

BEHAVIOUR CHANGE COMMUNICATION AND THE CATHOLIC
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A PEIRCIAN PERSPECTIVE

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A RESPOSTA DA IGREJA CATÓLOCA AO COVID-19 EM TIMOR-
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BEHAVIOUR CHANGE COMMUNICATION AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH RESPONSE TO COVID-19 IN TIMOR-LESTE: A PEIRCIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: A key challenge for development aid organizations is to clearly communicate messages about their programs in diverse socio-cultural contexts. Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) activities are designed to attempt a persuasive connection with project beneficiaries for whom the development message is usually new or otherwise difficult to understand. One strategy to achieve this connection is to leverage an influential institution whose standing in the community can give development messages authoritative backing. This article draws lessons for BCC programs about building the trustworthiness of new messages by examining the communicative actions of the Catholic Church in Timor-Leste in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis elaborates Charles S. Peirce's theory of signs wherein the communication between utterers and interpreters is transacted along a continuum that links objects, signs and interpreters. It is argued that an interpreter's trust in the sign is negotiated between what Peirce calls the Immediate Interpretant and the Dynamic Interpretant, where an object (such as a BCC activity) is contextualized to existing cultural values and mind-sets of the audience.

Keywords: Anthropology; Behaviour Change Communication; ritual; semiotics.

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Resumo: Um dos desafios fundamentais para as organizações de ajuda ao desenvolvimento é a comunicação de mensagens claras sobre os seus programas em diversos contextos socioculturais. As atividades de Comunicação para a Mudança de Comportamento (CMC) são projetadas para tentar uma conexão persuasiva com os

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beneficiários do projeto, para os quais a mensagem de desenvolvimento é geralmente nova ou difícil de entender. Uma estratégia para alcançar essa conexão é utilizar uma instituição influente, cuja posição na comunidade pode dar mais autoridade às mensagens de desenvolvimento. Este artigo reúne lições para os programas de CMC sobre a construção da credibilidade de novas mensagens, examinando as ações comunicativas da Igreja Católica em Timor-Leste em resposta à pandemia do COVID-19. A análise discorre sobre a teoria dos signos de Charles S. Peirce, na qual a comunicação entre enunciadorees e intérpretes é realizada ao longo de um continuum que vincula objetos, signos e intérpretes. Argumenta-se que a confiança de um intérprete no signo é negociada entre o que Peirce chama de Interpretante Imediato e Interpretante Dinâmico, onde um objeto (como uma atividade de CMC) é contextualizado com os valores culturais existentes e as mentalidades do público.

Palavras-chave: Antropologia; Comunicação para a mudança de comportamento; ritual; semiótica.

INTRODUCTION

A clear communication of messages among large numbers of people requires a commonality among the audience of interpreters and a capacity of the utterer to identify with this commonality. A fundamental problem for development aid organizations is to construct messages about their programs for socio-cultural contexts where the unity of the audience can be difficult to define. The ideas, values and practices of beneficiary populations who historically have been marginalized from the production of mainstream development aid models can appear opaque, strange or counter-productive to development agents. For example, World Bank Group (2015, p. 18) research has found that “development practitioners are not always good at predicting how poverty shapes mind-sets [of the poor]”. The problem of cross-cultural (mis)understanding is magnified when the communication aims not just to broadcast information, but to establish durable beliefs and practices.

Development aid programs often seek to change the behaviour of their beneficiaries. In some cases the evaluation of program success is tied to this objective rather than to the distribution of material benefits. A sustainable behaviour change requires some change in culture so that the ideas and values

(as well as supporting socio-economic structures) associated with the behaviour enter into the normal practice of beneficiary communities. A water and sanitation project, for instance, might aim to change behaviour from open defecation to the use of toilets. In addition to the provision of toilets (or the training and tools to build toilets), the project must establish the propositional belief among community members that ‘it is good to use a toilet’. In attempting this, the project designs its Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) – whether through trainings, events, literature or broadcast – to affect a persuasive connection with its audience. Strategies such as the translation of materials into local languages, adaptations of images, diagrams and metaphors to reflect local characteristics, and sensitivity to local hierarchies, tastes and knowledgebase can contribute to making the messages meaningful.

