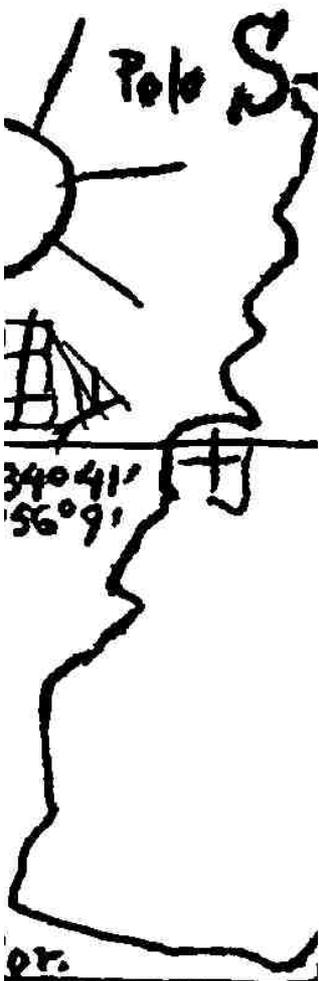


Alternautas

(Re)Searching Development: The Aby Yala Chapter



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Preface

Introduction to the Special Issue on Indigenous and Afrodescendant Movements and Organizations in Latin America: Negotiating, Resisting, Performing and Re-purposing Dominant Categories - *Diego Silva & Nancy Postero*

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Alternautas is a peer reviewed academic blog that publishes content related to Latin American Critical Development thinking.

It intends to serve as a platform for testing, circulating, and debating new ideas and reflections on these topics, expanding beyond the geographical, cultural and linguistic boundaries of Latin America - Abya Yala. We hope to contribute to connecting ideas, and to provide a space for intellectual exchange and discussion for a nascent academic community of scholars, devoted to counter-balancing mainstream understandings of development.

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Preface

Welcome to the seventh volume of *Alternautas*!

We are proud to present to readers with this Special Issue of *Alternautas*, ‘Indigenous and Afro-descendant Movements and Organisations in Latin America. Resisting, Performing and Re-purposing Dominant Categories’. In this issue we continue to publish critical research and alternative intellectual perspectives about Latin American development processes. We are pleased to have several new authors joining us this time from various parts of the world.

The foci of this special issue are the political strategies, forms of resistance, and anti-political practices that indigenous and Afro-descendant communities across Latin America have developed to deal with diverse challenges presented to them by the state and the market. However, it is impossible to preface this issue without reflecting on the contemporary global crises that are currently affecting all of our lives in so many ways.

The effects of Covid-19, since the first South American case was declared in São Paulo, Brazil on 26 February 2020, have been devastating. As we write this in August 2020, the epicentre of the Covid-19 pandemic is sweeping through the Amazon region of Brazil, Colombia and Peru. But the number of cases is also rampant in Colombia, Peru, Guatemala, and Bolivia, and there are now cases in every Latin American country. Some of the worst-affected areas are the marginalised rural and urban peripheral ones, where there tends to be high concentrations of indigenous and Afro-descendant populations. We clearly still have a lot to learn about this disease, and we do know that pandemics affect different populations in different ways, but what is becoming clear is the ethnic and racial inequalities that were already embedded in Latin American societies – such as higher levels of

malnutrition, difficulties in accessing health services, and precarious infrastructure – are going to be accentuated.¹

Amadeo Martínez, the General Coordinator for the Abya Yala Indigenous Forum (FILAY), has already identified the very real threat that the pandemic poses for food security.² This has led to calls by the United Nations and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) for greater support and responses in the Amazon region. When we put all of this together, there is clearly a risk of new forms of violence and conflict beginning to emerge once resources, clean water, and food are in short supply.

Responses to the Covid-19 crisis by Latin American governments have been patchy, to say the least. In just a couple of examples, the Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil (APIB) has accused the Bolsonaro government of a "fascist strategy", aimed at "cleaning up the area" to make way for a developmental project in the Amazon.³ Similarly, a public letter addressed to President Vizcarra in Peru by civil society organisations and indigenous groups have demanded urgent state resources and humanitarian action after five months of inaction.⁴

Intersecting with this very immediate crisis are more protracted issues of racial and ethnic hierarchy. However, these are shifting into sharper focus in dominant academic and policy-making discourse due to the momentum generated by the global Black Lives Matters movement. Although the movement is building in a number of developed societies, the sense of immediate moral outrage in Latin America appears far less widespread. News about the death of fourteen-year-old João Pedro Matos Pinto being killed by seventy police bullets on May 18, 2020 was clearly heart breaking. But the everyday, quotidian nature of ethnic and racial violence in Latin America has significantly different repercussions.

¹ Hooper, Monica Webb, Anna María Nápoles, and Eliseo J. Pérez-Stable. "COVID-19 and racial/ethnic disparities." *Jama* (2020).

² <https://i.noticiasfides.com/filac-alerta-del-peligro-de-desaparicion-de-pueblos-indigenas-por-el-covid-19-404707/>

³ <http://apib.info/2020/07/08/contra-as-decisoos-anti-indigenas-do-governo-bolsonaro/>

⁴ https://content.eia-global.org/assets/2020/08/20200813_Amazon_in_Emergency.pdf

As we go to press, the pandemic is crashing global and local markets, and the immediate health effects for Latin American minority communities are becoming more visible every day. However, the continued neglect of Afro-descendant and indigenous communities treatment in relation to Covid-19 is another demonstration of the embedded and institutionalised nature of racial and ethnic inequality.

All of that said, this is clearly not the first time that indigenous and Afro-descendant communities have experienced disease, pandemic, and existential threats at the hands of political and state elites. But once again, indigenous and Afro-descendant communities are demonstrating incredible resilience.

As critical development thinkers, it is in this context that we re-commit to continuing our efforts to reveal unequal power structures that force indigenous and Afro-descendant populations into situations where they are disproportionately affected by violent and erratic crises, or by the long and slow effects of structural and systematic violence. We also re-commit to supporting the innovation and creativity of indigenous and Afro-descendant communities as a way of charting a way forward and to move beyond the crises. It is essential to shine a light on these projects and make space for them to develop, mature, and be effective.

Participation, visibility, and prioritisation of these populations and their strategies in contemporary global debates are essential to breathe new life and energy into old and tired debates. We will, therefore, continue to make opportunities to hear, remember, and honour indigenous and Afro-descendant experiences, and to assert unequivocally that indigenous and Afro-descendant lives do indeed matter. There has never been more of a critical time, indeed, for critical perspectives.

We are approaching this challenge head on and, so, we are making progress in amplifying the voice of the *Alternautas* community so that it is stronger and louder. *Alternautas* is now moving further forward in the process of indexation so that we hope it will be available as an Open Access Journal by the upcoming year. This will provide improved capacity and visibility for these critical voices, which are so important to academic, activist, and policy-making debates on issues of race and ethnicity, amongst other issues, across Latin America and globally.

We invite readers and contributors from across the *Alternautas* community to suggest other ways in which we may advance the enormous work ahead of us. We start the ball rolling with a new Call for Papers to contribute towards a Special Issue on Covid-19. This special issue will help facilitate a critical dialogue on the effects of the pandemic, how states and markets have responded to it, and how different actors, groups, and organisations have attempted to advance more progressive agendas in the wake of it.

Although this next Special Issue is of critical and timely importance, we are always open to discuss supporting alternative ideas and projects.

Stay safe and healthy.

