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# Towards pluriversal views of digital technologies: the experiences of community and indigenous radios in Chiapas, Mexico

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## ABSTRACT

This article aims to present an emerging perspective for analyzing digital technologies, centering around the concepts of pluriversality and communality, and drawing on the experiences of the Network of Communicators Boca de Polen, a civil organization that has been supporting community and indigenous radios in Chiapas, Mexico for over two decades. Using a Participatory Action Research framework, the study delves into the network's experiences and those of the radios it has accompanied, revealing a profound interplay of sociotechnical practices deeply rooted in communal experiences. It sheds light on a particular pathway of technology appropriation and resistance and, by shifting the place of enunciation, explores new dimensions of concerns and possibilities enabled by digital technologies. The experiential knowledge gained from Boca de Polen is presented as a tangible manifestation of a pluriversal vision of technology, vital for fostering inclusive critical reflections on the multifaceted implications of digital technologies.

## Rumo a visões pluriversais das tecnologias digitais: as experiências das rádios indígenas e comunitárias em Chiapas, México

## RESUMO

Este artigo tem como objetivo apresentar uma perspectiva emergente para analisar as tecnologias digitais, centrada nos conceitos de pluriversalidade e comunalidade, e baseada nas experiências da Rede de Comunicadores Boca de Polen, uma organização civil que tem apoiado rádios comunitárias e indígenas em Chiapas, México, por mais de duas décadas. Utilizando um quadro de Pesquisa-Ação Participativa, o estudo explora as experiências da rede e das rádios que ela acompanhou, revelando uma profunda interação de práticas sociotécnicas enraizadas em experiências comunitárias. Focando em uma experiência específica de apropriação e resistência e ao mudar o lugar de enunciação, explora novas dimensões de

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## PALABRAS CLAVE

Tecnologías pluriversales; autonomía tecnológica; diseño indígena; tecnologías digitales; comunicación comunitaria

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preocupações e possibilidades habilitadas pelas tecnologias digitais. O conhecimento experimental obtido a partir de Boca de Polen é apresentado como uma manifestação tangível de uma visão pluriversal da tecnologia, vital para promover reflexões críticas inclusivas sobre as implicações multifacetadas das tecnologias digitais.

## **Hacia visiones pluriversales de las tecnologías digitales: las experiencias de las radios indígenas y comunitarias en Chiapas, México**

### **RESUMEN**

Este artículo tiene como objetivo presentar una perspectiva emergente para analizar las tecnologías digitales, centrada en los conceptos de pluriversalidad y comunalidad, y basándose en las experiencias de la Red de Comunicadores Boca de Polen, una organización civil que ha estado apoyando a radios comunitarias e indígenas en Chiapas, México, durante más de dos décadas. Utilizando un marco de Investigación-Acción Participativa, el estudio profundiza en las experiencias de la red y de las radios que ha acompañado, revelando una profunda interacción de prácticas sociotécnicas arraigadas en experiencias comunales. Centrándose en una experiencia particular de apropiación y resistencia y al cambiar el lugar de enunciación, explora nuevas dimensiones de preocupaciones y posibilidades habilitadas por las tecnologías digitales. El conocimiento experiencial obtenido de Boca de Polen se presenta como una manifestación tangible de una visión pluriversal de la tecnología, vital para fomentar reflexiones críticas inclusivas sobre las implicaciones multifacéticas de las tecnologías digitales.

## **1. Introduction**

The proliferation of narratives concerning the societal impacts of digital technologies and their associated outcomes has emerged as a central subject of scholarly debate across diverse disciplines globally. Seeking to bridge the gap between the technical and social spheres and anticipating the challenges posed by rapid technological advancements, critical analysis has deemed obsolete the once-prominent optimistic perspective that regarded technology as a panacea for humanity's problems. Instead, scholars have directed attention towards the intricate interplay between historical and geographical contexts and the production, design, and use of information technologies and digital media (Dourish and Bell 2011). They have brought awareness to the transformative effects of data gathering and processing, enabling surveillance and the quantification or datafication of previously unexplored aspects of life (Mayer-Schönberger and Cukier 2013; Zuboff 2015).

Additionally, scholars have illuminated how algorithms and other components of modern computer science have perpetuated and deepened existing inequalities and injustices (Eubanks 2018), uncovering complex dynamics resulting from the widespread integration of the internet and digital technologies into everyday life. However, as critical engagements multiply and specialize, prevailing narratives often center on the extraction of economic value from human existence through data, predominantly examined

through the lens of systems of economic exploitation and rooted in Western epistemologies.

In response, scholars from the global South have raised awareness about the overrepresentation of perspectives from industrialized nations in the global critique of the societal impacts of twenty-first-century technologies. They stress the importance of understanding the unfolding of digital practices and their specific implications for countries in the global South, as well as the emergence of unique data cultures.