One strategy, also often used by advertisers, is to leverage an agent that has some kind of authority or affinity with the audience to carry the message. This may take the form of ‘champions’ or ‘ambassadors’, such as the use of the boxer and politician Manny Pacquiao for the ‘Safe Steps’ campaign, or in the context of Timor-Leste, the singer Marvi as UNICEF’s youth advocate. In community settings, champions may be early adopters or good exemplars of the behaviour sought, such as people designated as ‘lead farmers’ in agricultural programs (see for example Fisher, Holden & Katengeza, 2017). Alternatively, appending development messages to commercial products takes advantage of their household familiarity. Nixon’s (2018) ‘companion product’ method, implemented with the Papua New Guinea National AIDS Council, piggybacked on the ubiquity of toothpaste to distribute condoms. Finally, just as messages can be attached to people and products, so can they be attached to organizations. That is, the influential agent may take the form of an institution whose standing in the community gives the message an authoritative backing, such as a religious organization like the Catholic Church. This strategy is the topic of the present paper. The focus on an organization (rather than an individual) draws attention to the array of ideas and practices that are deployed by the organization as trusted values attached to a new behaviour, thus encouraging its uptake. New messages can be inserted into an existing,

trusted utterer-interpreter relationship and thus be imbued with a similar sense of reliability as a settled belief.

In approaching this issue, the article outlines the import of Charles S. Peirce's semiotic, or theory of signs, for BCC. Peirce's position suggests that communication between utterers and interpreters is transacted along a continuum that links objects, signs and interpreters (or rather, an aspect of interpreters that Peirce calls 'interpretants'). The paper discusses how trust in a sign by an interpreter is negotiated between what Peirce calls the Immediate Interpretant and the Dynamic Interpretant, where an object (such as a BCC value) is contextualized to existing cultural values and the mind-sets, or habits of thought, of the audience.

The exposition of a Peircian framework for BCC is informed by an anthropological perspective. From this disciplinary stance, the article aims to draw lessons about behaviour change from the communicational activities of a non-development aid organization that has a deeply established connection with a particular community. Instead of delving directly into a treatment of BCC as it is practiced by development aid groups, it is useful to first apply and test the framework with the actions of another organization that has existing cultural authority and trust. The semiotic process engaged by such an organization to cause behavioural changes is an important point of comparison, especially in view of the evaluation of BCC projects that aim for similar levels of influence.

To this end, the article examines a method of communication deployed by the Catholic Church in Timor-Leste which aimed to support a behavioural change in the local community in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent national state of emergency. Regulations entailed the closure of churches to large gatherings, and many regular liturgical activities, such as the Eucharist, were thus suspended. In response, churches across the country began to perform and amplify various prayers and messages related to the coronavirus to surrounding communities using loudspeakers.

The intention of this communication entailed a multi-layered public health message. The Church showed support for government regulations by adapting its own practices to comply with physical distancing guidelines.

By bringing part of the ‘church experience’ to the community it sought to discourage people from breaking regulations to visit churches or by holding their own community prayer groups. By including specific messages about COVID-19 alongside prayers it sought to educate and provide moral support to listeners. The Peircian framework explains how these intentions, as objects in the semiotic process, and all as novel responses spurred by the coronavirus, could be interpreted with confidence and trust by community members because of their habituated beliefs about the Church.

BEHAVIOUR CHANGE FRAMEWORKS AND PEIRCE’S SEMIOTIC

There are numerous theoretical frameworks to guide the various BCC strategies used by development practitioners for planning interventions and designing BCC activities. Each framework posits some explanation for how beliefs and behaviours become fixed as part of culture and also provide various roadmaps to achieve the desired outcomes. Morris, Marzano, Dandy & O’Brien (2012, p. 20) review several frameworks and conclude that they are “diverse and sometimes conflictual” but from which some “central cross-cutting insights” can be found for use in behaviour change interventions.² Foremost among these insights is that individuals and society develop in cooperation with each other, where individuals have agency but are also subject to structural pressures that enforce change. Secondly, the threats or problems that the development intervention seeks to overcome should be manifestly real and meaningful in peoples lived experience for change to be motivated.

The World Bank Group’s 2015 World Development Report distils a similar explanation of the co-production of individual and society. They argue

² Frameworks reviewed by Morris et al., include the ‘Theory of Planned Behaviour’ ‘Theory of Reasoned Action’, ‘Health Belief Model’, ‘Stages of Change (Trans-theoretical Model)’, ‘Social Practice Theory’ and ‘Diffusion of Innovation Theory’. They also show the multiplicity of frameworks at the level of ‘integrated tools’, where theoretical models are interpreted and simplified into practical implementation steps, often created for specific sectors or institutional environments (for example, the ‘MINDSPACE Approach’, the ‘Energy Cultures Framework’ and the ‘4 E’s Model’).

that people think both automatically and deliberately with ‘mental models’ that are built in relation to external conditions (such as society and the physical environment). The definition of the relationship between mental models and societies’ prescriptions for thought and action is, however, fraught. In the World Bank Group’s (2015, p. 62) view mental models are not the same as ‘social norms’ because “mental models, which need not be reinforced by direct social pressure, often capture broad ideas about how the world works and one’s place in it. In contrast, social norms tend to focus on particular behaviours and to be socially enforced”. Yet, the World Bank Group (2015, p. 63) also asserts the importance of social norms in the construction of mental models, writing that since “we are social animals, our mental models often incorporate the taken-for-granted beliefs and routines of the culture in which we were raised”. From these statements it would appear that peoples’ deeply ingrained ideas and behaviours are at once a feature of mental models (‘broad ideas about how the world works’) and social norms (‘beliefs and routines of the culture’).

