a reciprocal relationship, one is embedded into the other. The approach of linguistic anthropology suggests that the speakers of a language are social actors, which means they are constantly creating meaning and articulating their existence inside their net which interconnects moral values, expectancies and beliefs. (Duranti, 2000, p.21). Moreover, linguistic anthropology sees language as a collection of symbolic strategies which are part of the social web and of the individual representation of the world, where the linguistic signs are not neutral, but are constantly used as a form of building cultural differences and affinities. (ibid., p. 22 - 24).

In his book *The Dawn of Language*, linguist Sverker Johansson states that “[...] it is the systems of symbols that create meaning that make culture relevant to language, language too is a system of symbols that create meaning” and that “the ability to handle symbols and networks of symbols [meaning culture] is therefore a prerequisite for language [...]” (2021, p. 305). This means that language is not only a system of symbols that creates shared meanings across cultures, but it is also a way of expressing the culture. This is especially true for indigenous peoples in Brazil. They preserve their culture through oral traditions, and the essential tool for culture preservation is their language. As confirms Dorvalino Refej Cardoso, an ethnic of the *Kaingang* People, in a news article for *Brasil de Fato*:

We are around 240 peoples that speak *Gê* languages [one of the existing indigenous linguistic families in Brazil] *Kaingang* that exist from the south to the center of the country. We suffer with the acculturation of our youth, because our culture is maintained through the oral form. That is why teaching the language is one of our main tasks, besides the dances and other religious rituals practiced by our ancestors (2021, para. 8).

Another factor that shows this crucial relationship, is the amount of initiatives to preserve indigenous languages, -due to the process of assimilation- as explored by many linguists, educators and anthropologists in Brazil, such as Barbosa (2011), Keim and Santos (2013), Franchetto et al. (2019), Guaratira and Costa (2020) and many others involved in the Indigenous Languages Revitalization Project by University of Campinas (Unicamp², 2019), to cite a few. For instance, Vanderson Lourenço, indigenous of the *Guarani-Nhandewa* community, explained how religion and language are connected for them in the documentary *Indigenous Language Revitalization*:

If you want to talk about the revitalization of the language, there is no way to separate it from religion for us, *Nhandewa*. That is because the religion takes place in an ambiance that we call *Oy Guatsu*, that would work like a school, a training space, because this is the place where the locals of the community will learn how to make medicine, how to read time, and how to understand the languages of the birds and the animals. This is where we always took our survival from, the knowledge always came from the *Oy Guatsu*, so we still carry these traits from the ancestral culture [...] we are reliving the ancestral memory. (Unicamp, 2019, 0:45).

In the documentary *Kaingang Knowledge*, indigenous leader João Carlos Kasu Kanheró states: “the *Kaingang* Language has a lot of value, the one that does not know how to speak the *Kaingang* Language has no value, that is what our ancestors used to say” (Flow and pH7³, 2015,

² In bibliography as Extensão, Esporte e Cultura – Unicamp (2019).

³ In bibliography as Flow Filmes & pH7 Filmes (2015).

03:34). Still in the same documentary, another indigenous leader affirms “if you speak *Kaingang*, you are indigenous, even if you are wearing a suit” (ibid., 19:10). This highlights the role of language in identity. It serves not only as a tool for expressing and articulating the culture of a people, but also as an identification tool, which unifies the indigenous of the group, regardless of how assimilated they are to a non-indigenous context. Not only language allows the symbols of the indigenous cultures to be constructed, but it allows a net of identification and understanding -identity- that can only happen through their languages. Again, in the documentary *Indigenous Language Revitalization* it is stated that by reviving a language it is possible to get to know the history and culture that was erased through time and, therefore, to give continuity to a people’s identity (Unicamp, 2019, 0:34). Moreover, Professor Wilmar D’Angelis expresses that reviving the language “benefits the communities, that now have a new life with it, a new dynamic for their schools and for the daily life itself, because it is possible to see the language making people happy again, giving its important role for the identity (ibid., 08:55).

It is also affirmed by Claudécir Marcolino, indigenous of the *Guarani-Nhandewa* people, that for one to speak the language, it is necessary to have someone to talk to (ibid., 05:25). This highlights the importance of communication in the process of maintaining the culture alive, because the way that language and, therefore, culture remain living is by active interaction. This is where Mead’s Symbolic Interactionism main premise enters the scene. According to Herbert Blumer, human beings use language and, therefore, social interaction to manage meanings and that the meanings are the basis of action in society (1969, p. 2). This is very similar to what was already discussed in relation to Linguistic Anthropology, because here, a cutout in Symbolic Interactionism is made, in which we isolate the bit where language is seen to be generating meaning and apply that to observe indigenous languages and cultures. However, it is also possible to relate Symbolic Interactionism with media, since the concepts created to support meaning are not only represented in it but are also negotiated and renegotiated in it.

2.3. Media and Representation

Regarding the discussion in the previous subchapter, Stuart Hall also argues that meanings can only be accessed through the common ground of language (1997, p. 1). Moreover, he presents the theory of Representation, which says that without the ‘signifying systems’ -language being one of them- it would be impossible for one to take on identities and to sustain the common ground of culture (ibid., p. 5). Furthermore, other non-linguistic systems are also signifying

systems, such as visual images, facial expressions, gestures, sounds... all of this can be considered languages. (ibid., p. 18 - 19). In other words, not only a language -as in English, or French- work as negotiating meaning, but other systems of representation also impact how a meaning is created and perceived in and across cultures. In semiotics terms, this means, for Hall, that understanding language as a system that crosses the border of linguistics offers a broader view concerning the power of signifying systems. (Benshoff, 2016, p.53).