Notably, Paola Ricaurte's work (2019; 2022) elucidates how data practices and hegemonic Artificial Intelligence perpetuate epistemic violence against women, indigenous populations, and other ethnic groups, thereby reinforcing the capitalist, colonialist, and patriarchal global order. Simultaneously, academic research exploring the impacts of digital platforms and technological infrastructure on the territories of the global South has experienced exponential growth. These studies aim to explain not only the effects of digital platforms but also the differentiated impacts that digital infrastructure is starting to have on the lands and lives of people in these regions (Grohmann et al. 2022; Kwet 2019; Mumford 2022; Rosa 2023; Tapia and Peña 2020).

By shedding light on the specific impacts of data exploitation in countries of the global South, these authors bring attention to extractivist practices that stem not only from data collection but also from data infrastructure and digital waste, directly impacting the environment. Additionally, they scrutinize the role of the digital economy in exacerbating inequality within marginalized communities, drawing connections between data practices and global oppression systems. Using localized experiences, they reflect on how questioning digital technologies can take on new dimensions, considering the complexities they present when experienced in the territories of the global South. In doing so, they are contributing to a "decolonial turn" in data and technology research, placing today's extractive data practices within the historical *longue durée* of extractive models established by colonialism (Couldry and Mejías 2021).

Moreover, in Mexico, beyond academia, activists like Yasnaya Aguilar (2020) have explored how technologies grounded in the idea of collaborative work or "tequio," prevalent among indigenous communities in Mexico, could shape a future where technologies sustain life. Alongside the civil society organization Redes AC, which supports the development of community networks in rural Mexican communities, they offer tangible examples of diverse technology adoption and interaction. These endeavors emphasize the urgent necessity for a transformative shift in the locus of enunciation to envision digital futures prioritizing inclusivity and equity.

These works, centered on the importance of positionality and epistemic justice, have sparked a critical discourse that challenges the notions of data colonialism and data capitalism, revealing alternative dynamics and tensions that push the frontiers of critical data studies. Urging for the development of new concepts and approaches that encompass the diversity of experiences surrounding technologies.

In the context of these ongoing dialogues, the concept of the "pluriverse" has progressively gained attention within the realm of technology studies. This concept accentuates the necessity to transcend the entrenched modern ontology that revolves around a singular world – a universe. This perspective is questioned and examined within the discourses of Transition Conversations, Buen Vivir, and the Rights of Nature. These conversations emphasize the profound interconnectivity intrinsic to all forms of life, thereby

highlighting the existence of relational worldviews or ontologies in which the world inherently takes on manifold dimensions – a pluriverse (Escobar 2014, 139).

Within this framework, concepts like data cultures (Chan 2014), data territories (Lehuedé 2022), and techno diversities (Hui 2020) have emerged. This article contributes to these ongoing conversations by embarking on an experiential exploration of technology deeply rooted in the relational ontology of communality.

This work draws insights from a Participatory Action Research project conducted in collaboration with Boca de Polen, an organization that has supported community communication initiatives for indigenous and peasant communities in the state of Chiapas, Mexico, for over two decades. Through this research, a vision of technologies emerges, one that is deeply interconnected and grounded in communal experiences. During this collaborative process, I conducted an analysis of the organization's activism and advocacy efforts, specifically focusing on securing access to communication channels and sustaining community communication projects through indigenous and community radios. In doing so, I explore how the purpose, relationships, and dynamics surrounding technologies are transformed, taking on new dimensions that are highlighted by their embeddedness in the relational ontology of communality characterizing life in the indigenous communities of Chiapas.

To develop this argument, I begin by offering an overview of the historical context that led to the struggle for access to communication outlets and technologies within indigenous and peasant communities. This context aligns with the establishment of Boca de Polen as an organization. This historical analysis will provide essential insights into the evolution of the struggle and its relevance in shaping the present-day efforts for equitable access to communication technologies. Subsequently, I delve into an exploration of how community communication projects can be comprehended through the lens of the theoretical framework of communality. By adopting this framework, I shed light on alternative perspectives and approaches to technology, which prioritize communal values and relationships. Finally, I elucidate the challenges and opportunities posed by digital technologies through the tensions they generate and their impact on communal values, specifically in relation to autonomy. By examining these challenges and opportunities, I aim to provide a nuanced understanding of the implications of digital technologies within the context of communal values and the pursuit of autonomy.