Such categories offer a dualistic assessment of behaviour wherein the mental models of individuals and norms of society are separate entities, albeit mutually constructed. A question that emerges for BCC practitioners is how does this mutual construction function? How do changes in the domain of mental models impact on that of society, and vice-versa? What is the thread of continuity that breaks down the duality and unifies these domains, and how is it manifested in the lives of project beneficiaries? In practical terms, the BCC practitioner must be able to identify the settled mental models and social norms of a given society, isolate the communicative mechanisms that connect and reinforce them, and insert changes (such as new ideas or new mechanisms) that will achieve durable improvements. No easy task.

Peirce’s semiotic offers a path to explain how mental models and social norms – those beliefs and habits of individual and community life that BCC seeks to influence – emerge in the communicative actions of signs. In its broadest sense Peirce’s semiotic involves an encompassing philosophy of representation, such that all thought, emotion and behaviour grow from and produce signs. By using a Peircian framework BCC practitioners are able to

analyse the existing signs of a community (for example, their speech, pictures, and performances) to identify the objects of the signs (things which the sign seeks to represent, and which can be intentional, such as a prescription for a behaviour). From this position the analysis moves to the meaning of signs as they are interpreted. It is at this stage that questions arise concerning correct or mistaken interpretation and the relevance or irrelevance of the sign and object – questions which are key to BCC.

The scope of Peirce's theory is vast, and only a start can be made in this article to articulate its importance to BCC. It is important to note that Peirce developed his ideas over several decades and made no definitive statement of his theory. Scholars rely on a smattering of published articles and lectures, and his personal notebooks and letters, to interpret and build upon the Peircian semiotic. Quite different interpretations of the semiotic can be made depending on where one chooses to delve into Peirce's writing. For example, in Peirce's early formulations he posited that the effect of the sign on a person (via the interpretant) involves an endless series of signs interpreting signs. Short (2007, p. 45) describes how Derrida took up this early formulation to describe thought in terms of the 'limitlessness of play', that puts Peirce in a Saussurean theoretical context where thought proceeds unanchored from an objective ground. This was something that Peirce later rejected when he stated a real connection between object and the interpreter based on a full and correct interpretation (the Final Interpretant).

The role of philosophers and semioticians in presenting Peirce's work to scholars in other disciplines is thus crucial. The present analysis relies a great deal on the work of Short (2007) and Jappy (2017; 2018), who have elucidated Peirce's three typologies of sign classes: the early ten-class typology, the middle 28-class typology, and the later 66-class typology. The transition from the ten-class to the 28-class typology is particularly significant for the present discussion because it introduces the concept of the sign as a medium that communicates the 'form' of an object to an interpreter. The semiotic process is constituted by a triad (object, sign and interpretant) through which the object's form flows.

For Peirce, an object is classified into a Dynamic Object and an Immediate Object. The Dynamic Object is the real object. It exists but is

not directly accessible to our perception. Our perception of something is always as a sign and our knowledge of a Dynamic Object is always through its effects (this pragmatic principle is for what Peirce is perhaps best known). The Immediate Object is that part of the Dynamic Object that is represented in the sign, and it is here that we can begin to detect the communication of the object's form from Dynamic to Immediate Objects. For example, take a photograph of soapy hands under a running tap. The Dynamic Object could simply be a person washing their hands, or if the photo was contextualized to certain other collateral information the object could be an imperative 'wash your hands!' The Immediate Object is the hands, soap and water, which are those parts of the Dynamic Object that are actually represented in the sign. To understand this sign, the interpreter would need to have the facility to extend a perception of the picture of detached hands to the form of the Dynamic Object. If someone (or some other intelligence) could not make that connection, their interpretation of the sign would be mistaken.