This far, this paper has demonstrated that language plays a crucial role in the preservation of indigenous cultures. But even with the process of identity building through language and culture, these identities are still inserted in a society ruled by dominance. As mentioned in the introduction, the 'image' created through the systems of meaning matter a lot, especially in the current hypermediated society. The repetition of one single perspective, the mass perspective, can end up establishing a single version of a narrative. The more the same perceptions and narratives are reproduced, the more standardized they become. This can come to the point in which standard concepts are created, called *default assumptions* by Hofstadter (Griffin, 2012, p. 57). In this case, the identity of indigenous people can be detached from the alignment between identification and the meanings and expectations and can instead become only what is expected of them based on the widespread stigmas that are endorsed by media.

This has been the case in indigenous populations representation in Brazilian media for years, as attests the indigenous journalist Nankupé Tupinambá Fulkaxó. According to him, a great part of media vehicles continues to feed an ethnocentric and stigmatized discourse - originated in colonial times- about indigenous peoples, and the way the media interprets and portrays news about conflicts that involve them, affects the generated judgment and perception. (Fulkaxó, 2019, p. 93). As an example, we have a news article from G1 -one of the main news vehicles in Brazil- about an indigenous demonstration that happened this year, in which the negative consequences -mainly to big companies- were the focus. The reason and explanation for such demonstration were briefly mentioned and not detailed, and the way the text was constructed portrayed the situation as a wrongdoing to the country and did not seem to validate any of the motives which could have led to this occasion. One excerpt was:

The BR-230 highway was blocked this Wednesday at kilometer 27 by leaders of the Arara, Juruna and Assurini ethnic groups, who live in villages in the Paquçamba and Koatinemo Indigenous Lands. They used a truck, tires and pieces of wood to close the road. The passage was only opened for ambulances and police vehicles. Before long, a long traffic jam formed on both sides of the track. [...] For those who work with the transport of perishable cargo, the protest raised concerns about possible losses. A cart loaded with vegetables left São Paulo and was stopped at the roadblock. Delivery to

Altamira, a neighboring municipality, had already passed the deadline. (G1, 2024, para. 5 - 9).

This is only one of many occurrences in Brazilian media that Fulkaxó (2019) confirmed to be true. But the focus here is different. The aim is to analyze if the proposed counter argumentation by indigenous people is able to bring a new meaning for their identities, through their own signifying systems.

As the aim of this research is to investigate the possibility of renegotiating identity of indigenous communities in Brazil through their own signifying systems, the following case studies will illustrate the strategies and means used represent these communities and serve as contextual discourse analysis objects to examine whether the renegotiation is present or not.

3. IDENTITY COMMUNICATED IN MEDIA

3.1. Case study one: documentary

The first case study is the documentary called *Martírio*⁴ (Martyrdom), idealized, directed and narrated by Vincent Carelli and premiered in 2017. Carelli is a French-Brazilian anthropologist, indigenist and filmmaker, who has produced many documentaries involving indigenous communities and has even created a project to train indigenous filmmakers (Embaúba Play, 2024). The reason I chose this documentary, even though Carelli is not an indigenous person is that he uses his instruments to give voice to the counter narratives proposed by indigenous communities and goes against the dominant stories. “His project stimulated the exchange of information and images between nations, which discussed together the way of presenting their reality to the rest of the world (ibid.).

The documentary shows the long-going attempt to retake indigenous territories. It regards specifically the *Guarani-Kaiowá* community that lives in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul in Brazil. Carelli had already produced some films about the same matter in the decade of 1980, when the movement started, but with the raise of law projects against indigenous rights and the recurrent reports of violence, he decided to go back to the same communities and investigate the origins of conflict, “the peaceful and obstinate insurgency of the dispossessed Guarani-Kaiowá against the powerful agribusiness apparatus.” (Vitrine Filmes, 2020). Although the focus of the documentary is a specific community, it is applicable to the whole indigenous

⁴ Since the documentary was made in Brazilian Portuguese, all citations made throughout the text were translated by the author.

scenario in Brazil. It is shown that the fight is constant and general, regarding all communities. All of them struggle with conflicts over land, especially against farmers and against agribusiness.

The first scenes of the documentary are from the 1980's decade and show a big prayer, which assembled the *Guarani-Kaiowá* people from different villages of the region. The ritual happened at night and was followed by a meeting the next morning, regarding political discussions. The conversation was held entirely in the native language *Guarani-Kaiowá* and was not understood to its integrity at the time it was filmed. Later in the documentary, the dialogue is brought up again, and this time, translated. The community was talking about the retake of their lands, but not only that, as Carelli affirms "they had already understood the State's dissolution plan of indigenous cultures" (1:36:22). The order of the scenes was placed in this particular way to set the tone of the documentary; it is about indigenous communities, their culture, their identity and their struggle. Moreover, it serves to affirm that even though it is not enough talked about in the mass media, the conflicts over indigenous land are not recent, and not at all over. Still in the first minutes of the film, the tone continues to be set. "The media treats the indigenous as invaders and the ruralist lobby in the National Congress threatens their rights" says the narrator (03:36). This statement is followed by a display of different news reports, again, treating the indigenous communities as invaders and as aggressive. All these ideas and perspectives right at the beginning serve to expose exactly the kinds of views that the documentary is determined to oppose. This is a recurring strategy throughout the film; exposing the widespread ideas that portray indigenous people as the problem, to be able to contradict them with the represented narratives that have the communities as their authors.