## 2. Materials and methods

As a professional, I have engaged in numerous projects using data to analyze public opinion and support development goals, as defined by international organizations. During this experience, I encountered intriguing issues that sparked my curiosity, driving me to explore critical data studies for answers. However, coming from a rural context in northern Mexico, with limited connectivity, I realized that these debates only partially captured the complexities of my place of origin, a situation that is likely applicable to many other regions in Mexico. With this question in mind, I came across numerous community communication projects that had previously pondered the same inquiry. This involvement eventually led me to participate in the community networks track of the Workshop on Internet Network Technologies for Latin America and the Caribbean (WALC), where I was first introduced to the works of Boca de Polen.

Boca de Polen is one of the pioneering civic organizations in Mexico, dedicated to supporting community communication projects and training popular communicators. While their experience primarily revolves around indigenous and rural radios, during their presentation, they discussed the challenges and complexities they encountered while integrating digital technologies into their processes. I discovered that their extensive experience and the unique issues they were dealing with provided valuable insights that were not readily available in the academic literature I had reviewed. Inspired by their knowledge and legacy, I approached Boca de Polen's coordinators to propose a collaboration. They saw this as a great opportunity since they lacked the necessary resources<sup>1</sup> to properly document their experiences and projects. It was a pressing need they were facing.

To establish the trajectory of the joint research project, a pre-research phase was conducted, involving group and individual conversations with the 6 current members of Boca de Polen, during three weeks of fieldwork at Boca de Polen's main office. These conversations revolved around the question: "Can we think of digital technologies within the framework of community communication projects?" The purpose was to understand the organization's perspective, values, and needs in order to effectively address the question, as well as the participation of the author in meetings and workshops led by the organization to get a deeper understanding of their work. This phase led to the development of a joint action plan guided by the principles of Participatory Action Research, emphasizing ethical considerations such as promoting horizontal dialogue, sharing control over knowledge production and storage, and committing to transformative change (Fals Borda and Rahman 1991).

Choosing Participatory Action Research as the methodological framework was natural, as it originated from an approach to empirical knowledge held and enacted by grassroots communities, while also providing them with control over the production, storage, and use of knowledge (Fals Borda 1989, 213). This approach aligned not only with the objectives of the joint research process but also resonated with the processes of the organization, Boca de Polen. Additionally, the study employed a combination of community and participatory methodologies (Solíz and Maldonado 2012), interviews, and documentary research.

Following the guidelines of this framework, it was agreed that all decisions would be made through consultation with every member of the organization. Any matters related to radios would be discussed with the radialists and/or in assemblies, and all content, including interview questions, would be reviewed and approved by the entire team. Apart from building a research body, this project's objectives also involved creating a booklet in co-authorship between the author and the organization. These booklets are intended for publication and use by the organization and radialists.

The action plan encompassed three main research phases conducted over a period of twelve months. The first phase responded to the institutional need to attend to memory

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<sup>1</sup>Throughout the history of the organization, funding sources have been a constant challenge. They initially received financing from the Culture Ministry of Chiapas, which lasted for only a few years. Over time, they received support from various organizations such as UNESCO, Cultural Survival, FRIDA, NHRF, among others, but these funding opportunities were limited and time-bound. As a result, they are always in search of new funding sources to sustain their projects.

preservation, recognizing that the present, past, and future are interconnected rather than linear. Given resource constraints, the challenge of consolidating the organization's historical archive was significant. To address this, a documentary analysis was conducted, analyzing approximately 30 radio programs from Chiapas Expediente Nacional, the radio show preceding the organization's establishment. These programs were retrieved from the National Phonographic Library to contribute to the historical archive and identify narratives surrounding the organization's foundation.<sup>2</sup>

In the second phase, considering Boca de Polen's significant role as a key player within a network of organizations historically collaborating in community communication projects across Mexico, a total of 18 in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interviewees included 6 the members of Boca de Polen, 6 members from other collaborating organizations with joint projects, and 6 members of community radios that have collaborated with the organization.

The interview dimensions were established during the first informal conversations with the members of Boca de Polen, considering their main work pillars and current interests. Four dimensions were explored: (1) territorial and relational aspects, (2) narratives and practices concerning technology (with a focus on radio as the primary technology), (3) narratives and practices concerning digital technologies (related to their introduction), and (4) dreams and hopes. The data collected underwent analysis using Maxqda software, following the guidelines for thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2022).

Finally, a workshop based on community and participatory methodologies was conducted with all members of the organization. The aim was to discuss the findings and reflect on the challenges posed by hegemonic digital technologies to community-based communication projects. During the workshop, I presented a summary of the results from all interviews and the historical review. Subsequently, a collective mapping exercise was conducted to outline and contextualize the most important elements mentioned in explaining the significance of the radio experiences. Everyone had the opportunity to express their concerns and ideas. Finally, we engaged in an exercise where we identified fears, hopes, and commitments as a strategy to transition from the unknown reality (fears) to the desired possibilities (dreams) (Figure 1).