Interpreters themselves are not technically part of the Peircian semiotic analysis. Instead the concept of 'interpretant' is used. An interpreter may be human, animal, or another form of cognition, such as an artificial intelligence, and they might have very different physical states and capacities. But what they all have in common as participants in semiosis is that at some point they embody an interpretant. For the most part, an interpretant is another sign that emerges in response to the perception of the initiating sign. In Peirce's theory these interpretant signs can be 'emotional' (feeling, including sensations like pain), 'energetic' (actions, such as movement or reaction), or 'logical' (inferential thoughts). And in practice, it is likely an interpreter will embody a combination of all three. For example, to continue with the hand washing photograph, somebody who views the photo might feel guilty (emotional interpretant), think to themselves 'I should have washed my hands already' (logical interpretant), and then proceed to get up and go wash their hands (energetic interpretant). These interpretants are all themselves signs that evoke further interpretants for the person in question, and perhaps also for others, in the continuing flow of life.

COMMUNICATION, TRUST AND INTERPRETANTS

According to Peirce, interpretants (whether emotional, energetic or logical) progress through the semiotic process from Immediate to Dynamic and, lastly, Final Interpretant. This section examines the roles played by these latter kinds of Interpretants in making clear and trusted connections between utterers and interpreters.

When a sign is perceived the process of interpretation moves through three phases. At first, with the Immediate Interpretant, there is consideration of the possible interpretations that are presented by a sign. Just as the Immediate Object defines possible connections between the Dynamic Object and the Sign, the Immediate Interpretant defines possible connections between the Dynamic Interpretant and the Sign. The second phase of interpretation, the Dynamic Interpretant, involves the enactment or embodiment of the actual interpretation. It is the emotion, movement or thought that actually occurs. As the process of interpretation moves from the Immediate to the Dynamic Interpretant there is progress from the collection of possible interpretations that could be made from the sign to the real interpretation that somebody makes at a certain time and place.

At the third phase, the Final Interpretant, the meaning of an object is obtained such that no further interpretation is needed to improve this meaning. In other words, it is the form of the object, communicated through a sign, and without error, as it is interpreted. This concept equates to the ultimate goal of BCC, whereby the object of a message is an intention to change a certain kind of behaviour, and if that behaviour is indeed changed, the beneficiary has thus embodied the Final Interpretant. The embodiment itself is not the Final Interpretant, rather it is the Dynamic Interpretant. Thus, an interpretant can be both Dynamic and Final when the complete form of an object is embodied by an interpreter. But, and of most concern for the present discussion, an interpretant can also be Dynamic only, such as when an interpreter embodies an emotion, movement or thought which does not completely accord with the object's form. A Final Interpretant is by no means guaranteed, and peoples'

Dynamic Interpretants about a great many things are merely a partial or mistaken apprehension of the object's true form.

It is the Immediate Interpretant with which development practitioners must first engage as they design and implement their programs. Peirce (1931-58 [CP 8.315])³ writes that an Immediate Interpretant is the "Quality of the impression a sign is fit to produce, not any actual reaction". Impressions that a sign is 'fit to produce' evokes all the possibilities for interpretation that could come before any interpreter. Much depends on the object, and on the way the sign is constructed. A piece of art, for example, may take a complex object, wrap it in a deceptively simple sign, and elicit many different possibilities for interpretation. An abstract expressionist painting, whose object is perhaps only known by the artist, could be interpreted differently by everyone who sees it. Whereas a civic sign, such as traffic lights, has a relatively simple object (stop or go), and is signified in as clear a way as possible (coloured lights), and is designed to have a very limited set of possibilities for interpretation. In fact, it is hoped that every driver will have the same Dynamic Interpretant of it – they will either press the brake or accelerator. In many ways it is the task of development practitioners to make signs of complex objects that are fit to produce a limited set of possibilities, namely, the desired outcomes of the project.

Peirce's concept of Immediate Interpretant can be likened to 'affordances', an idea developed by the psychologist James Gibson (1966; 1979), and more recently taken up by anthropologists (see Ingold, 2000; Keane, 2018). The term 'affordance' refers to the things that an object offers, or 'affords', someone who perceives it. Ingold (2018, p. 39) describes affordances as "the ways in which things come into the immediate presence of perceivers, not as objects-in-themselves, closed in and contained, but in their potential for the continuation of a form of life". Although Ingold defines affordances as a pre-semiotic type of perception (direct and unmediated), which on its surface does not fit with Peirce's view, the term is nonetheless a useful way of thinking about the Immediate Interpretant. The Immediate Interpretant is constituted

³ Peirce's Collected Papers referenced here are conventionally cited using the Volume Number and the Paragraph number (thus, CP 8.315 refers to Collected Papers, Volume 8, Paragraph 315).

by potentialities, and as a more direct, as yet unanalysed apprehension of the possibilities of the sign is made at this stage, it does involve a kind of preparatory stage for the eventual interpretive act (of the Dynamic Interpretant).