Another approach taken in the documentary is to debunk false stories which lay underneath and contribute - and have been doing so since colonial times - to the idea that indigenous communities have a privileged life according to the law. This statement is especially contestable when it comes to the protection programs created for indigenous peoples. The *Indian Protection Service* is widely known to be an acclaimed project, for having delimited indigenous lands and for having begun the civilizing process of indigenous communities. What the film proceeds to expose is that even though the project had a humanitarian character, it carried the arrogance of an ethnocentric attitude; "we, the civilized, them, the primitive" (46:20). The so-called civilizing process was mainly performed by the military, and it is attested that

the military order of indigenous peoples aimed to progressively distance them from their customs, discrediting traditional leaders, the *Indian* Protection Service appointed captains aligned with its project of cultural assimilation who organized their militias to impose the new order (45:33).

In other words, the basic role of it was to dissolve and try to erase the culture, the beliefs, the languages. Moreover, it is clarified that the indigenous reserves created by the protection service became more of exile areas, which contradicts the common idea that the territories were fairly delimited.

The film also presents the agribusiness matter, which is the most relevant one regarding the territory struggle. Again, it takes a different perspective of it, not the mainstream one. It expresses that “there seems to be no room for diversity in the overwhelming march of agribusiness”, which instead of looking to the side of economic growth, it shows that wanting to expand the industry territories has a very big price (49:54). It costs the lands, the lives and the culture of indigenous communities, who fight so thoroughly to maintain everything alive. The documentary also represents the truth behind the indigenous *roadside camps*, which are often seen with bad eyes. The reason for that is that many expropriated indigenous communities end up camping near the lost land or even inside it as an act of resistance, and many times, it is on the roadside. This is also used to make a counterpoint with a streamed Agriculture Commission meeting in the National Congress in 2013, in which those acts of resistance are referred to as aggressive invasions. In the same meeting a Congress member shows a video that went viral on the internet, showing a retired policeman, tied up and bleeding, repeating the words “why are you doing this? I am a friend of yours, let me go please” (1:05:03). This was a result of a confront in which 3 policemen in total were killed by locals of an indigenous village, and the Congress member emphasized how brutal and shocking the event was and added that the video was recorded and sold by an indigenous person as a form of threat. However, in the next few seconds, a different perspective is taken again: why is the murder of 3 policemen more shocking than the atrocities that have been happening non-stop to indigenous people since colonial times? The narrator voices:

I was also shocked with this video which was posted and shares thousands of times on the internet with the title “*indian* murderers”. I was shocked by the title as well, since 50 indigenous leaderships have been assassinated in the past 30 years, meanwhile 3 policemen were murdered in the same period. What is shocking is the inequality of strengths involved in this conflict. (1:06:35).

The documentary producers went to the roadside camp where the event occurred to reassemble the facts which anticipated it. To do so, the camera focused on the locals of the indigenous

village, so they could tell themselves what happened that day. They reported that the policemen started the attack, that they arrived with firearms, shooting in the direction of the people. As reports one of the locals, “when the policeman was going to replace the ammunition in the revolver, he [the responsible for the death] did his self-defense, if he had not done it, he [the police officer] would have killed 6 women”. (1:09:31). It is also explained that the video entitled “*indian murderers*” was filmed by two non-indigenous women and sold to the police. This is where Benshoff’s counter point between the image and the facts becomes very clear; even though the reality was different, the perspective represented by the Congress member prevailed as the believed version. The producers also traveled to other camps, to capture the reality and tension of these conflicts. In one of the communities, a local affirms that “the farmer always come to destroy the praying house, he always comes to burn que house of the community” (1:15:58). In sequence, the plantation of the community is shown, which was once full of their own cassava and banana plants. Now, after throwing poison in there, the farmers replaced the cultivation with soy mass production, which did not stop the indigenous community from continuing to try to keep their plants alive. As affirms the narrator: “the plantation is the proper scenario of resistance; community’s the banana and the cassava against the agribusiness’ soy” (1:16:38). A further example brought about resistance is another roadside camp, which was destroyed when farmers set fire to the sugar cane plantation (process used for harvesting) nearby. The community then decided to camp inside the farm, where they were pressured by the workers and a tense atmosphere was installed. Contrary to the mass media representation, the documentary shows that the camp inside the farm was an answer to a previous aggression, and not the starting point of the aggression itself. In this sequence of events, not only the words, but the images make a statement. They are showing that the indigenous communities do not want to make profit like the agribusiness, they want to survive.

Since the film is not produced by indigenous people, but it takes their point of view, there is a great emphasis on the use of indigenous people speeches. The following speech, given by a *Guarani-Kaiowá* indigenous sums up the reason why resistance is essential, not only for this community, but for all indigenous groups in Brazil:

We did not depend on anybody to survive when everything was forest [...] because we had everything from nature and the non-indigenous came and took everything from us and now, we are the *vagrants*, we are the invaders. We are not invaders; we want what is ours [...] how many people got hurt due to the violence and retreated to a small area? [...] the necessity itself obliges us to occupy this land. (1:55:42).