During this phase, great attention was given to ensuring that the voices of all the individuals interviewed were given special consideration. This inclusive approach allowed for the collective construction of concepts and ideas, providing a space not only for theoretical exploration but also for the emergence of "sentipensares" (thoughts and feelings).

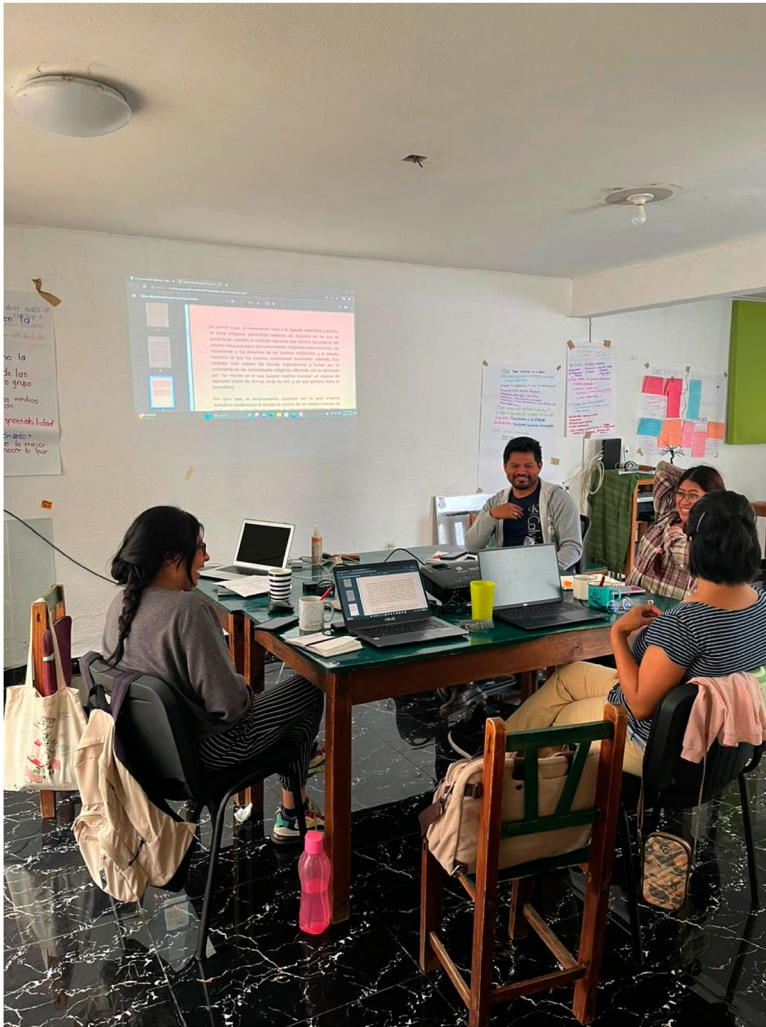
After several months of analysis, resulting in the creation of a booklet, the paper presented here, and other materials, a second fieldwork visit of one week was conducted to present the results and engage in a final collective discussion. This discussion led to revisions in the materials to better align with the organization's vision and goals.

The methodological decisions outlined above arose from a process focused on finding ways to engage with research that incorporate knowledge generated outside of academia

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<sup>2</sup>The results of this documentary analysis will be a part of another article. However, it was important to mention the process because it carried over a relevant meaning that was reflected on in the final ideas presented here.





**Figure 1.** Image of the workshop.

and promote the co-creation of knowledge. Through this experience, the goal is to establish a meaningful dialogue between external knowledge and scholarly discussions, while also striving to implement more equitable research practices that provide tangible benefits to the communities involved.

### **3. The struggle to access communication technologies and community communication projects in Mexico**

The organization's work is rooted not only in present projects but also in a rich historical legacy. This legacy can be traced back to the individuals who first conceived these ideas in the 1990s and the active involvement of indigenous communities they collaborate with. This historical influence is evident in how projects are executed, decisions are made, and



future aspirations are shaped. Throughout the research process, the legacy of resistance and communal organization, embodied in the organization's history and present time, remained a prominent and influential element.

The history of Boca de Polen is intricately linked with the development of community and indigenous radios in Mexico. These initiatives have their roots in the Cultural Indigenist Radio System, which aimed to establish radio stations run by indigenous communities and produce content in their native languages under government guidance (Calleja and Solís 2005). However, a pivotal moment in the rise of community-based communication projects was the 1994 uprising of the Zapatista Army, led by the EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation). This indigenous insurrection challenged the power structures in Mexico and shed light on the long-standing oppression faced by indigenous communities in Chiapas and the rest of the country. Beyond questioning the relationship between mass media and political power, it also spurred demands for the right to communications and information from historically marginalized communities (Magallanes-Blanco et al. 2020).