The Alternautas Editorial Team,

Ana Estefanía Carballo, Michela Coletta, Gibrán Cruz-Martínez, Emilie Dupuits,
María Eugenia Giraudó, Rebecca Hollender, Valesca Lima, Angus McNelly,
Paulina Méndez, Nicholas Pope, María del Pilar Ramírez Gröbli, Philip Roberts,
Läetitia Saint-Loubert, Diego Silva, Johannes M. Waldmüller

From a virtual Abya Yala, July 2020.

DIEGO SILVA & NANCY POSTERO¹

Introduction to the Special Issue on Indigenous and Afrodescendant Movements and Organizations in Latin America: Negotiating, Resisting, Performing and Re-purposing Dominant Categories²

Introduction

In 2018 the Albert Hirschman Centre on Democracy in Geneva organized together with Europaem and Alternautas, the workshop on “Democracy, Indigenous Rights and Ethno-Racial Mobilization: Latin America in Comparative Perspective.” This workshop was part of the “Geneva Democracy Week” organized by the Geneva Chancellery of State to promote dialogue between political institutions, civil society, students and citizens, with a view to strengthening their participation in democratic processes. Our focus on Indigenous and Afrodescendant movements was intended to illuminate the ongoing contributions these populations have made to expanding and redefining democracy. Latin America has been the site of inspiring activism over the last decades, as formerly subaltern populations have challenged the ongoing legacies of colonialism and claimed citizenship rights. We

¹ DIEGO SILVA is a Postdoctoral Research Associate at the Albert Hirschman Centre on Democracy in Geneva, and NANCY POSTERO is the Co-Director of the Human Rights Program at UC San Diego and is the Co-Director of the International Institute.

² This article was originally published in:

<http://www.alternautas.net/blog/2020/8/7/introduction-to-the-special-issue-on-indigenous-and-afrodescendant-movements-and-organizations-in-latin-america-negotiating-resisting-performing-and-re-purposing-dominant-categories>

received paper proposals from students of different European universities in Switzerland, England, Germany and Luxemburg and selected nine papers to be discussed at the workshop on the 6th of October at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies. The papers received feedback from the workshop conveners, Graziella Moraes, Filipe Calvão and Diego Silva from the Graduate Institute in Geneva, as well as from our special guests Nancy Postero, professor UC San Diego, Ethel Branch, former Attorney General of the Navajo Nation and Karmen Ramirez Bóscan, founder of Wayunkerra Indigenous Women's Initiative in Guajira Colombia, as well as anonymous peer review. Thus, the articles in this special issue of *Alternautas* are the product of a rich international conversation.

At the time of the workshop, Evo Morales was still in power in Bolivia, the 2019 Indigenous protests in Ecuador had not taken place, Chilean citizens had not massively mobilized against the unfulfilled promises of neoliberal development, and more than 350 Colombian activists, including many Indigenous and Afrodescendant leaders, had not been assassinated. Thus, workshop participants did not focus on these dramatic events but considered the long-term colonial structures that still permeate international institutions, the State and the market. Today we can reflect on how these contributions dialogue with the 2019 period of social unrest in Latin America. Thus, in this introduction we first discuss the questions addressed by contributors to this special issue, to then focus on some of the ideas that contributors raise in the light of more recent events.

Dominant Categories

Starting in the 1980s, Indigenous and Afrodescendant communities began to organize and mobilize, claiming rights to citizenship and equal participation in the nation-states where they live. Across the continent, these civil society organizations marched, protested, held hunger strikes, blockaded highways, calling for inclusion in the democratic societies where they live. As a result, during the 1990s, the so-called Latin American “multicultural turn” gave rise to reforms of national constitutions intended to grant inclusion of Indigenous communities and

Afrodescendant populations in political and social processes (Cottrol and Hernandez, 2001, Seider 2002, Van Cott, 2000). These legislative reforms included collective territorial titling, bilingual and intercultural education reform, cultural and linguistic recognition, and measures to insure political participation (see Postero 2007). However, the actions of Indigenous peoples' and Afrodescendant social movements/organizations in Latin America are embedded within and limited by a set of disciplinary and regulatory technologies shaped by international organizations, nation-states, market, and globalization processes. Charles Hale calls this regulation the "menace" of neoliberal multiculturalism, arguing that public political commitment to Indigenous and Afrodescendant movements is limited in practice by neoliberal development agendas with "multiple scaled transnational practices and discourses" (Radcliffe 2002, Hale 2005). Hale shows that this form of governmentality reinforces Indigenous identity and cultural demands only to the extent that they do not challenge the State or capitalist structures. "*Indios permitidos*" are supported, given funding and resources, while "*Indios prohibidos*" are sanctioned (Hale 2004). More recently, so-called "Pink Tide" States such as Bolivia and Ecuador explicitly recognized Indigenous and Afrodescendant rights in plurinational States, but continued to prioritize damaging extractivist developmental agendas linked to an ideal of a homogenising nation-state (Martinez Novo, forthcoming, Postero 2017).

Thus, despite their mobilization and agency over the last decades and their efforts to transform the political context in which they act (Muteba, 2012), in many parts of Latin America, Indigenous and Afrodescendant movements have faced obstacles developing political spaces that go beyond interpretation and representation (Lefebvre, 1991). As a result, they are often forced to translate themselves and their different and complex ontological understandings of the world in order to counterbalance the hegemonic colonial and patriarchal capitalist spaces that continue to dominate their communities. Mastering other languages, categories, and codes can sometimes lead to effective resistance and successful outcomes, but it can also lead to the expansion and reproduction of colonizing structures. Refusing them through disruption and silence can sometimes promote the reproduction and continual reinvention of worlds, but it can also lead to their marginalization and diminish the chances of democratic participation. As they have since the beginning

of the colonial era, these groups are negotiating a complex balance of structural forces and political openings.

The papers in this special issue ask: how are these challenges being confronted by Latin American Indigenous and Afrodescendant movements? How are identities fixed and mobilized by the international organizations, States, and the market, and performed or resisted by Indigenous and Afrodescendant communities in order to further their interests and contest or challenge different ontological views? How are these fixed identities expressions of State racism? And how do Indigenous and Afrodescendant movements react to an increasing racist violence coming from the State in the region? How are these movements intersected by multiple oppressions (such as class and gender) beyond ethnicity and race?

Coloniality and the State

The contributions to this special issue recognize the colonial structures that permeate Latin American societies today. In particular, they analyze cases where State institutions reproduce colonial hierarchies in the way they relate to the non-human environment, as well as the way in which Indigenous and Afrodescendant communities, and their ways of knowing and relating to the world, are not only marginalized by State institutions but also actively exterminated; women bearing a disproportionate share of this colonial type of violence.

Julia Zulver shows that the Colombian conflict disproportionately impacted Afro-Colombian women, and that elements of this violence has its roots in structural and gendered racism that both predates and outlives the armed conflict itself. Based on two groups of Afro-Colombian women living in Bogotá, Zulver's article describes the different strategies that women's organizations take to confront the ongoing kidnappings, assaults, rapes, and femicides in their communities. AFROMUPAZ, displaced women from the Pacific Coast, focus on psycho-social healing programs based in traditional practices like gardening, initiating business ventures to reduce economic instability, and legally denouncing past and present acts of violence committed against members of the organization (Zulver 2018b). She also considers

how a more radical new generation of Afro-Colombian feminists – the *Colectiva Matamba Acción Afrodiaspórica*—whose “empowered female warriors” see racism through an intersectional lens and tackle structural racism head on through targeted and deliberate community engagement activities, such as holding anti-racism workshops, lectures, and cultural activities, as well as monitoring femicide levels in Colombia. Members of these multigenerational organizations learn from the struggles of their elders, and intentionally include their youth in activities of collective healing to create new ways of resistance.