Immediately after, a counterpoint is made by showing another meeting of the Agriculture Commission, where several speeches are given by Congress members. The purpose of this is to show how far apart the two perspectives are, since the speeches proceed to treat indigenous communities as a threat and as invaders and not as a community trying to retrieve what was taken away from them, which is what the documentary approach represents. The scenes that lead to the end of the film present the same situation; another meeting, this time called “Resistance Auction”, picturing the agribusiness as victims, as if the industry was in danger, and not the lives of indigenous communities, the original inhabitants of the country (2:23:46). This serves to depict that despite the history of struggle, and the many attempts to change the situation, the dominant perspective prevails. The last scenes, recorded by the producers, show one of the visited indigenous communities chanting as a form of wishing the visitors blessed trip home. This goes along with the consistent paradoxical tone of the film; the indigenous community wishes a blessed trip but at the same time is constantly threatened. By doing this, they show that even though the struggle is arduous, it is what keeps alive the most valuable thing they have: their identity, the language, the culture, the land, the beliefs, everything that makes them indigenous, everything that makes them diverse and at the same time, united; here the strongest representation of identity is the denial to assimilate. There is a bonus scene at the end, recorded by one of the indigenous communities that was camping inside the farm. The recordings show firearm attacks against the group and leaves the final reflection: “for how long will history repeat itself? How will these children grow up amid the terror imposed on the retake camps? (2:37:03)

All things considered, even though *Martírio* was not produced by indigenous people, it had a major representation of the communities, and that is the most important thing about it. The narrator, which is also the main director, speaks only at very specific moments, to give a historical background, or the context between a sequence of scenes. Most times, the narrative is taken over by the indigenous communities, which allows them to tell their own version of the story. In several moments, dialogues and speeches in the indigenous native languages are shown, together with chant, prayer and dance rituals, which makes a statement about identity; they are still here and will continue to be. One widely used strategy is the interplay of opposite ideas. The film continuously shows the mass perspective of indigenous communities as aggressive and invaders, especially in the media, and then, proceeds to combat these ideas with an excerpt of indigenous speeches, or a historical overview about the situation. Not only is the documentary itself a way for indigenous peoples to speak for themselves, but it also serves as

a testimony for indigenous history in Brazil for the last few decades, as well as it combats different misleading and dominant ideas throughout the course of it.

From an insider perspective, the kind of representation used in the documentary is extremely important to show reality as it is. According to the indigenous interviewee, Marcos Kaingang, having space for indigenous people to have their own voice brings visibility and strengthens resistance for the communities. This can be added to what Karine Emerich affirms:

Producing audiovisual content in indigenous languages is a small stone in the shoe of mainstream media. We as society, do not know all the languages that allow their [indigenous communities] resistance. [The media] denies the number of indigenous communities existing in Brazil. It is a small opening for the acknowledgement of the existence of the communities.

Moreover, she mentioned that when this kind of documentary is produced, it is customary that the script and the decisions about the content are made together with locals of the indigenous community in question, which gives autonomy for them to speak from their own perspective and be active participants in the process of building their own narratives. The importance of this kind of content is even more clear when Marcos Kaingang affirms: “if the media entered more in the communities and looked for this kind of knowledge from the original people, it would be a strong work for us”, agreeing with the idea that involving indigenous people in content producing about them, as obvious as it might seem, is essential for an accurate and aligned with reality representation of them. Regarding the language matter, Marcos Kaingang expressed that the very first worry when establishing a new community, or “village” is preserving the language, having an indigenous school so language does not get lost. For him, the indigenous language comes first -in his case, the *Kaingang* language- but they should learn Portuguese as well to be able to be in touch with the rest of the country. This can also be applied to documentary production. It was produced in the indigenous language in most of the times, but Portuguese was also needed to be able to spread the message to as many people as it could get to. All things considered, this documentary is an important piece of identity preservation and narrative building, and moreover, as Karine observes, this kind of work is important because it stays out. Those are alive memories, voices registered in the past, to be continuously heard, until this day and the ones to come.

3.2. Case study two: media channel

The second case study is a media channel called *Mídia Indígena*⁵ (Indigenous Media). They are an internet-based indigenous communication collective and mostly use their Instagram profile -which has 216 thousand followers- for posting and publishing, so that is the focus of the analysis. Their mission is to promote communication made by indigenous people and for indigenous people, as well as showing their lives differently than the stigmatized perception of traditional media. In order to have a better idea of the channel, three different posts regarding different matters will be examined.

The first post is a news report about two murder cases which happened in two different villages of the Kaiowá community, in the state of Mato Grosso Do Sul. The images carousel is original from another organization called *The National Articulation of Indigenous Women Warriors of Ancestry*, but the Instagram post is made by *Mídia Indígena*, since the purpose of the project is to communicate indigenous matters and spread their perspective to the whole country. The first image of the carousel says: “Denunciation: stop killing the first Brazilian women”; the post is illustrated in *Figure 1*:



Figure 1: Murder Case

Source: *Mídia Indígena Oficial*, 2024. Screen capture by author.

It is already possible to observe that the kind of language is purposely chosen to make a statement, as the first word says itself, it is a denunciation. Moreover, the intense request of

⁵ As well as the documentary, any direct citations were translated by the author.

“stop killing” implies that this was not the first murder case regarding indigenous women. But for a more detailed analysis, let us observe what the main message of the posts says:

Today, once more, we face the pain of seeing our indigenous warriors brutally silenced. Hilda Barroso, 79 years old, and Marisonia, both belonging to the Kaiowá community, had their lives interrupted by acts of violence and abuse. We cannot accept that hatred, racism and fascism continue to devastate our territories and bodies. The National Articulation of Indigenous Women Warriors of Ancestry claims for justice! Each dead indigenous woman is a piece of our struggle that is ripped out. We are still standing, for our girls and women, for equity and respect.