The Zapatista revolution had a significant impact on the media landscape, as it gained global recognition through various digital platforms like the Internet, websites, mailing lists, and support from hackers and media activists worldwide. These channels played a crucial role in effectively disseminating information about the movement to a global audience. At the same time, civic organizations raised awareness about the manipulation of the conflict by the Mexican media, leading to the emergence of movements and organizations advocating for access to media outlets. During this period, the program Chiapas Expediente Nacional emerged under the National University broadcast system, laying the foundation for the establishment of the network of communicators known as Boca de Polen.

In this context, Boca de Polen sought to establish spaces and offer technologies to empower deprofessionalized communicators and journalists within the communities. This approach challenged the existing concentration of power and control within mainstream media. Additionally, it allowed for the creation of autonomous spaces that aligned with the specific needs, organizational methods, and worldviews of these communities, which often operate under a different logic – one that prioritizes the collective “we” over the individual “I,” referred to as “communality” throughout this paper.

In Mexico, community radios have long been intertwined with the resistance against social exclusion. This connection is particularly evident in the state of Chiapas, where radios have played a crucial role in responding to the demands of indigenous communities (Baca-Feldman 2012).

The demand for community management of media was a crucial aspect of the Zapatistas' negotiations with the government. Consequently, the San Andrés Accords recognized the rights of indigenous peoples in Mexico to self-determination and autonomy, including the ability to acquire, operate, and manage their own communication outlets (Presidencia de la República 2000a).

Radios emerged as the primary communication outlet and a tool for community empowerment. Boca de Polen played a pivotal role in this context by introducing some of the first radio transmitters to Chiapas and providing technical training for communities to operate their own radio stations. Boca de Polen's pioneering work became a reference for other organizations nationwide.

This framework also sheds light on the broader appropriation of technology in Mexico, which has paved the way for subsequent community-based projects, like community-owned cell phone networks in Oaxaca, community Internet, and Intranets. These initiatives offer alternative ways of using and appropriating technologies that operate independently from the demands and logic of capitalism. They serve as a response to the systematic denial of communication and infrastructure needs by both the state and the market.

#### 4. Community as the relational ontology behind community radios

To contextualize these reflections within academic discourse and initiate a dialogue that juxtaposes Boca de Polen's approach to communication technologies with other critical viewpoints on digital technologies, I draw upon the concept of the pluriverse and use the analytical framework of communality. These theoretical underpinnings serve as a foundation for examining the unique perspectives and practices of Boca de Polen in relation to the broader debates surrounding digital technologies.

The vision of the pluriverse, as proposed by anthropologists such as Arturo Escobar (2012; 2014), Marisol de la Cadena (2015) Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser (2018), Mario Blaser (2013) is grounded in the idea of inter-epistemicity, and the recognition of the multiple configurations of knowledge and wisdom beyond what science and academia deem valid. However, unlike critical thought centered on the epistemic dimension, studies of the pluriverse in recent years have sought to problematize the ontological dimension.

Many contemporary struggles for the defense of territories and diversity can be understood as ontological struggles, as struggles for a world where many worlds fit, as the Zapatistas put it, and whose goal is to promote a pluriverse. (Escobar, 2016, 13)

The authors emphasize that the pluriverse is not something that has to be created but that emerges through the forms of existence that resist in opposition and exist in parallel to the ontology of modernity, and its three core assumptions: the deliberate separation between nature and society, anthropocentrism, and the linearity of time (Blaser 2013).

In Chiapas, community and indigenous communications can be seen as an ontological struggle, centered on defending the relational fabric of life (Escobar 2020). These processes have emerged in opposition to communication norms dictated by markets and states, which prioritize economic gain and power legitimization through exploitative practices. Instead, these communities have adopted technologies as tools to safeguard their territories, ways of life, and existence, aligning them with the needs of their community.

To further explain how community radios sustain and defend a relational ontology, we can explore them through the lens of "comunalidad" or communality. This concept, developed by indigenous anthropologists Floriberto Díaz (2007) and Jaime Martínez Luna (2003), sheds light on the organizational principles and practices of indigenous territories in the northern highlands of Oaxaca, as well as the shared ideology among indigenous communities in southern Mexico.

According to the authors, communality is not meant to be a static concept, but rather a dynamic and living one, constantly evolving. It serves as an experiential framework that helps us comprehend how life in a community unfolds through the interconnection of

all its elements, providing a holistic understanding of how communities function and thrive.

