

International dialogue with the Most Affected People and Areas: Metaphors of resistance

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This paper sets out to promote the environmental knowledge displayed by the Most Affected People and Areas (MAPA) in their discourse produced during international political meetings (e.g. Conferences of the Parties).

It has been acknowledged that the climate crisis has uneven impacts on different regions of the world: namely, the Global North is blamed for its excessive pollution while the Global South, whose emissions are limited, suffers the most from the impacts of global pollution (Greenpeace and the Runnymede Trust, 2022). Yet environmental movements, such as FridaysForFuture (2020), demonstrated that the climate crisis also intensifies pre-existing social injustice. For instance, the role of women in food production and consumption makes them particularly vulnerable to environmental threats (UNWomen, 2022). Accordingly, activists have relied on the acronym “MAPA” to encompass the experiences of different communities.

Considering these different experiences, my paper asks: how do the MAPA share their own experience and knowledge of the crisis in international discourse settings? How do they communicate their own viewpoint on the crisis to an international audience who may have a very different perception of the crisis?

To answer these questions, I composed a dataset of 192 texts produced by MAPA activists (from the Global South and Indigenous communities) during the United Nations Climate Assemblies (from 2020 to 2023). In particular, I focused on the use of metaphors. This focus draws on existing findings showing that 1.metaphors (such as “carbon footprint”) serve explanatory functions in climate crisis discourse (Deignan, Semino, & Paul, 2019; Nerlich & Hellsen, 2014) and 2.metaphors can facilitate intercultural communication (Giora & Haugh, 2017; Sharifian, 2017). I relied on the procedures established in Critical Metaphor Analysis (Charteris-Black, 2004) to analyse, explain, and interpret metaphorical instances. As the discourse produced by the MAPA relates to different experiences, the scope of this research remains exclusively qualitative.

Preliminary findings demonstrate that metaphors are tightly linked to particular cultures, nations, and traditions. For instance, Indigenous activists rely on metaphors to promote Amerindian Perspectivism (de Castro, 1998), presented as a solution to the crisis (“*we must listen to the stars, the moon, the wind, the animals, and the trees. The Earth is speaking. She tells us that we have no more time*”). Metaphors also serve to convey concrete images of the impacts of pollution and land exploitation suffered by the MAPA (“*Resource extraction is extracting our humanity, and violating our right to live sustainably on the land*”). Metaphors are also used as means of resistance to Global North discourse and Global North perception of the climate crisis (“*In your words, you wield the weapons that can save us or sell us out*”).

It is thus argued that the metaphors used by the MAPA in climate crisis discourse represent a significant discursive strategy to shift the public’s perception of the crisis and to promote adapted solutions at the global level.

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