In what way, then, do the affordances of the Immediate Interpretant, as possibilities of interpretation, become fixed in the Dynamic Interpretant as actual interpretation? Whether the interpretation be an emotional, physical or intellectual response to the sign, it is made as the interpreter selects some meaning out of the total set of affordances furnished by the sign. The constitution of the Immediate Interpretant is thus a key point of analysis for development practitioners. And this analysis must be complemented by a consideration of the ways in which individuals select the affordances that are meaningful to them. In the design of BCC activities mistakes can be made when a sign is constructed to offer an Immediate Interpretant that affords meanings drawn from the socio-cultural context of the development practitioner, rather than from that of the intended audience.

For example, a WASH project would first seek to understand how ideas and practices about cleanliness and water use are represented locally before creating their own BCC strategy. If not, signs that have a particular meaning for the project might be misconstrued by the project beneficiaries. To illustrate the point, imagine a culture for whom defecation is normally an outside activity, perhaps done in certain areas of the surrounding fields or forest. Value laden metaphors that link certain outside areas to contamination and places inside village boundaries and houses to cleanliness are expressed locally in language and perhaps even ritual practice. In this case, a WASH project's BCC activity would not simply post pictures of people sitting on an inside toilet with a big green tick and the imperative 'Stop Open Defecation!'. This sign could throw up all sorts of unintended consequences.

This sign's Immediate Interpretant might afford negative responses for the project beneficiaries, contrary to the intentions of the project's actors. For example, a diagram of an individual sitting on a toilet might not afford a model of good behaviour as intended, but present interpretive options informed by the cultural norms of defecation and waste disposal mentioned above. Options might include it being a model of what not to do; or a joke; or an attack on

one's local practices; or, indeed, as something that is necessary to do, regardless of how one actually feels about it, because it carries the imprimatur of a development program. From this array of Immediate Interpretants might come Dynamic Interpretants such as emotional responses of disgust, guilt or confusion. Or perhaps energetic responses of attempts to use an indoor toilet, or laughter. Logical interpretant responses might include a thought to learn more about toilets, or, in a different scenario, a thought to disrupt the program.

In this way, the socio-cultural context of the sign provides information to the Immediate Interpretant that sets the definition of affordances. But the interpreter's selection of information from the Immediate Interpretant's affordances must also occur in concert with the interpreter's mental habits. A sign might furnish a wide range of affordances, but not all of these will become manifest in the Dynamic Interpretant if the interpreter does not have the facility to make a connection with these affordances. Some affordances for one person might not even be apprehended as an option for interpretation by another person. For instance, a person listening to another speak in a foreign language does indeed perceive the signs (they hear the sounds), but they do not perceive the meanings of the words because they perceive nothing of the form of the objects to which the words refer. To use the World Bank's terminology, this interpreter's 'mental model' does not facilitate understanding. In the Peircian framework a mental model sets some of the conditions for the move from the possibilities of the Immediate Interpretant to the reality of the Dynamic Interpretant. In other words, a mental model contributes to the form of the object that the sign affords to an interpreter. Thus, a mental model takes part in the Immediate Interpretant during semiosis. Both social norms and mental models act upon the form of the object in the Immediate Interpretant and are thus equally part of the sign's context.

In sum, the utterance and interpretation of a sign within a Peircian framework proceeds from a real object (the Dynamic Object) to some form of the object that can be expressed in the sign (the Immediate Object). The sign itself then moves from the utterers' domain to that of the interpreters with the emergence of the Immediate Interpretant, which is constituted by all the possible affordances of the sign. The specific affordances for

different interpreters are settled in a negotiation between the sign and the context of the sign, which includes both social norms and mental models. Dynamic Interpretants take shape as certain affordances of the Immediate Interpretant are selected and expressed in the emotions, actions and thoughts of interpreters.

With some signs the scope for interpretation might be strict, where the form of the object moves through to the Immediate Interpretant with more completeness. For example, a footprint in the sand is an indexical sign of a person having stepped there at one point in time. And smoke is a sign of fire. There are not a lot of other interpretations that could be made. With others signs an interpreter might have a wide scope to intentionally select certain affordances over others, analysing options and exercising agency. Such is the case with symbols, where only conventional practice ties an object to its sign. However, given the right context at the Immediate Interpretant level this freedom can be very much constrained, such as when belief in religious propositions is established in ritual (see Rappaport, 1999; Butterworth, 2011). Together the sign and the context of the sign (those social norms and mental models that coalesce with the form of the Dynamic Object in the Immediate Interpretant) can be constructed in such a way to produce predictable Dynamic Interpretants. In other words, when the form of an object represented in a sign aligns just right with the form of certain social norms and mental models, a belief and trust between utterer and interpreter is promoted. In the next section, this point will be discussed in relation to the Catholic Church's response to COVID-19.