Importantly, Zulver recognizes the ongoing intersecting dynamics of insecurity and violence after the historic signing of a peace agreement between the FARC and the Colombian government in 2016. She highlights the continued violence against social leaders in Colombia, especially Indigenous and Afro-Colombian women, who have been attacked and killed for their social engagement. As mentioned above, more than 350 social leaders have been assassinated in Colombia since 2019. While the systematic violence against social leaders seeks to marginalize the democratic participation of the communities they represent, Zulver recognizes that this type of violence is not merely the result of the Colombian internal conflict. Instead, it responds to historically engrained structural and gendered racism. In the month of June 2020, for example, it was revealed that members of the Colombian military have been involved in the repeated acts of sexual abuse against Indigenous minors. Since many of these violent acts are attributed to State actors, the work of AFROMUPAZ and *Colectiva Matamba* constitute resistance against gendered State racism.

Therefore, Indigenous and Afrodescendant peoples organize to denounce State violence and colonial hierarchies. They devise ways of healing and protecting themselves from further violence and propose alternative ways of relating to the world. However, cultivating these alternatives is a challenging process. They often clash with the State’s interests, language, and categories, which define nature as an object or a resource to be extracted, promote ways of knowing the world that are not rooted in local experiences, and define structural violence as exceptional, reducing reparation from this violence to material compensation.

In this direction, Yira Lazala examines some of the limitations in the implementation of the 2011 Colombian Act 1448, the Law of Victims and Land Restitution, which have sought to offer reparation to the individuals and collectives affected by the Colombian armed conflict. Based on the case of the Inga Indigenous Community in Aponte Nariño, Lazala argues that the Ingas' understanding of their territory and of the duration of the conflict against their community, reveal temporal and spatial limitations in State's reparation projects. On the one hand, the Inga people do not consider their territory to be limited to the extent of land that is officially recognized by the State. They have argued for the notion of "territory as victim", but the State's notion of territory links indigeneity to an enclosed space. On the other hand, the Inga do not agree with the State's periodization of the conflict, which traces the violence exerted against the Inga to just a few decades ago, beginning with the last phase of the Colombian armed conflict. From the Inga's perspective, the conflict can be traced back to the ancestral past, to Spanish colonization. Rather than seeing their dispossession as a reiterative and persistent phenomenon, the State identifies their dispossession as the result only of the violence resulting from the recent internal war.

The Ingas' understanding of what an integral reparation process would entail reveals further ontological limitations in the way the State reparations are designed. Inga leaders do not conceive reparation as legal remedies or material concessions that are designed as compensations for exceptional periods of violence. Instead, these leaders translate the State's legal concept of reparations into the idea of territorial harmonization, which includes the cultivation of social and spiritual balance. This ontological understanding of territorial harmonization is often not recognized by State institutions. For example, the Inga requests for reparations related to environmental disasters that they understand as the result of social and spiritual imbalance, are often dismissed. Thus, despite national recognition of Indigenous land and reparation rights, ontological tensions as well as temporal and spatial limitations make it challenging for Ingas to gain significant reparation in their own terms.

The denial of Indigenous ontologies by the State is also clear in Thomas Niederberger's contribution. Niederberger traces the endeavor of the Wampis

nation in the Peruvian Amazon to openly and visibly mobilize nonhuman actors in eco-political struggles. Inspired by the Wampis' uprising against oil extraction in their autonomous lands in the early 2000s, Niederberger shows the ontological clash that characterized the different understanding of the State and the Wampis about the notion of territory: "what for the Wampis was their own territory, the State regarded as limited rights to the land surface."

Niederberger shows how the Wampis decided to abandon western conservationist discourses they had strategically employed as part of a "global ecological imaginary". That model reproduced human exceptionalism by portraying humans as the protectors of a separated and objectified nature. Instead, to reclaim the totality of their land, the Wampis shifted to mobilize different understandings of their integral territory where nonhumans beings are central and cannot be limited to the land surface: "nonhumans cover the entire range of relationships to the territory, including forest, water bodies (abode of tsunki, master of aquatic life), underground (abode of nunkui, mother of edible plants) but also the air and space." Thus, while State notions of territory are based on objectifying views of the environment, and where living relations can be divided through horizontal boundaries, the Wampis reclaim a "vertical territoriality" where living interconnections in all three dimensions are also recognized. For Niederberger, this opens a vertical dimension to the defense of territory – the extension of relationships into the underground and atmosphere – which comes to the fore in parallel with the advancing recognition of nonhumans as right-holders.

Coloniality, the State, and the market

In the articles described in the previous section, we saw that Indigenous and Afrodescendant groups' ethnic knowledge and practices are often marginalized by (post)colonial State institutions, especially when they are mobilized to protect rights and promote alternative worlds. In this section we consider how market forces profit from the appropriation and commercialization of "ethnic" commodities, such as textiles, art, and music (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009). In some cases, initiatives of benefit sharing and the inclusion of ethnic products in the market are justified as

a strategy to distribute income to “impoverished” segments of the population. This can be problematic, as it reifies capitalist relations, obscuring forms of wealth that are not measured through mainstream economic indicators. It also portrays the market as the only viable channel for development (Gibson-Graham 2006).

Moreover, the very translation of ethnic products into commodities poses bureaucratic and safety obstacles that effectively block the participation of Indigenous and Afrodescendant communities in the market. When the product reaches the market, it is often sold by someone from outside its community of origin. Thus, the material and knowledge that is necessary to produce a particular ethnic product end up being extracted from local communities, while the benefits are appropriated elsewhere. However, even in cases where local communities manage to overcome market hurdles and sell the product themselves, the commodity form gains prevalence over cultural life. Ethnic products become static and standard commodities with clear markers of cultural “authenticity” demanded by consumers.

Larissa da Silva Araujo’s piece on the *baianas de acarajé* in Brazil provides a case in point. She defines *baiana de acarajé* as “an Afro-Brazilian craft, performed by autonomous women who work as street vendors of food, such as acarajé (black-eyed pea fritters), abará (steamed peas in a banana leaf), cocada (coconut sweets), among others.” In the context of the 2014 football World Cup organized by FIFA, da Silva Araujo examines the process by which the *baianas de acarajé*, organized as an association, fought for the right to sell their products inside stadiums during football matches, as they have done for decades. Initially excluded from the event by FIFA, the *baianas de acaraje* organized street protests, mobilized petitions on the internet, and distributed t-shirts to raise awareness about their situation. Acarajé is not just a local specialty food; instead it is part of a food and religious system shared by practitioners of the candomblé religion. The *baianas de acarajé* share these secret crafts with their daughters and kin and offer the food to the warrior deity/*orixá* Iansã.

While the *bainas de acaraje* were finally allowed to sell the products during the world cup, da Silva Araujo reflects on the limits of this victory. She argues that state of Bahia’s recognition of the *baianas de acarajé* as part of the state’s Intangible

Heritage was central to FIFA's acceptance of their presence in the World Cup. When international capital arrived to the football events in Brazil, street vendors were forced to find ways of communicating with this type of capital. The notion of cultural heritage proved to be a legible category. However, this category also imposed new commitments on the part of the *baianas de acarajé*, to perform their art in particular and standard ways suitable to global markets. It traps them into "a static conception of the traditional and the cultural. More importantly, da Silva argues, "they are recognized as subject to the law, but are not recognized as agents of this right. Thus, it is evident that the State dialogues with the "Other" through the code that it created to classify and dialogue with this Other". Like the Ingas described by Lazala and the Wampis described by Niederberger, the Baianas in this case were constrained by the categories of "Otherness" dictated by market forces.