There are many aspects of this text to be interpreted. First of all, using the expression *brutally silenced* elucidates that besides murder being a way of violently lessen the indigenous population, it is also a way of silencing their voices. Moreover, this being two murders against women, means that the target is “the ones that once gestated and generated the ones that now inhabit the land”, as the original post suggests. The text also connects these occurrences to hatred, racism and fascism, which suggests, together with the accusing tone, that these events are not isolated, but happen inserted in a structure that by itself already marginalizes indigenous people, and in this case, indigenous women specifically. Other than denouncing the brutal and violent events, the post also has a tone of resistance, which is similar to what was observed in the documentary, in the previous case study. However, the main idea is that these cruel episodes cannot keep happening. The post clearly makes an appeal: *stop killing us*. It is evident that the purpose of this media channel is not to try and stay neutral in the eyes of the audience, but to make a clear statement in defense of the indigenous communities. This is even clearer when it is compared to a traditional mainstream media vehicle like G1, one of the biggest news vehicles in Brazil. The same murder case was reported by the G1 website, and a very different tone can be observed. It is important to clarify that *Mídia Indígena*’s referred to two separate cases in the same Instagram post, as a form giving emphasis to what they were denouncing. In the following example, only the case about Hilda Barroso, the 79-year-old woman is reported:

The body of Hilda Barroso, 79 years old, was found in this Friday morning (18), in a small house in the retake area of *Ñu Verá*, next to the Bororó Village, in Dourados, 251km from Campo Grande. According to the Civil Police, the victim present signs of suffocation. The suspect has been already identified and is being sought by the police. (G1, 2024).

As can be noticed in the first paragraph of the news report, the same case was related by G1, but with a distinct character. On the one hand, *Mídia Indígena* used an accusing tone, and focused on the brutality of the facts and the structural problems that lay behind this kind of

episode, therefore taking a position in favor of the defense of indigenous communities and indigenous women specifically. On the other hand, G1 used a rather neutral tone and focused on quite concrete information, such as the exact location of the event and what the police said about it. Observing the following paragraphs is also noticeable that the news report is quite short and does not focus on any structural societal problems; it seems to report just like any other news story.

The second Instagram post is an invitation to follow up the coverage of a sports and cultural event that involves indigenous communities from 3 different states in Brazil. As the caption of the post itself says, the event is called *Mpo Kaxuwa Amijkin* and it is a way “to celebrate the cultural diversity between the communities and practice traditional activities”. The original publication is a video, posted in partnership with an indigenous communicator, who works in *Mídia Indígena* platform. In the video, he talks about what can be found in the event and shows highlights of the opening ceremony. The post can be observed in *Figure 2*:



Figure 2: Sports and cultural event

Source: *Mídia Indígena Oficial*, 2024. Screen capture by author.

This kind of media coverage is contrasting with the previous example. Whilst the first one was a news report about two of many cases of indigenous murders, the current example brings a lighter tone to the picture. It is representing the diversity between indigenous communities, at the same that it is celebrating their culture and what they have in common. It also communicates

an idea of resistance. Celebrating and producing content about one's culture can be an effective way of representing indigenous identities. By showing how diverse the cultures are, and portraying the event with a good note, is possible to spread the message that indigenous lives are not only about struggling to stay alive and to have their lands back. This kind of representation portrays exactly the languages, the cultures, and the identities they want to preserve, and serves as a reminder that indigenous communities are not all the same but are rather diverse. It reaffirms the importance of maintaining their traditions, and since the coverage is made by indigenous people themselves, they can have the autonomy of representing their reality as it is and as they perceive it. This is especially important considering Stuart Hall's representation theory, in the semiotics perspective. If images, sounds, and other semiotic systems are a part of representing culture, then it is essential that the indigenous communities have the control of the signifying systems, so they can defend their perspective with propriety.

The next post is also made in a lighter tone. It was made on the 12th of October, which is known as Children's Day in Brazil. The idea of the post is to show 6 indigenous children's games and invite parents or professor to play it with children. The interest thing is that most of them are very popular in Brazil in general, or at least, are very similar to popular children's games. As is possible to observe in Figure 3 and Figure 4, the post includes a caption, describing the idea and an image carousel, with brief descriptions of how the games work and photos of indigenous children having fun with them:



Figure 3: *Children Games 1*

Source: Mídia Indígena Oficial, 2024. Screen capture by author.



Figure 4: *Children Games 2*

Source: Mídia Indígena Oficial, 2024. Screen capture by author.

At the end of the caption, an invitation to visit a website called *mirim.org* is made. This website is part of a project that aims to produce teaching material to talk about the diversity of indigenous communities and to try to break stereotypes about them, with simple and accessible language.

The main idea of this post is, of course, to engage with the Children's Day atmosphere. However, there are a few subtle aspects that can be observed in it. The very fact that most of the games are well known all around the country, already gives the idea that indigenous culture is an undeniably present part of Brazil. Moreover, one of the intentions of the publication can be an attempt to slightly reduce the stigma regarding indigenous people by connecting them to the rest of the country with one thing every human being has in common: childhood. On the same emotional note, it can be a way to show how indigenous culture is inserted in popular culture, inviting Brazilian people to look back at their origins and start deconstructing the idea that indigenous people are isolated or even "exotic". Explicitly showing how aspects of indigenous culture are inserted in mainstream culture is a way to state that indigenous people's identity is organically present in the daily lives of Brazilians, and since indigenous communities were the original inhabitants of the territory, this whole idea states that a part of the diverse indigenous identity was kept and preserved and now is inserted in parts of the daily life that might not seem that obvious. Furthermore, the call to visit *mirim.org* website is a way of taking advantage of the attention grabbed by the post to divulgate an initiative that can be beneficial

for indigenous populations, considering that the teaching material produced by them can contribute to a destigmatized image of indigenous communities in the country.