A CATHOLIC RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The Catholic Church in Timor-Leste is a useful point of comparison for development aid BCC. The Church's missionary work sought to introduce new ideas and practices to the region and (through its own prism of personhood, ethics and cosmology) improve lives. Although it was a powerful force acting in coordination with the Portuguese colonial government, during much of the

colonial period it found it difficult to make headway among the indigenous population (Gunn, 1999). At the cusp of the Indonesian invasion in 1975, less than 30% of the population were baptized Catholic. The Church then grew significantly during the Indonesian period and became widely influential. Administrative factors, including Indonesian law requiring citizens to identify with a world religion, contributed to this growth. And importantly, as Hodge (2013) emphasizes, the Church forged emotional and intellectual legitimacy and trust during the occupation and became a key factor in ameliorating the suffering experienced by the people of Timor-Leste. Nowadays, according to the most recent population census, 97.57% of Timorese identify as Catholic (GOTL, 2015). However, it must also be recognized that the Church itself has been subject to influence from indigenous religious precepts, values and ritual (see for example McWilliam, Palmer & Shepard, 2014; Bovenspien & Delgado Rosa, 2016). The Church is woven into the contemporary cultural fabric of the country, having both provided new inputs, and itself adjusted to some existing conditions, over the course of centuries.

When COVID-19 threatened Timor-Leste, it was clear that the Church would, as it did during the Indonesian resistance period, have an important role to play. On March 21, 2020, the first person in Timor-Leste tested positive for the coronavirus. The sense of unease was palpable in both Dili's streets and corridors of power. At that time news of the dire situation in Italy dominated the media. The authorities quickly realized that the poorly resourced health system in Timor-Leste would not be able to cope with a similar outbreak. On March 22 all schools were closed and a 14-day quarantine enforced for all international arrivals. A state of emergency was declared from March 28 which entailed border closures, physical distancing regulations and the suspension of non-essential services. Many people living in Dili left for their ancestral homelands outside the capital. A second COVID-19 case was confirmed on April 10 and by April 24 the last case was confirmed (as of June 15). All cases were among those arriving from overseas and placed in quarantine and there was no community transmission. According to WHO's June Situation Report for Timor-Leste, only 24 positive cases were recorded, all of whom recovered (World Health Organization, 2020). The lockdown had worked.

Restrictions on religious services were a key part of the physical distancing regulations. Article 4 of the State of Emergency Decree 29/2020 involved the following regulation:

Freedom of worship, in its collective dimension: the necessary restrictions may be imposed by the competent public authorities to reduce the risk of contagion and carry out measures to prevent and combat the epidemic, including limiting or prohibiting religious celebrations and other worship events that involve a gathering of people. (GOTL, 2020).

Immediately upon news of the first case of coronavirus the Archdiocese of Dili suspended church activities, including Masses and the Way of the Cross. Marriages and funerals, a constant beat in the social and ritual landscape of the community, usually with hundreds and sometimes thousands of participants, were curtailed. Archbishop Virgílio do Carmo da Silva stated “I take these steps to avoid the further spread of the coronavirus in the community” (Ora, 2020a). Soon after, as the state of emergency was enacted and it became apparent the lockdown would last months, rather than weeks, the Archbishop requested that Catholics pray at home, stating that “[p]eople can celebrate in their own homes via radio and television. Although they will not receive Holy Communion, they can [unite] through a prayer of spiritual communion” (Ora, 2020b).

While Masses were broadcast on television and radio, another more immediate solution was put into practice for local communities. Churches and chapels throughout the country began to erect loudspeakers on the top of roofs or nearby trees and amplify prayers performed to the surrounding community. This particular form of mass communication is the subject of the present analysis. In my inner-city neighbourhood of Taibessi the *Exaltação da Santa Cruz* Chapel amplified prayers, hymns and some speeches for approximately two hours in the morning (usually from 6am to 8am) and two hours in the evening (5pm to 7pm). The evening prayers involved the Holy Rosary performed by members of the local congregation on a rotational basis. In the mornings, when a priest was available to participate, the chapel would conduct Mass (but, according Diocese guidelines, without the standard communion rite). The bulk of the ceremonial activity involved the formulaic prayers, scrip-

ture readings and hymns that the majority Catholic population of Timor-Leste know well. At times, however, such as preceding the Holy Rosary or during the sermon after the Liturgy of the Word, explicit mention was given to COVID-19 and the state of emergency. This would usually only be one or two sentences re-expressing the reason for the lockdown and the hope that Timor-Leste would remain safe from harm. The ceremony as a whole can be taken as a unified sign consisting of the many sub-signs of the Holy Rosary and the Mass. For expediency in this paper, the overall communicative performance will be called the ‘COVID-19 rite’.