Coloniality and the International system

Otherness is also built at the international level. The United Nations (UN) has witnessed the presence of Indigenous peoples since 1923, although they were not allowed to participate in UN sessions until 1977. In that year, the International Indian Treaty Council obtained NGO status at the UN. Its first participation in UN session was accompanied by the presence of around one hundred delegates from 15 countries of the Americas. This was a milestone for the international

Indigenous movement in their struggle for land and human rights, as well as nationhood and self-determination. Since the UN had been created to represent nation states at the international level, the Indigenous demand for nationhood and self-determination directly questioned the legitimacy of State borders and authority.

The gathering of multiple and diverse peoples under the notion of "Indigenous" was however not merely the result of Indigenous strategic essentialism. It is a complex term tied to racial colonial classifications, State sovereignty claims as well as to the exoticization of non-Western peoples, still reproduced in national and international fora. Despite the inclusion of Indigenous peoples in the UN, the colonial structure of international bodies is still visible in the codes of conduct,

languages, and spaces in which Indigenous peoples are expected to participate. Not only are colonial languages such as English, French and Spanish the main ways of communicating at the UN, Indigenous participation is often relegated to thematic areas such as biodiversity and environmental sustainability, extractivism and benefit sharing, as well as traditional knowledge and folklore.

Urpi Saco-Chung uses this type of otherness as a starting point to discuss the notion of “Indigenous” at the UN. While recognizing the rich scholarly debate that seeks to study the notion of Indigenous and indigeneity, Saco-Chung problematizes this notion further. She analyses what the UN expects from Indigenous delegates, the efforts of these delegates to perform these expectations, and the multiple ways in which their identities, knowledges and skills exceeds these limited roles. Her contribution describes the bureaucratic hurdles and social codes that Indigenous delegates need to follow before they can make a statement in the UN. This process does not only include getting accreditation and speaking in an official UN language, but it also includes fulfilling the UN criteria of what it means to be Indigenous. Thus, before Indigenous delegates can even make a statement at the UN, they must engage in a long process of adaptation, accommodation and learning about UN expectations, definitions and codes. Saco-Chung laments that the reverse is less likely to happen. The institutional transformation of the UN to adopt various Indigenous ways of knowing, acting and doing is not a priority, and any change is partial and slow.

Through an ethnographic example about the participation of a Guarani-Kaoiwá woman from Matto Grosso do Sul, Brazil, Saco-Chung illustrates what happens when the performance of the Indigenous category goes beyond UN definitions and expectations. In her description, Saco-Chung focuses on the tension created in a UN auditorium by the evident discomfort of this woman when reading a statement in Spanish, one of the UN official languages. Saco-Chung shows that the choice of this woman to face discomfort by going off script and speaking instead in a non-official language, reveals aspects of the Indigenous category that do not fit with the fixed notions of the UN. This decision destabilized the ways of doing in the UN, as interpreters and translators struggled to capture what this Indigenous delegate was trying to communicate.

Instead of putting the burden on the Guarani-Kaoiwá woman for not adapting to the codes of the UN, Saco-Chung prefers to ask what this performance of the Indigenous category reveals. It is not just a matter of languages. Her speaking in Portuguese, instead of reading in Spanish, changed the content and form of her presentation. It showed not that this woman would not comply to the codes of the international institutional setting, but rather that she could do that, do more, and do it in different ways, while the UN struggled to accommodate. Thus, through a simple ethnographic example, Saco-Chung reveals the disciplinary and exclusionary structures of international organization codes and languages, as they reduce the Indigenous category to their own terms and knowledges.

Decolonial initiatives

Seeking to build bridges between different ways of producing knowledge we invited an Indigenous organization from Colombia to write a piece about their experience dealing with dominant categories. The Pijao Group was created by university students from the south of Tolima in Colombia, who self-identify as Indigenous. One of us, Diego Silva, had had the opportunity to meet some of its members while carrying out research about cotton production in their territories. As part of this research, Diego had joined an agroecology school organized by the environmentalist NGO *Grupo Semillas*, where he met some local youth who were part of the Pijao Group. Sometimes the leaders of this group also joined the school actively voicing their opinion about the local struggle of their ancestors for land rights and for the right to autonomously govern their territory.

The piece that the Pijao Group wrote for this issue reads as a poetic chronicle about the growth of the group. The writing is, however, much more than that. It is a reflection on the colonality of the mind of local youth, a register of their transgressions to escape the expectations of western society, and story of self-recognition and revalorization as Indigenous youth.

Viviana Lozano Ducuara and Edwin Alexander Henao Conde write about their experience as founders of the Pijao Group, an Indigenous youth organization from

the Coyaima and Natagaima peoples of the south of Tolima in Colombia. Through the metaphor of a corn seed that is planted, germinates and produces grain, these two Indigenous activists/social scientists go back to 2015 when the group was founded, to tell the story of how the Pijao Group has progressed and impacted their communities.

Funded by university students from the Universidad Nacional in Bogotá, the Pijao Group organized workshops to prepared high school students in the south of Tolima for the State education quality tests, and for public universities entry exams. The objective was to give the local youth the opportunity, through higher education, to design life-projects that went beyond becoming a soldier, a farmer, or a care worker in the city. However, the workshops rapidly expanded beyond the State curriculum to include cultural activities such as hikes and rituals so that participants could recognize and value their territory, tradition, and customs. Recognizing that most education in their territories was a form of recolonization, they sought to accompany their fellow students to alternative worlds.

The Pijao group is a conscious project of self-recognition and decolonization of the mind, of knowledge, and language. Naming and speaking in their own terms is central to the Pijao Group. Their workshops were named “Weaving Knowledges for Life”, the hikes throughout the Indigenous territory were called “Pijao Paths”, and the discussions held in the Group’s headquarters were called “Speaking Pijao”. Since the Pijao language has been largely lost, the act of naming their world, recompiling their ancestors terms, and promoting their words is an effort to revive and re-value their Indigenous identity. They sought to create a “horizontal field between those who teach and those who learn” in which the group could carry out politics through the Indigenous practices of everyday life.

Through their commitment, the Pijao Group has made itself noticeable among other local organizations. Importantly, they do not define themselves as another Indigenous group, but as an ally where the youth of the community, the children of members from different organizations, can find their own space. This has allowed the Pijao Group to fight for a voice in the local discussions between Indigenous leaders and State officials to devise ways in which the Pijao’s future can be protected. They conclude: “The decolonization of thought, identity and language

in the midst of consumerism and exploitation must be remembered and promoted in our daily lives. Thus, one of the most important lessons guiding our sowing and harvesting is to bring politics into every aspect and field of life.”

Indigenous and Afrodescendent participation: Power, Politics, and the Spaces in Between

In “From participation to power” Christopher Kelty (2012, 24) differentiates between two questions related to forms of participation: first, what kinds of participatory structures do organizations, movements, or governments create? and second, how does participation affect or transform the structures of participation? The Indigenous and Afrodescendant movements and organizations discussed by the contributors to this special issue help us to reflect on these questions. The State, the market, the university, and the international organizations all structure participation in ways that are functional to late capitalism. In contrast, Indigenous organizations described by our contributors, such as the Wampi and the Inga nations, as well as Afro-Colombian women’s organizations and Indigenous youth groups, create other very different types of participatory structures often defined as the “Other” by the first set of dominant organizations.