All in all, it is noticeable that *Mídia Indígena* uses different approaches to try and take control of the signifying systems, as discussed before in this paper. Taking only the examples analyzed previously, news reports, coverage of events and connecting indigenous culture with everyday were already three of them, however other ones can be observed throughout their Instagram profile. Those include reporting conquests, -such as when lands are delimited, or when a university graduates their first indigenous woman- invitations to mobilize people to participate in demonstrations, divulgating other contents produced by and about indigenous communities, articles about indigenous stories, and many more. This amount of approaches reveals that the process of building a counter narrative against the perspective proposed by mainstream media is multifactorial and consistent. Not only is the content of the posts important, but all the semiotic signifying systems proposed by Hall (1997, p. 18 – 19). The images, the videos and the language used in them are crucial to get the message across and represent the indigenous communities with their own perspective.

The idea of having media content produced by indigenous people themselves resonates a good impression between indigenous populations. Marcos Kaingang affirmed that this brings the key message of: “we can, we know”. This is because, according to him, society is used to picture indigenous people as incapable of using technology to produce their own things. So, indigenous communities representing themselves communicate a message of presence. They are here, they have learned and are ready to be the spokespeople of their own narratives. This is connected to what Karine said about mainstream media: “mass communication has a classist vision, a dominant discourse [...] so reporters end up producing a discourse which always put the *white man* as dominant.” This is exactly what Marcos Kaingang was referring to, as well as it is connected to what Hall’s representation theory attests about the control of the *meanings*; whoever has it, runs the debate. Karine also adds that due to the dominant discourse, indigenous populations and the problems regarding them are neglected; she states: “it is known that many are the tragic occurrences lived by indigenous people, it is known that the majority of indigenous lands are conflict areas, [...] the problems are serious and the space in the media for this is too small”. Which is where the importance of *Mídia Indígena* vehicle comes in. Even though is it not the most popular media outlet, especially because it is Instagram based, it is one of the few that does not try to alleviate the occurrences by using neutral terms; it has the purpose of making a statement in the name of the indigenous communities. As Marcos Kaingang mentions, a lot of the times, mainstream media weakens the events, and “it is very important

that the media enters the communities”, but at the same time is rare that reality is represented as it really is. All of this implies that content produced directly by indigenous people, from different communities, but connected through one principle, is important to share their reality with the rest of the country, and eventually the world, seen and represented by their own eyes, voices and resources.

3.3. Case study three: influencer

The third case study is the Instagram profile of the indigenous activist and communicator/influencer Alice Pataxó⁶. She is an indigenous of the *Pataxó* community, in the south of the state of Bahia in Brazil and uses her personal profile on Instagram as a way to speak up about issues concerning indigenous communities, demystify misleading concepts, and also share her culture with the internet. In her own words, she is part of a struggle, in which her generation “in photos, videos and demonstrations, keeps on bringing communication that changes *the today* and, without question, the future perspective, we were never past, we are an important part of the present. We are and we will be future.” To better understand her role in proposing a counter argumentation to mainstream media, different posts will be analyzed.

The following two posts will be analyzed together, since they contemplate the same situation: her visit to different communities of the *Pataxó* people, realized in partnership with the NGO *World Wide Fund for Nature Brasil*, which works towards preserving nature and diminishing human impact on nature. This visit resulted in many Instagram posts, which talked about different cultural and environmental aspects of the communities and preserved areas. The post shown in *Figure 5* is a video in which she takes the audience inside the culture of the *Pataxó* people.

⁶ Alike the previous sections, any direct citation was translated by the author.



Figure 5: Visit to Pataxó Community 1

Source: Alice Pataxó, 2024. Screen capture by author.

Her opening line for the video was: “in the village, walking barefoot, we take you to get to know the culture of my people and the history of an invaded land that cures itself in the forest”. This first statement is already strong and gives a hint to what her mission is as an influencer and communicator. What this sentence communicates is that, first, it is important to recognize that indigenous lands were invaded, and second, even though it happened, the indigenous people proceed to live their traditions and succeeded in maintaining their community alive. The video itself is made in a very natural style, similar to the famous *vlogs* that circulate around the internet, in which the intention is to show the audience how a day in the life of the influencer looks like. The difference is that in this video in question, Alice Pataxó’s objective is to show a little bit of the *Pataxó* culture, to represent her people through her own lenses, from an insider’s perspective. She proceeds to show one of the preserved areas, called *Reserva Porto do Boi*, where she recorded body paintings being made and explained how important they are to her culture and how they can communicate the status, state of spirit and origin of the person wearing them. She also presented a traditional dish and a purifying shower, made of herbs, and of course, different images of the village. The way the video was made, had a very natural approach when representing some aspects of the Pataxó culture. While most images spoke for themselves, the narration was wisely chosen; simple sentences with simple language, but with

a very clear message to communicate. This can be observed especially in the part she records one connection moment, where everybody sat in circle to listen to the leadership speak:

Biraí Pataxó gave us a history class about Brazil, the true history, which tells our struggle and our resistance, which paints the indigenous people with the face of the diversity they have in this country. Getting rid of the lies there is important for connection with the people, its home, its medicine.