This concept then can be seen as a natural philosophy, encompassing four inseparably intertwined moments:

- a) Nature, geography, territory, land, or soil on which the community resides.
- b) Society, community, family that inhabits and interacts with that natural environment.
- c) Work, labor, and activities carried out by the community in that territory.
- d) The outcomes and experiences derived from the community's work and activities, including enjoyment, well-being, celebrations, recreation, satisfaction, and fatigue. (Martinez Luna 2015, 100)

While a formal theoretical framework of communality may not be explicitly present in the works of Boca de Polen or the community radios they have collaborated with, the essence of communality described by Martinez Luna is evident throughout the experiences shared by those involved in radio projects. In an interview with Domingo Gómez, an experienced indigenous radialist of Radio K'inal, the communal element of radios was described as follows:

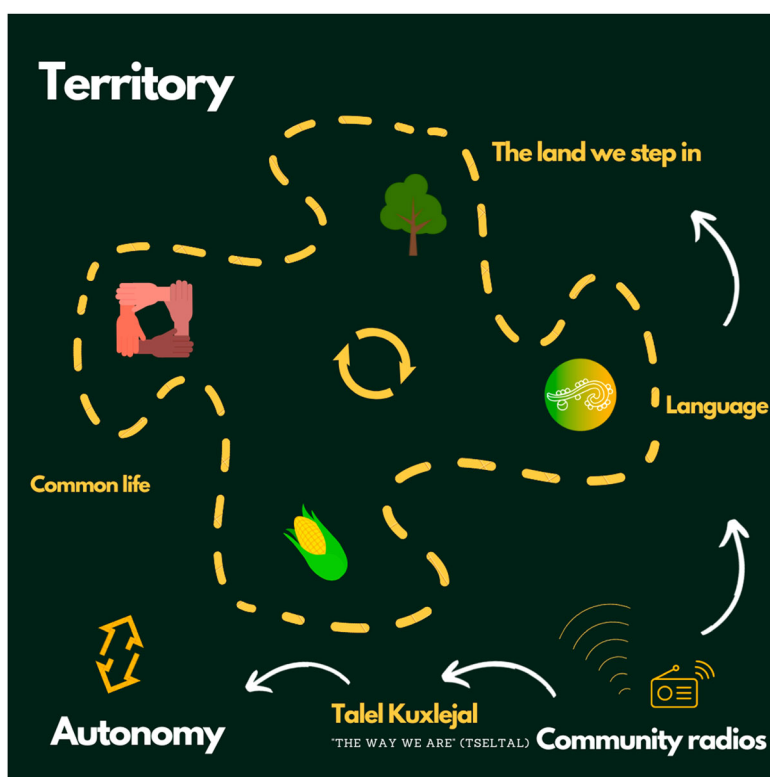
When I talk about a radio being community-oriented, I'm not referring to the distance it reaches, but rather to how it expresses the way we are, our customs, the type of music we listen to. Starting from five to six-thirty in the afternoon, we broadcast indigenous music. Why at five? Because people usually finish work at 4, they are in their plots, they arrive walking, they reach their homes, and by five, they are resting, so they can listen to indigenous music.

In a similar vein, all testimonies emphasized the profound importance of community radios in the region, as they provide a platform for communication and expression that fosters the values of the communal way of life, centering around the key element of the territory. This becomes particularly critical in light of media concentration in urban areas, the dominance of the Spanish language as the official one, and other challenges. Radios have emerged as a technology that promotes autonomy, which is a vital element in the ongoing struggle to uphold the principles of communality.

For indigenous communities, autonomy has served as a strategy to coexist with the rest of the world, resist aggression, and strengthen unity, as evident in the Zapatista revolution's pursuit of "a world where many worlds fit" (Martinez Luna 2015). The prevalent use of radio in community-based projects in Chiapas is not a mere coincidence. Radios have emerged as a technology that enables the expression of the diverse elements that constitute the territory, which is fundamental to communal life. In this context, radios possess the ability to articulate and convey the various facets of the territory, playing a crucial role in reflecting the essence of communal existence, as explained in the following analysis (Figure 2).

#### **4.1. The ground we walk on**

The territory, often referred to in communities as "the ground we walk on," can be understood as the central axis that sustains and develops life. Unlike the concept of the



**Figure 2.** Map of community radios and the territory, created along with the members of Boca de Polen during a workshop.

environment, which views it as an external entity that can be appropriated, the perception of territory in communal territories takes on a more complex character.

The territory holds significant meaning as it connects its inhabitants to their history, spirituality, and sustenance, representing a central element in the worldview of the communities residing within it. In an interview with Raymundo Lopez, a radialist from Radio Muk' ul Lum in the community of Oxchuc, he emphasizes the radio's crucial role in communicating the significance of the territory to younger generations and people outside of the community.