A Peircian analysis of the Church’s broadcast of prayers from loudspeakers can shed light on how the Church, as the utterer of the sign in this case, was able to communicate so clearly and authoritatively to the surrounding community. It is perhaps too easy to take the Church’s actions and people’s acceptance of them as natural. But the Church in Timor-Leste had never communicated in this way before. On certain occasions, like popular services during Christmas and Easter, loudspeakers are used to ensure the gathered crowd outside Church buildings can hear the services. But a regular twice daily broadcast of prayer, loud enough to be heard hundreds of meters away and continued without break over several months, was new. If another organization, even the government, had undertaken the same communication tactic for their own messaging, I would hazard to guess that it would not have been accepted so charitably. The Catholic Church holds a privileged position in Timorese society, and the Peircian framework helps elucidate how this privilege is built and deployed.

The Dynamic Object of the Church’s communication was the intention outlined by Archbishop da Silva. The Church amplified prayers to the surrounding population with the objective of supporting the state of emergency regulations by communicating liturgical activities into people’s homes. This was made under the assumption that the people needed, or at the very least appreciated, the prayer and ritual to maintain their spirits throughout the lockdown. Skipping forward in the semiosis to the Final Interpretant, with the caveat that this conclusion is made without the benefit of a more thorough survey, it would seem that the true form of the Dynamic Object was achieved

in people's Dynamic Interpretants. In the neighbourhood surrounding the Taibessi chapel I only ever heard positive responses to the broadcasts. At times people would joke about those who performed, such as the sound of someone's singing voice or a mispronunciation, but this was more by way of friendly engagement with the communication, rather than any criticism. And, perhaps most importantly, people stayed at home peacefully, thus embodying the Church's intention.

The Immediate Object involved a maze of other signs collated for the single purpose of the Dynamic Object. When considering the Dynamic Object in a propositional form as 'stay at home and the Church will help you make it through the lockdown', the Immediate Object at first appears tangential and redundant. After all, a more efficient mode of communication might have been simply to state the proposition in a letter circulated to households with a diocese letterhead. This would communicate the same form of the Dynamic Object. Instead, the Immediate Object included an intensive performance of up to four hours of prayers each day, various hymns, homilies and introductory statements. Each of these signs, when taken separately, could be analysed with Peirce's semiotic. For example, prayers on their own are signs with Dynamic Objects concerning cosmological and moral ideas, and produce various Interpretants for those at prayer or listening. But when taken together in the special performance of the COVID-19 rite, they also served to enrich the affordances of the Immediate Interpretant produced by the rite in its capacity as a sign of compliance to the state of emergency regulations.

The Immediate Interpretant presented to the audience of the COVID-19 rite afforded reference to their experiences with Catholic ritual. The meanings attached to prayers and other ritual components, as well as those meanings attached to the voices of the performers, whether it was a family member or neighbour, or a local priest, could evoke a lifetime of participation in masses, weddings, funerals, baptisms and other assorted Catholic ceremonies that punctuate daily life. The belief in the tenets of Timorese Catholicism are complemented by the experience of these tenets being effective as the Church regulates the rhythms of their existence. The Church effects great change throughout peoples' lives, and this power is largely unquestioned in Timor-

Leste. For instance, transformation from ‘unmarried’ to ‘married’ is a status change that is facilitated by the Church and has manifest impacts on peoples’ lives. Over time, belief promotes more belief as the efficacy of the Church is reinforced self-referentially, whether it be through ritual or bureaucratic action. Of course, if an interpreter does not have this background, different affordances of the COVID-19 rite might arise and be selected. For example, a critical interpreter might form a Logical Interpretant that the Church, by maintaining a strong presence in peoples’ lives with twice daily high-volume broadcasts throughout the lockdown, sought primarily to strengthen its claim as a leading community organization.