This speech clearly states that it is necessary to listen to what indigenous people have to say about the history of the country, because it belongs to them as well. When Alice Pataxó refers to “the true story” and that it is important to get rid of “the lies”, she is clearly talking about the discourse that endures since colonial times, where the indigenous populations are disregarded as the original inhabitants of Brazil, and are represented as if they were all the same, with the same culture and same identity. The entire video serves as a challenge and criticism of this kind of discourse. By showing specific aspects of the *Pataxó* culture, she defends the existence of a particular identity to which they belong, at the same time as she reassures that **each** indigenous people have **their** particular identity. Nevertheless, the idea of separation does not apply to the struggle of keeping the identities alive. It remains clear that the populations are united through the need to struggle to be able to resist and exist. *Figure 6* shows the last post regarding the visit to the *Pataxó* communities, which contains an image carousel with photos of days spent there. In the caption, a reflection is proposed, in which she highlights how important it is for her to be connected with the land which her ancestors set foot one day.



Figure 6: Visit to Pataxó Community 2

Source: Alice Pataxó, 2024. Screen capture by author.

Besides sharing her personal interest in visiting the communities in the caption, she also reminds the audience of the objective of turning the experience in material for content production:

How much life and special knowledge we shared in these days, thank you @wwfbrasil [her partner in this project] for believing in our dream of a preserved territory, loved by our tradition, and for encouraging the arrival of more people that dream of this future of ours, of a Brazil rich in real stories and memories.

This shows that more important than doing this kind of activity, of visiting the communities and getting to know more and more about indigenous cultures, is making sure that people know about it. Using the space of social media and doing so by an insider's perspective is a demystified way to bring issues concerning indigenous communities to the eyes of the people.

The third post is a video that, in fact, was reposted by the influencer. The original post was made by the account @aldeia_juerana, which is an account managed by locals of the Juerana village to manage visits and create content. This shows that Alice Pataxó not only creates her own content, but also shares other indigenous peoples' ones, in worder to spread the common message they have to communicate. In *Figure 7* it is possible to see the repost, where the influencer adds her own caption.



Figure 7: Video about Stereotypes

Source: Alice Pataxó, 2024. Screen capture by author.

The content of the video is about stereotypes that indigenous people are used to encounter. One of the examples cited was “I am indigenous and of course people will tell me that I am not indigenous because I have curly hair”. This video brings the matter of identity very strongly, since many of the given examples regarded doubts about indigenous people being “authentically” indigenous or not. The caption proposed by Alice Pataxó goes as it follows:

What indigenous has never heard at least 3 of those questions? It is always the same joke, the same distrust in our identity, or even the uncertainty that our money is result of our work [...]. They question and put our culture to the test, our language, our bodies, they believe we no longer exist, and when we are here, they pretend not to see us, but we resist!

This is also one strategy to defy the mainstream perspective regarding indigenous people. Giving this space for indigenous people to speak for themselves and ask the question back to the people that believe the stigmatized vision; “do these questions of yours make sense?”. The strategy of this post is to let the video speak for itself. Ironizing the stereotypes is a way to state what want people to know: their identities are more than stigmatized and popularized ideas about indigenous populations. As the original caption displays, it is also a way to “call to reflect on our responsibility in building a future that recognizes and respects the diverse cultures that shape our nation.”

The fourth post is a video in which the influencer sings a *Pataxó* song, in their *Patxôhã* language. The song is about the birds singing and inviting people to dance with their partners, which, according to Alice Pataxó, is a practiced chant and dance activity in her community. The original post can be observed in *Figure 8*:



Figure 8: Singing bird post

Source: Alice Pataxó, 2024. Screen capture by author.

This kind of post communicates a message that even though the struggle and resistance are an enormous part of indigenous lives, it is not the only thing they have to share. Nevertheless, a simple song about a bird, like this one, can also represent the resistance of indigenous people. Being able to sing a song in the *Patxôhã* language and post it on the internet with its translation is also a statement that says, “we are here, we will remain here”.

It was possible to observe that Alice Pataxó uses her Instagram account to combat not only misleading and prejudiced media narratives, but also widely spread narratives in society in general. She uses her platform to speak in the name of indigenous peoples, but at the same time, she gives space for other indigenous people to speak for themselves, as in the case of the visit in the communities. Her content is varied, mostly involving *vlog-style* videos, informative posts, and videos in which she explains some aspects of her culture or talks about environmental issues. She merges different approaches to represent her *Pataxó* culture, and at the same time, be a part of and represent the shared mission of indigenous people in Brazil: stay present and

alive, destigmatizing their history along the way, and, as she mentioned in one of the videos, representing “indigenous people with the face of the diversity they have in this country”.

From the perspective of an indigenous person, the presence of indigenous people in the media is vital. As Marcos Kaingang states, it brings visibility to the indigenous communities and shows that they are capable of representing their own story. Other than that, according to him, it is essential for strengthening the struggle and bringing more visibility that media explores the inside of the communities, and in the case of Alice Pataxó, the perspective actively **comes** from the inside. Marcos Kaingang also talks about how important it is for indigenous people to be represented in the media with their traditional clothes, paintings, and performing their rituals, because it reinforces the fight, and this is something that Alice Pataxó brings frequently to her profile. With the perspective coming from the inside like in this case, is one more step towards debunking the “classist vision” and the “dominant discourse” of mainstream media, as mentioned by Karine Emerich. Furthermore, representing the indigenous communities as they really are in daily life, and naturally showing their diverse cultural and identity aspects, endorses what Marcos Kaingang stated about popular knowledge regarding indigenous people. He expressed: “it is important not to stay only in the book, but to get to know reality for itself”.