By exploring the codes, languages and categories by which these organizations function, the contributions to this issue shed light on the types of participatory structures that they create. For example, AFROMUPAZ and *Colectiva Matamba* create spaces of healing, memory building, economic solidarity, and resistance to State racism; the *baianas de acaraje* struggle to reproduce the market as a space of economic resilience and cultural expression; while the Pijao Group translates hikes, workshops and language into spaces of identity building and construction of life projects.

Moreover, by exploring the tensions and clashes between dominant and subaltern participatory structures, the contributions to this issue illustrate how Indigenous and Afrodescendant movements participate in and negotiate dominant structures of participation (the State, the market, the UN) and struggle to change them. For

instance, the Wampis refuse to adopt the State's ontological understandings of human-environment relations, pushing back with their notion of "vertical territoriality". The Inga refuse to accept the State's notion of reparation and the State's temporalities of the violence inflicted upon their communities, instead holding fast to the longer-term notions of colonial harm. The Indigenous delegate to the UN goes off script and speaks in a language that the International Institution cannot – or will not --understand.

Ultimately, participation is about power (Kelty 2012, 29). Indigenous and Afro-Colombian movements and organizations create spaces of participation seeking to fulfill different goals. Some of them will be directed at satisfying collectively recognized internal needs, such as providing support in economic, psychological, emotional and security areas. Other efforts are directed outwards, in relationship to dominant structures of participation where they have struggled to participate. As their internal codes, categories, ontologies and languages clash with dominant ones, they try to modify dominant structures so that they can participate in them without giving up their ways of knowing, doing and living.

This is the site of Indigenous politics. French theorist Jacques Rancière (1999) defines "politics" as "disagreements" intended to call attention to inequality. He opposes politics to "policing", the structures that organize society such that some people—"the part without a part" – are not visible within the "partition of the sensible" (2001). For Rancière, politics erupts in that rare moment when those excluded from the existing social order (or who are invisible and inaudible in its current aesthetic distribution) rise up, make themselves visible, and through disagreement, call attention to the "scandal" of their invisibility. For centuries, Indigenous and Afrodescendant peoples have been in this category, their languages and customs considered "noise", to use another of Rancière's terms. Following Rancière, we can characterize the efforts our contributors describe as disagreements that dispute the relegation of Indigenous and Afrodescendants to this category. These disagreements are acts of emancipatory politics, enacting equality by requiring the police order—the university, the UN, the market—to take them into account.

It is however not just a matter of seeking inclusion into existing structures but about changing the police order itself. For example, Marisol de la Cadena (2010) has challenged the branding of Indigenous struggles in Latin America as “ethnic politics:” “a quest to make cultural rights prevail”. Instead, through the recognition of non-humans as actors in Indigenous politics, the notion of “cosmopolitics” suggests a way in which Indigenous peoples’ relations to their environment can expand and defy the participation structures where Indigenous peoples are taken into account. Another example is the Inga’s notion of reparation for the past and current violence exerted against their communities in Colombia (see Lazala in this issue). For the Inga, the State’s recognition of their communities as victims of the Colombian conflict, and who are entitled to reparations, is not an end product. Instead, they use their inclusion into the State’s participatory spaces to change the very categories and definitions structuring their participation.

Of course, disagreements are often met with resistance. As Indigenous and Afrodescendant people challenge the colonial structure of dominant organizations, the State responds through violence and extraction of natural resources, the market forces commodify cultural expressions in ways that detach products and consumers from producers, and the university gives entry to marginalized communities without taking account of their knowledges and histories in their curricula. Although progress has been made in some cases on the State’s recognition of the rights of nature, Indigenous land rights, and legal inclusion, for the most part, it has been carried out on the State’s terms, as the literature on neoliberal multiculturalism described above points out.

Yet, politics is not only waged in a dualistic or contested way. As many of the forms of disagreement described in this volume demonstrate, politics is often carried out in the “spaces in between” hegemonic structures, logics, and sovereignties (see Postero and Fabricant 2019, 114). Precisely because they are struggling against powerful discourses and institutions, Indigenous and Afrodescendant peoples are forced to carry out complex negotiations with more powerful actors, using their languages at times, and in others, taking advantage of the ambiguities that exist with relation to the categories they are supposed to inhabit, asserting their own visions for the future. Negotiating meaning in spaces of uncertainty and

contention, these savvy political actors enact a “camouflaged form of politics”, smuggling in their own notions of autonomy, self-governance, sovereignty, and cosmovisions (Ibid).

Inhabiting these spaces in between also prepares groups for action when the political conjunctures change. We mentioned at the beginning of this introduction that since these articles were written, there has been a wave of mobilizations and civil society uprisings. In Bolivia, Indigenous president Evo Morales resigned in November 2019 after massive protests and street violence following allegations of electoral fraud. In Chile, civil society erupted in 2019 for very different reasons: the costs of neoliberalism became ever clearer after metro fares were raised. In 2019, public outrage grew as massive fires burned across the Amazon due in large part to continued expansion of the agricultural frontier. Moreover, social leaders in Colombia continue to be threatened, intimidated and often assassinated. In 2019 Colombia was considered the country with the highest number of environmentalist leaders assassinated in the world. Many of these leaders are part of Indigenous and Afrodescendent communities who oppose the extraction of natural resources from their territories (Grueso 2012, 367).

In these new conjunctures, Indigenous and Afrodescendant organizations have complemented what Gramsci would call their “wars of position” with more active “wars of maneuver” (Gramsci 1985). In Colombia, for example, Indigenous communities have actively worked to position their territories as victims of the national conflict (Ruiz 2017) and Afrodescendant communities have proposed local programs of territorial development based on the conservation of local habitats (Grueso 2012, 367). In Peru Indigenous communities have sought to redefine the notion of territory based on their cosmovisions to include underground natural resources (Niederberger, in this issue). In Colombia, Ecuador and Bolivia legislation has been developed that recognizes the rights of nature, although this type of recognition remains largely rhetorical (Kotzé and Villavicencio Calzadilla 2017). These are efforts towards redefining the frameworks that are used in their territories to govern the relations between humans and their environments, and a step towards reclaiming autonomy in the governance of their territories. The ongoing work of these groups to position their cosmovisions and categories at the national and

international levels allows them to mobilize their categories when opportunities for social mobilization emerge. In particular, Indigenous notions have been widely used by social movements in Latin America in rejection of mining projects in Ecuador (Sánchez-Vázquez, Leifsen, and Vérdu 2017), seed confiscations in Colombia (Silva and Gutierrez 2020), and the privatization of natural resources in Bolivia (Burguete 2017), to name just a few. In this way, “wars of position” prepare the ground for more effective “wars of maneuver.”

Yet, actively engaging in wars of maneuver is extraordinarily difficult, and risks shutting down the possibilities of negotiating the ambiguous spaces in between. For instance, in Bolivia, tensions between different Indigenous groups had long been simmering, despite the fact that its president was Indigenous and its 2009 constitution purported to establish new rights for Indigenous peoples. Many highland Andean Indigenous people supported president Morales and greatly benefitted from his development program based on natural resource extractivism, especially the newly emerging urban Indigenous middle class and Indigenous coca-growers. But many lowland Indigenous peoples strongly opposed Morales, whom they saw as willing to sacrifice their lands and livelihoods for the country’s “economic liberation” (Postero 2017).