I would like the radio to serve as a means of getting to know more about our town. "Mukulum" means "big town" in our language. Our grandparents used to call it that when they came here, although it was not really big. They imagined it was big because Oxchuc was previously populated by non-indigenous people "Kaxlanes." "Oxchuc" means three knots, it is symbolized by three seashells, the three deities that also represent the union between nature and heaven, and three parts of the strength we have, the body, the soul, and the spirit. They say that Oxchuc was the ceremonial center of the Mayans at that time, we have a sacred hill here, Mukulvits, our grandparents used to go there to ask for everything related to their corn, beans, and rain. (Raymundo Lopez, founder of Radio Mukulum)

In this sense, radios serve as a vital platform for communities to not only express the diverse meanings of their territory but also to foster its preservation and care. They



**Figure 3.** Cabin of Radio Mukulum in Oxchuc.

play a crucial role in transmitting the spiritual and cosmological significance that the territories hold for their people, passing down this valuable knowledge to younger generations. Additionally, radios become a means to support and amplify the various struggles aimed at defending and protecting their territories (Figure 3).

#### **4.2. Language (orality)**

Despite the fact that 1,459,648 people in Chiapas speak an indigenous language, with approximately 30% of them being monolingual (INEGI 2020), the widespread use of Spanish as the sole institutional language in the country leaves them in a state of constant exclusion. In this scenario, community radios broadcasting in indigenous languages serve as a crucial lifeline, often the only available and accessible source of information for these communities. As mentioned by all members of Boca de Polen and the radialists and

collaborators interviewed, these radios play a pivotal role in preserving languages and upholding various cultural traditions that find expression through them.

Language is a very important factor for indigenous radios to emerge, because not everyone in the communities speaks Spanish, and there is a space where they say, “Wow, they are speaking to me in my language.” That is something new and surprising to many people because there are no other spaces like that. (Hipólito, documentation and memory assistant at Boca de Polen)

Furthermore, community radios, as autonomous communication outlets, play a crucial role in providing access to vital information and disseminating topics that are of utmost importance to the communities, based on their specific needs and interests. Moreover, radios serve as an essential element in facilitating communication and preserving the central aspects of communal life, particularly in the face of exclusion by the nation state entity. Their enduring presence can also be attributed to their function as an oral medium.

Orality holds significant importance for indigenous communities in Mexico, acting as a fundamental form of communication and resistance against the imposition of writing during colonial times (Martínez Luna 2003). It serves as a powerful means of preserving life and civilization, similar to how radio and television function today. In this context, the accessibility and oral nature of radios have played a critical role in their appropriation and establishment as a crucial technology in community communication processes.

#### **4.3. Talel Kuxleja “the way we live” or the culture**

The theme of the language-culture relationship emerged repeatedly while investigating the motivations behind community radio creation. However, the term “culture” fell short in fully encapsulating the essence of what these projects seek to express through their radios and communities.

In search of a more appropriate translation, Manuel, a member of the network and a Tseltal speaker, introduced the term “Talel Kuxleja,” which closely translates to English as “how we live” or “how we are.” This concept stems from the collective “us” and signifies the ways of inhabiting and coexisting, highlighting the contrast with the forms imposed by external entities.

When asked about their radios, the communities consistently express the importance of their language and culture. They view the radio as a means to promote and preserve their cultural heritage because there are very few other means to do so. (Manuel González, technical leader at Boca de Polen)

The struggles to defend the territory and preserve their way of life in Chiapas communities can be understood as ontological struggles. These communities endeavor to safeguard their unique ways of living, which constantly face threats and encounter limited avenues for expression. In this context, community radios serve as autonomous spaces that play a vital role in preserving and amplifying the festivities, stories, recipes, and other elements of community life. These radios become essential tools for sustaining communal traditions, particularly amidst challenges like migration and displacement, which can lead to the fragmentation of communities.



#### **4.4. The life in common**

Additionally, community radio plays a crucial role as a direct means of communication in regions with limited access to telephone networks. This facilitates the organization of communities through activities such as assemblies, as it enables the dissemination of essential information and the establishment of agreements.

Notably, Zapatista radios and the coffee cooperative radio Tsumbal Xitala, have demonstrated their capacity to articulate community organization. They broadcast the political work of the communities and contribute to the consolidation of economic projects. As a result, community radios become a tool that strengthens and empowers the social fabric, fostering active community participation in decision-making and in shaping their own development on their own terms.

In more recent times, community radios have also proven invaluable in the context of growing migration waves following the pandemic. They enable continuous participation of community members in assemblies, which are vital decision-making processes for the community.