4. CONCLUSION: ALIGNING IMAGE WITH REALITY

It has been a long journey of European culture from Dante's time to recent times - many languages have disappeared, and many others have been revitalized. In Brazil, however, these processes are not at all in the past, and the dynamics involve a long and withstanding process of power relations, originated in colonial times. This paper began with the discussion of different theories; representation theory, linguistic anthropology and symbolic interactionism. Throughout the paper, it was pointed out that these theories can be connected between themselves, taking the perspective of the current hypermediated world and observing how media plays a big role in negotiating *meaning*, and how people make sense of reality around them. Expanding the concept of language to other semiotic symbols, here called signifying systems, it was possible to analyze the different ways in which the attempt to renegotiate dominant ideas can happen.

In the case of the documentary, it was noticeable that the choice was to explicitly combat the dominant narratives by placing them next to the counter argumentation, where the indigenous perspective prevailed. Other than that, the documentary is itself a testament of the indigenous communities' history in the country in the past decades. Regarding the media channel *Mídia Indígena*, it was clear that they also fight the dominant representation explicitly; by making a statement through the words they use to put together their news reports, instead of trying to remain neutral or even alleviate the situation. Together with that, they also represent indigenous identities by showing how indigenous cultures are inserted in the popular culture, producing informative posts and by celebrating the diverse identities with coverage of cultural events. In the case of the influencer profile, Alice Pataxó, she addresses indigenous matters with information right from the source, bringing the perspective of someone from the inside. At the same time that she takes a light approach, by showing elements of her culture in a natural way, using *vlogs* and informative posts, she takes on a reassuring language, choosing the right words to build her statement in defense of indigenous rights and accurate representations.

Considering all of this, the answer to the research question is yes, media representation does work as a tool for indigenous communities to renegotiate their identities. In this case, it is important to bring back the concept of identity used in this paper: it is the categorization in a social role, or social group, where the meanings and expectations regarding this role are aligned with the person's identification. The indigenous communities are well aware of their identification. What is in discussion here is the meanings and expectations typically associated with them, which are endorsed by mainstream media. The renegotiation of identity is especially

clear not only by observing how different the narratives proposed by indigenous voices are from the mainstream media representations, but also taking into consideration what the interviewees had to say about the matter. As Marcos Kaingang said, the presence of indigenous people in the production of media content is essential, because it brings visibility and shows reality as it is, and by representing the indigenous cultures as diverse as they are and giving space for the different activities to be represented, the real identity can be preserved and reassured. There is, of course, a limitation if the audience proportion of mainstream media and ‘alternative’ media produced by indigenous people are compared. As Karine Emerich expressed, mass communication has a classist view, which involves a dominant discourse, difficult to be broken, so media content produced by indigenous people are a “small rock in the mainstream media shoe”. This certainly does not mean that it is irrelevant. On the contrary, it is a big step if compared to how the situation was some decades ago. If the image can be even more important than the reality, accurate representations of indigenous communities and their identities are the way to align the expectations with the identification, to align the image with the reality.

On the same note, the only way to give indigenous communities the power of discourse and the authority of negotiating their own meanings through media is to understand the possible strategies that can be used, and the dynamics in which the enforced powerless can work their way through different media channels. And this is what this paper analyzed, hoping to clarify the ways in which the renegotiation of indigenous communities’ identities can be done.

5. SUMMARY

The power of mainstream media in crafting and/or reinforcing dominant ideas is undeniable. The ones in power of *meaning* control the debate, and meaning is constantly negotiated through communication, which is difficult to detach from media in the 21st century. Considering this in the context of Brazilian media, the research question of this paper is: *does media representation in Brazil work as a tool for indigenous communities to renegotiate their identities?* This study explored the possibility of using media representation as an instrument for indigenous communities to propose counter-narratives of their identities, challenging mainstream media and its hegemonic power. According to some theorists, in the hypermediated world, the images, or portrayals may matter even more than reality. In this matter, it is also said that great part of media vehicles continues to feed an ethnocentric and stigmatized discourse about indigenous people, which affects judgment and perception about these communities. To investigate the matter, three case studies were performed, and in each one of them a different kind of media was analyzed. In the first one, with a more artistic note, a documentary was examined. In the second one, an indigenous news portal was assessed. And finally, the focus of the third one was the Instagram profile of an indigenous *influencer*. Two interviews were also conducted to complement the research. One of them, with an indigenous leadership of one of the Kaingang communities in the south of Brazil and the other one, with a Brazilian filmmaker who has a history of producing documentaries in partnership with indigenous communities. It was possible to observe that the media self-representation of indigenous people is concerned about making a statement: indigenous communities exist and must have their space. In this sense, media self-representation not only serves as an advocate to indigenous rights, but also as a way to register, preserve and diffuse their cultures, languages, beliefs; their identities. These results suggests that indigenous presence in the media is essential for formulating a counterargument against the stereotyping of dominant media, while it also combats the contradictory lack of representation regarding the diversity of indigenous cultures in Brazil.

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