A significant number of highland Aymara had also begun to oppose Morales, arguing his reforms were merely superficial and failed to support Indigenous legal systems and collective projects (Copa Pabón 2018). For many years, these various Indigenous opponents had no choice but to negotiate with Morales’s powerful MAS party, using whatever political openings they could to push for their long-term strategic goals of autonomy. When Morales’s political fortunes were challenged in 2019, however, many Indigenous people refused to support Morales, allying instead, with the mestizo middle class groups opposing Morales (Portugal Mollinedo 2020). This led to horrifying violence, especially after Right-wing Jeannine Añez took over as interim President.

What the 2019 political crisis points out is that the many Indigenous people in Bolivia have very heterogeneous positions vis-à-vis the State, democracy, and indigeneity. This reminds us that the very category of indigeneity is constructed, taking shape in particular moments and places (see Postero 2013; Cadena and Starn

2007). While the Morales government had tried to foment and perform a unified ideal of indigeneity, in practice the plurality of Indigenous positions and interests contributed to his downfall. Clearly, as Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2019) clarifies, this does not mean that democracy has been reestablished in Bolivia, as labor unions, leftist groups and Indigenous groups are still traversed by intersectional inequalities. Thus, Cusicanqui calls for a further pluralization of Indigenous voices that brings together groups of women and men from different communities and ages to continue the anticolonial struggle in Bolivia. She describes this plurality with the Aymara term, *ch'ixi*, a concept that goes beyond hybridity to recognize “the complex mediations and heterogeneous constitution of our societies” (2018:17). By arguing that “el mundo ch'ixi es posible” (the ch'ixi world is possible), Rivera Cusicanqui suggests that the ruptures that can divide a society can also be important resources, forging an “ethical compass” that guides society to “planetariness, solidarity, recognition of differences, respect”, and (citing Rancière) “the equality of intelligences”. (Ibid: 80)

In contrast, strategic essentialism has been key for Colombian Indigenous and Afrodescendant peoples. Indeed, mobilization around identity has resulted in constitutional changes that grant these communities with special rights to land, economic projects and education. It can be argued that strategic essentialism around identity politics in Colombia has been so successful that rural populations that do not self identify, or are not recognized by the State, as “sufficiently” Indigenous or Afro-Colombian are at a disadvantage (Bocarejo 2011). Since these categories are largely defined by the State, some populations are excluded from sharing the benefits of collective victories. At the same time, these categories continue to provide a space of participation from which marginalized groups can voice their needs. Thus, some rural communities seek to recover, cultivate and manufacture their identities as Indigenous and Afrodescendant. However, as reflected by the increasing number of assassinations of Indigenous and Afrodescendant leaders, the success of these groups in organizing around particular identities, projects and ideas is threatening for extreme right wing factions and criminal organizations that seek territorial control in Colombia.

Indigenous and Afrodescendant groups mobilize their identity strategically while

remaining open to working the “in-between” spaces and seeking outside support. This does not only refer to the indigenization of rural communities, but also the construction of social and political networks with allies who recognize their collective identity and claims to local practices and territories (Grueso 382). Thus, while identity categories can become oppressive when they are mobilized for the benefit of particular groups. Also, as we saw in Bolivia, they also provide strategic spaces of participation and emancipation where disagreements can be voiced. Just as there is no need to choose between “wars of position” and “wars of maneuver”, there is no need to choose between pluralism and strategic essentialism when the goal is simultaneously to be included and to transform existing spaces of participation, to create new evolving ones. What is important is to maintain a critical perspective on the particular moments, spaces and forms in which categories are mobilized (including identity categories), as well as on the relational ways in which dominant/subaltern categories are continuously built, resisted and negotiated within and outside Indigenous and Afrodescendant groups.

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JULIA ZULVER¹

Afro-Colombian Women's Organisations in Post-Accord Colombia: Gendering and Racialising Violent Pluralism across the Conflict Continuum in Bogotá, Colombia²

When it comes to Afro-Colombian women's mobilisation in so-called post-conflict Colombia, demands cannot be understood without employing a lens that draws into focus the specifically racial/ethnic dynamics that both shaped and continue to shape their experiences. Cynthia Cockburn is clear that conflict exists along a spectrum for women, and that the official end to hostilities does not necessarily represent an end to violence for women (2004, 2013). When it comes to Afro-Colombian women, however, we are presented with an additional plane of violence.

Colombia's armed conflict shone a light on how violence against Afro-Colombian women was shaped by entrenched patterns of racism established during colonial rule; in this sense, gendered racism became particularly visible during the conflict. These violences, however, transcend binaries of war/peace. Racialised instances of

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violence against women have not disappeared with the end of the conflict. As such, Afro-Colombian women's ongoing resistance highlights a struggle to redefine the racist and patriarchal hierarchies that still function in Colombian society today.

This article will examine the mobilisation strategies of two groups of Afro-Colombian women now living in Bogotá – AFROMUPAZ and the Colectiva Matamba – in order to add an intersectional dimension to growing calls for ongoing theories on the gender of violent pluralism (see Sandvik 2018). Indeed, by recognising and addressing the specific ways in which Afro-Colombian women experience violence because of their positions in society, we will be able to better understand the strategies they continue to employ in an attempt to obtain guarantees on their rights as citizens, as victims, and as women.

Gendered and Racialised Dynamics of Conflict

Women suffered disproportionately during the Colombian conflict (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2017). More than half of the registered victims of displacement are women and to date the Victims' Unit has registered more than 29,000 victims of sexual violence (RUV 2019). Studies have further noted cases where women were specifically raped or sexually tortured by armed actors in order to disrupt the social fabric of the community (see, for example, GMH 2010; CNMH 2011, 2012).

Scholars highlight the multiple ways that experiences of displacement are gendered (Meertens and Stoller 2001; Meertens 2010, 2012; Zulver 2018b, 2020). Meertens notes in a report that the relationship between displacement sexual violence is threefold:

Sexual violence may have been part of the violent acts that caused the forced displacement; threats of sexual violence may have been the direct cause of displacement; and sexual violence may continue as one of the particular vulnerabilities of women during and after displacement (2012).

When it comes to displacement itself, Meertens and Stoller further highlight:

Women are victims and survivors of displacement and uprooting in the first place as widows of rural violence, heads of household suddenly expelled toward the cities; in the second place as spouses, when the effects of violence and uprooting and the necessities of survival touch them differently from men; and in the third place as leaders whose experiences of participation and organization help them to forge new life projects, individual and collective, in the city (2001, 134).

Beyond this, however, evidence shows that Afro-Colombian women have been further targeted based on their position as women and as racialised subjects (Marciales Montenegro 2013, 2015; Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2017; Zulver 2020). Marciales' study on victims of sexual violence in the south of the Chocó department documents that violent actors employed racist language, practices, and stereotypes when violating Afro-Colombian women. Perpetrators forced them into sexual relationships, into prostitution, or raped and sexually tortured them. These acts can be considered a symbolic expression of not only gendered domination of women's bodies, but also of structural racism in the context of armed conflict.

Her argument, then, is that the intersection of race and gender results in a "differentiated impact" of violence for Afro-Colombian women. This violence is historical, and must be studied as such, given ongoing discourses about Black women that date back to colonial times (2015, 72). This is expanded on in a report by the National Centre for Historical Memory, which outlines the ways in which sexual violence against Afro-Colombian women is part of a colonial legacy of domination (2017, 294).