But given the preponderance of Catholicism in Timor-Leste it can be asserted with confidence that the mental models of the audience listening to the COVID-19 rite involved deeply held beliefs in the Church and its authority. Thus, there is emotional and intellectual depth to the affordances of the COVID-19 rite but little possibility for the perception of alternative or contrary affordances that would be considered a ‘mistake’ given the intention of the sign. Of all the affordances, only the statements about COVID-19 and the lockdown were new, potentially untrustworthy and in danger of misinterpretation. But the rite arrayed trusted meanings to enfold the new message. The clarity of the message to adhere to the lockdown regulations, and indeed the acceptance of the adjustment of the Church’s standard ritual procedure, was underwritten by the truths, self-evident to the audience, which saturated the Immediate Interpretant.

CONCLUSION

The Church’s ability to advocate a public health message and engage the community’s trust appears a simple matter. In a novel communicative act, it uttered a new message within a setting of existing beliefs so that the audience could make their interpretations with confidence. The Peircian framework explains the progress through semiosis of the form of the object of the communication, which was to support the state of emergency and

encourage people to stay at home. The COVID-19 rite, as a sign of this object, involved the assemblage of several component signs, such as prayers and hymns, as the Immediate Object. The standing of the Catholic Church as an institutional norm, as well as the deeply held beliefs of interpreters about its authority, framed the set of affordances of the Immediate Interpretant. These affordances channelled the Dynamic Interpretants of the audience listening to the COVID-19 rite into a predictable interpretation: The message was clear. Although BCC activities cannot aim to establish belief as do religious organizations, which deploy metaphysical propositions, sanctification and ritual, certain general mechanisms are instructive.

The Dynamic Object and the Dynamic Interpretant can be considered as two poles, wherein the form of the object at one pole is reflected in the other. If the reflection is correct, the Dynamic Interpretant can be defined in the Peircian framework as the Final Interpretant, and the communication is meaningful in its true sense. It should not be underestimated how distant, and prone to error, these two poles can be when a Dynamic Object is created (or selected) via the interpretation of a development practitioner and the Dynamic Interpretant is embodied by project beneficiaries. This equation is known to development practitioners who are now taught and encouraged to know the 'other'. Formative research, community and government consultations, partner workshops, pilot studies and various monitoring and evaluation activities should contribute to reducing error in development interventions. In the design of interventions, the semiotic movement of the form of the object through to the beneficiaries should be considered as important as the object, or goal, of the intervention.

The Church's communicative response to COVID-19 involved the introduction of a 'new' object (the COVID-19 message) couched in a dense formation of 'old' objects (prayers, hymns). The semiotic movement of the old objects was a known quantity and correct interpretation could be assumed. And even though the very existence of the COVID-19 rite was due to the new object, the Church nonetheless allocated substantially more time and effort towards communicating the old objects. In other words, an easily followed

path was beaten between the Dynamic Object and Dynamic Interpretant with these well-practiced ritual actions. The new object needed only to fall into line. This was unlikely an intentional strategy on the part of the Church, it was just the way they do things. Development practitioners will suffer the redundancies and inefficiencies that are commonplace in their interactions with partners and beneficiaries. A meeting with community stakeholders might involve twice as much time and effort spent on ceremony, introductions, seemingly irrelevant comments and questions and off-topic discussions than on the intended core message. But these tangents can be efforts to find commonality, to set a groundwork of shared understanding and trust before any novelty is introduced. Project staff will probably understand this on a human level, but the strictures of a heavy project work plan and finances will, unfortunately, be less forgiving.

The Church produced a sign with affordances of the Immediate Interpretant that ensured clarity and engendered trust. This was only possible because that set of affordances, built through the Church's long-term engagement with the community, was available to be called on. A development intervention, and BCC as a specific type of intervention, will probably not have this capacity. In an environment where development projects are normally implemented over comparatively short periods (years, not decades), it is difficult to establish a comprehensive set of affordances that can be represented at will. Even large development aid organizations, like unilateral and multilateral aid agencies, or major international non-government organizations with a constant stream of projects, can become isolated and segmented. For example, they usually do not take signs that might afford trust from a previous project and deploy them in a current project.

There are exceptions, such as the use of characters from CARE's *Lafaek* educational magazine for their partnership with GIZ in producing BCC material for the *Partnership for Sustainable Agroforestry*. But, in general, the implementation modalities of individual projects do not facilitate this method. In the COVID-19 rite, a ritual action, such as the Holy Rosary, was able to be moved about and positioned in place as needed to afford collateral support to the rite's primary object. Development practitioners need to look outside

of their own project space to achieve similar levels of flexibility. The stock of affordances for BCC activities can be added to by implementation partners. The Church was supporting the government's state of emergency regulations with its COVID-19 rite, thus drawing on a political legitimacy. Development agencies will often themselves partner with religious organizations and government. BCC projects can look even further into the worlds of their audiences and seek out those social norms and mental models that furnish trust to the Immediate Interpretants of their signs.

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