### **5. Digital technologies in community communication processes: from datafication to deterritorialization**

Technology is a filter, a means to an end that involves acknowledging rights, fortifying organizational processes, advocating for territorial defense, and promoting gender equity. In essence, the goal is not merely to acquire skills in operating a radio or making videos, but rather to explore how these technologies can serve as transformative tools. (Guillermo Monteforte, Founder of Ojo de Agua Comunicación)

Acknowledging the specific role of technologies in meeting unique needs and practices within contexts of collective action and constant resistance, different needs, fears, and desires emerge. While concerns about data exploitation, surveillance, and manipulation exist, the primary worry is the potential of these technologies to weaken the link between community communications and the territory, thus being an element that could further increase the risk of growing deterritorialization. In that context, some of the main worries expressed were:

**Security:** Digital security emerges as a critical concern in community communication projects, especially in regions like Chiapas, Mexico, which face numerous aggressions towards media outlets, particularly those covering political activities and protests. Moreover, the rise of organized crime in the region further highlights the need for security measures.

While there is a generalized perception that internet technologies offer the potential to amplify messages and demands for justice, there is also a growing fear of the enhanced risks they may pose to activists in the territories. The Mexican government's use of tracking applications to spy on and prosecute journalists has heightened these concerns. In this context, digital technologies are approached with caution given the potential to be used against the movements for the defense of the territory and erode autonomic processes.

**Community:** The sense of community, under the lenses of communality, can be understood as the individual will to be a part of a community which is distinguished by the cyclical, daily, and obligatory reiteration of this will, through the participation in activities of power, work, celebration, and relationship with the territory. This way of living exists in

opposition to individualism, and as such, it could also be challenged by individualizing technologies.

As mentioned in an interview with Guillermo Monteforte, Coordinator of Ojo de Agua Comunicación, another pioneer organization working with community and indigenous communication projects in the state of Oaxaca:

Digital technologies could be a very good thing for communities but they also could be very risky. What do we do with all of these technologies that individualize more than collectivize? Someone sitting at a computer, alone, giving information that they don't have control of afterward. How do you manage the fact that some people have access, and others don't? That is something important we have to reflect on to take advantage of the benefits without being impacted by the bad.

Hegemonic digital technologies and platforms, created under the principles of capitalism and for the global market's needs, do not share the core values of community communication projects. However, they have been used as outlets for community-based projects to spread their message and to make their processes more efficient. This comes with certain risks and implies a critical approach to them. Following up on Guillermo's reflection: "The Internet as a human right movement is very contradictory. Yes, we do need access, but to what Internet? We don't want access to be consumers, to be told what to think. Is it that access? or the right to appropriate it?"

Acculturation: The role of autonomous radio as a medium for transmitting cultural values may face challenges or opportunities with the advent of other technologies. If the internet is used merely as a means to reach a broader audience, it could greatly benefit indigenous radio projects' continuous growth. However, there are concerns about losing control over content and the excessive use of social media platforms for marketing, potentially leading to a loss of cultural values.

In this context, the struggle is to establish a space within these platforms where communities can exist "as we are" and not just seek coverage but also assert their right to convey communal values through news outlets.

## 6. Conclusion: towards pluriversal perspectives on digital technologies

In this paper, my argument revolves around the premise that while critical technology studies have extensively scrutinized theories such as datafication, data capitalism, and algorithmization, which offer valuable insights into the challenges presented by digital technologies, they do not always encompass the full spectrum of complexities that arise when investigating the diverse impacts of these technologies across various territories and ontologies. Instead, these perspectives exist in a state of tension with alternative ways of experiencing technologies.

To address this and outline some of these complexities and tensions, I present an exploration of experiences rooted in the relational ontology of communality drawing on the experiences of community communication projects like Boca de Polen and indigenous radios in Chiapas.

By examining technologies within the framework of communality, we can observe that when allowed for deep appropriation, as seen with community radios, technologies can become powerful tools for expressing languages, cultural values, and cosmologies

excluded from mainstream media outlets. However, the integration of digital technologies, particularly through social media platforms, raises concerns about detachment from communal values and loss of content control. Indigenous communities must assert their presence on these platforms, not merely for wider reach, but to genuinely express their identities and cultural heritage.

A central concept that has arisen from this reflection is the potential of digital technologies to amplify the process of deterritorialization. Incorporating this intricate layer into the ongoing discourse surrounding the necessity for digital literacy, connectivity, datafication, and algorithmic biases emphasizes the imperative to pivot towards advocating for the preservation of community-rooted technologies like radio. This redirection is underscored by the urgency for a more unrestricted internet and the enlargement of community-owned platforms, which are anticipated to ascend to prominence as essential focal points for grassroots organizations and resistance movements on a global scale.

Furthermore, by reevaluating the role and potential of technologies when a high level of appropriation is permitted, we can also illuminate pathways to consider more meaningful forms of connectivity. This reimagining of connectivity entails envisioning its positive implications for humanity, sustainability, justice, and inclusion.

In conclusion, this article provides an illustrative example supporting the call to reflect from diverse perspectives and challenge universal discourses. Embracing pluriversal approaches allows us to better comprehend the complexities of digital technologies' impact on territories and communities, fostering inclusive and equitable digital futures.

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