The report outlines:

Social hegemonic discourses about Afro-Colombian women (and their bodies) represent them as inferior humans and ardent/hot-blooded savages. These labels automatically place black women in contexts whereby they are socially discriminated, economically excluded, and likely to be victimised by the armed conflict. Armed actors inflict(ed) violence on them for being women and for being black (paraphrased in Zulver 2020).

Violence on the Continuum

Despite the historic signing of a peace agreement between the FARC and the Colombian government in 2016, ending more than half a century of internal conflict, Colombia continues to face multiple and intersecting dynamics of insecurity (Maher and Thomson 2018; Rettberg 2019). This is particularly the case for many social leaders in Colombia, who have been attacked and killed for their social engagement (Prem et al. 2018). The U.N. Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders noted after his time in Colombia that “in the case of women human rights defenders, they are also exposed to gender specific violations, including gender-based violence, both within their community and organizations and by external actors” (Forst 2018). Violence against social leaders continues, and as such, mobilising for intersectional gender justice remains a high risk activity (Zulver 2018b).

Women also continue to suffer outside of the context of social activism. In June 2018 alone the *Red Feminista Antimilitarista* documented 56 cases of femicide (2018). Disaggregated data show that the majority of these crimes took place in departments that experienced high levels of violence during and in the aftermath of the conflict, including Antioquia and Valle del Cauca, again showing how conflict can be liminal for women (Berry 2018).

A member of the Matamba Collective highlighted that in parts of the country with historical state abandonment and a presence of illegal economies and violent actors (Idler 2019), Black women in particular are deprived of their dignity. The Collective works specifically in the Pacific region, where they say that “ongoing feminicides... are a sign that people are trying to silence the movements of Black women” (Interview, 13 August 2018).

Moreover, there is evidence that shows that young girls— and particularly young Afro girls—are susceptible to nefarious dynamics that draw them into sexual slavery and human trafficking. The *Observatorio de Drogas de Colombia* notes in its report on microtrafficking that girls are vulnerable to becoming consumers of drugs and/or joining distribution groups, particularly in gang-controlled neighbourhoods (2016).

The women of AFROMUPAZ further report that their sons are recruited into drugs gangs as look-outs and small-time dealers.

The Afro-Colombian women interviewed throughout my research have experienced both conflict-related and post-Accord acts of violence. For example, in 2010, long after being displaced, María Eugenia Urrutia was kidnapped from the AFROMUPAZ office in Usme by other paramilitaries and was taken, with her cousin (also a member of the organisation), to the town of Mosquera. Over the following days, they were repeatedly sexually abused. She was told that she had been kidnapped and abused this way as punishment for encouraging other women to denounce the crimes they had suffered (Gómez Carvajal 2015; Moloney 2014). Although 2010 was not officially a post-Accord moment, Urrutia is clear that this violence was a reaction to her gendered and racialised mobilising, rather than related to conflict dynamics writ large.

Afro-Colombian Women's Collective Action

One of the case studies for my doctoral research focused on the organisation AFROMUPAZ, the *Asociación de Mujeres Afro por la Paz*. The group was founded in 2000 by Urrutia, has about 70 members, and is based in Usme, a suburb of southern Bogotá. The members of AFROMUPAZ are displaced women from the Pacific coast, and all of them have survived episodes of conflict-related violence and multiple displacements.

The women of AFROMUPAZ participate in three main activities:

psycho-social healing programmes based in traditional practices, providing economic security to displaced Afro-Colombian women through a series of small business ventures, and legally denouncing past and present acts of violence committed against members of the organisation (Zulver 2018b).

One of their main focuses is the *huerta al perejil* (parsley garden) programme. The 14 steps use dance, song, acting, and relaxation exercises to holistically allow victims of trauma to heal from their pasts. Participants are giving the opportunity, to

remember, heal, forgive, and move forward. Urrutia and the women designed this programme themselves after they found that services provided by the state (sporadic access to psychologists) were not adequately addressing their specific needs.

Beyond this, AFROMUPAZ offers a social safety net for displaced women. The organisation has a house in Usme, a poor neighbourhood in the south of Bogotá. Here, women come every day to engage in the organisation's small businesses; they make beauty products, sew clothes, and bake desserts. They have a nursery where they can leave their children and are offered a hot lunch every day. While the members of AFROMUPAZ do not generate a wage yet, at the time of research (2017) they hoped to expand their businesses so that they no longer have to seek informal employment outside the organisation as well.

They also actively try to engage with the community when it comes to cultural activities. They have open-houses and hold cultural fairs in different part of the city. Finally, they have an active policy of denouncing ongoing violence, including the recruitment of their children. They do so through making reports at the *Fiscalía* and by engaging in protests, marches, and sit-ins. In the past, their activism and their ongoing communications with the Victims' Unit led them to become subjects of collective reparation, a measure within Colombia's transitional justice architecture that allows for collective compensation in cases where the armed conflict had a negative impact on community organisation, culture, etc. (see World Bank 2016). They are one of the few specifically women's organisations in the country that is currently receiving these holistic pay-outs, which include money for new sewing machines, a new headquarters (their own as opposed to rented), and funding of their healing programmes.

On the other hand, the *Colectiva Matamba Acción Afrodiaspórica* (Matamba Afro-Diasporic Action Collective) is an organisation of 13 young Afro-Colombian women based in Bogotá. Some were born in Bogotá, while others suffered displacement from other parts of the country. The group describes itself as a group of "activists, empowered female warriors who display courage and tenacity" (Zulver 2018a).

In contrast to AFROMUPAZ, Matamba tackles structural racism head on through targeted and deliberate community engagement activities. These include hosting anti-racism workshops and lectures for community members, monitoring femicide levels in Colombia, releasing public communications about acts of institutional racism, and participating in marches, protests, and sit-ins. They also participate in cultural activities, including painting murals of Afro-Colombian woman leaders in marginalised neighbourhoods and organising community theatre performances that speak directly about issues of racism. As noted in Zulver (2018a), one member highlights: “we talk about culture because our ancestors resisted through their use of culture, music, and art.”

They work with the *Red Feminista Antimilitarista* to document a monthly record of the murders of women in the country and use this information to lobby the government to better protect women – and particularly Black women – from gender violence by highlighting instances of impunity. They also publish communications via social media in order to ensure that incidents of femicide are pushed through the proper legal channels. Like AFROMUPAZ, Matamba also engages in more traditional iterations of political activism, by denouncing crimes, engaging in sit-ins, protests, and marches.

Different Intergenerational Approaches to Targeting Structural Racism

Studying the actions of these two groups, however, also offers insight into the different intergenerational approaches to targeting structural racism. Indeed, some of AFROMUPAZ’s strategies readily define it as a popular feminist organisation, or an organisation that engages in “class-inflected gender struggles” (Lebon, 2016). My previous research shows that although AFROMUPAZ participates in activities like sewing, cooking, and childcare, their “multiple identities intersect to create a differential feminism that intrinsically tied up with their racial identities” (Zulver 2020). Their community engagement is focused on redress for past (conflict-related) violences and reparation to create possibilities for a more equal future. While much of this is framed within the context of Colombia’s armed conflict, it also offers a critique of more long-term patterns of structural racism.

On the other hand, Matamba's strategies are more closely aligned with those described by Laó-Montes (2016), whose research discusses the emergence of a radical new generation of Afro-Latina feminisms across the region. He refers to a boom in Black feminisms that protest "against the negative effects of neoliberalism and [advocate] for distributive justice, radical democracy, ecological life, gender and sexual equity and anti-racial rights" (2016, 4). Indeed, Colombian academics/activists Vergara Figueroa and Arboleda Hurtado published a political statement that came out of the First International Seminar: "Afrodisaporic Feminist Conspiracy", held in Cali, Colombia, in 2011, which notes:

We conceive of an Afrodiasporic Feminist Conspiracy as a strategy of social mobilization, a practice of solidarity, and a claim for reparative justice. We further propose concrete areas of conspiratorial action focused on deconstructing and challenging entrenched forms of thinking and representing Black/Afro-descendent women in the larger society, as well as practices of domination that divide our movements and communities along axes of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality (2016, 118).

The above statements pertain to the Matamba Collective. In an interview, one of the founders discussed the Collective's focus on intersectionality,³ which differentiates it from the older generations. For her, the Collective is engaged in an "anti-racist, anti-classist struggle [that includes the needs of] lesbian and bisexual Black women. Earlier generations did not understand that sexual orientation also had to be part of the fight" (Interview, 13 August 2018).

What unites the two organisations, however, is the importance that both place on the role of intergenerational exchange, including when challenging patterns of structural racism. Matamba members are well aware that other generations of women have been active in Bogotá for decades, and that they have "enabled many other young women to mobilise as well" (Interview, 13 August 2018). They readily

³ Intersectionality was first academically conceptualized by Crenshaw, who noted that sexism and racism do not exist on "mutually exclusive terrains", and that women of colour have different experiences (particularly in the context of violence against women) that are shaped by different dimensions of their identities. (Crenshaw 1991, 1243).

appreciate that they are able to pursue the strategies they do because of the groundwork set by the previous generation. Moreover, given these linkages with older women, they also consider it important to connect with younger generations as well. They hold workshops with young Afro-Colombian girls in marginalised neighbourhoods in the city, focusing on subjects like sexual education and consent, as well as preserving Afro culture.

AFROMUPAZ has a slightly different approach to younger generations. For these women, it is about ensuring that the children of displaced women do not continue to suffer ongoing violence, be this institutional or structural racism, or conflict-related violence. During an organisation-wide meeting, Urrutia was once moved to tears when discussing the trauma expressed by children of members. “It can’t be a child’s role to wake up to be strong every day... they have to be children,” she said (Group meeting, 4 April 2017). Although most of AFROMUPAZ members’ children were born in Bogotá, the organisation worries about ongoing trauma and racism that extends beyond the conflict context. Such violence, for AFROMUPAZ, is clearly linked to ongoing patterns of racism and racist violence in Bogotá.

Young people (children and teenagers) are also purposefully included in group activities. At a community event attended by members of AFROMUPAZ and their now adult daughters, women took part in a memory activity, whereby they tossed a ball of yarn between them as they stood in a large circle. As the ball crossed between them they created an *atarraya*, a large fishing net. At the end of the activity, one of the leaders (a woman who was displaced to Bogotá decades previously) said to the participants:

As we build the *atarraya*, we are building a new future here in Bogotá. There were many things we couldn’t achieve, but our children can. Bogotá is a new territory for us, but we have a duty to build peace in our communities... the end of my string connects to many other strings, other lives. This activity has allowed us to reflect and think about which moments we want to remember and which we need to forgive. We come from enslaved roots. We don’t have to forget, but we need to make peace in our homes and our daily lives. (Activity, 20 March 2017).

Importantly, many of the Bogotá-born daughters of displaced people in AFROMUPAZ commented throughout the day how important it was for them not

to forget their roots. Particularly given ongoing dynamics of violence, they draw inspiration from their “mothers, aunts, and grandmothers” who are the descendants of *cimarronas*, escaped slaves. This call back to the colonial era once again highlights the understanding that although structural and gendered racism was made visible during the armed conflict, it still exists in the post-conflict moment.

Despite these organisations’ ongoing efforts directed towards healing and preventing violence, Afro-Colombian women in Bogotá continue to face various obstacles. The story of Urrutia and her cousin’s kidnapping provides an example of violence as a direct consequence of gendered and racialised mobilisation. One member of the Matamba Collective highlights: “Regardless of whether the conflict has ended or not... this victimisation shows us the structural racism that doesn’t allow our communities to rebuild themselves” (Interview, 13 August 2018). Despite this, the same member highlights, “if we did not have hope, we wouldn’t still be here. Our capacity to [protect ourselves] ... means that we don’t let the system destroy us” (ibid.).

Mobilisation in the Post-Accord Era

When it comes to mobilisation in the face of violence more generally, wisdom can be taken from Nordstrom, who notes:

[violence] isn’t a passing phenomenon that momentarily challenges a stable system, leaving a scar but no lasting effects after it has passed. Violence becomes a determining fact in shaping reality as people *will* know it, in the future. Part of the way violence is carried into the future is through creating a hegemony of enduring violence across the length and breadth of the commonplace world, present and future (2004, 226).

Auyero expands on this in his work about contentious identities; even after revolts subside, protestors (with no previous experience of collective action) think of these

episodes in personal terms – “their lives have radically changed” (2003, 2).⁴ Especially given the protracted power dynamics of the conflict, high risk mobilisation is a way that women can gain a semblance of control over their own lives; mobilisation is therefore sustained because it has proven successful in the past, and this reinforces its ability to modify the “tomorrows of violence” that women might otherwise feel are inevitable (Nordstrom 2004).

In this sense, mobilisation during the armed conflict provided a prism to assess the ways in which violence against Afro-Colombian women was more than simply a question of conflict-related violence. Indeed, it was based in historical, colonial legacies of racism. The women of AFROMUPAZ, then, mobilised within this conflict context, but also in the post-conflict moment in order to shine a light on the additional challenges faced by Afro-Colombian victims of the conflict.

The Matamba Collective, whose members for the most part did not suffer violence during the armed conflict itself, mobilise against the structural racism that was highlighted and addressed by women like those in AFROMUPAZ. Activism is conveyed through the generations given the transversality of structural and gendered racism beyond the bounds of the conflict/post-conflict moment.

Conclusion

This paper has noted that the Colombian conflict disproportionately impacted Afro-Colombian women, but that elements of this violence has its roots in structural racism that both predates and outlives the armed conflict itself. It further described the characteristics of an established organisation of displaced women, as well as that of a more radical new generation of Afro-Colombian feminists to explain the ways in which both organisations have a deliberate focus on continuing to mobilise against structural and gendered racism.

⁴ See also (Escoffier 2018).

Sandvik notes that the dearth of attention to feminist and women’s organising has left the violent democracies paradigm (Arias and Goldstein 2010) insufficient in its conceptualisation of violence as both gendered *and* political. She continues: “there can and should be many theories on the gender of violent pluralism” (2018, 13). This article has therefore aimed to contribute to a conversation about the need for more in-depth analysis of violent conflict as both gendered and political and, importantly, racialised.

Beyond this, it has aimed to begin a conversation about the “tomorrows of violence” in Colombia,. Although there are different styles of resistance – particularly notable when it comes to organisations of older vs younger generations of Afro-Colombian women – there are also important cross-overs related to fighting ongoing racism that require further analysis. Although AFROMUPAZ and the Matamba Collective’s strategies, and even their defined ‘end goals’, are different, there is a shared understanding of a pursuit of gender justice that critically includes race. Both generations of Afro-Colombian women recognise that an intersectional inclusion of Black women needs to be considered when talking about holistic and lasting views of security – and equality more broadly – in Colombia.

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Spatiality, Temporality and Ontology: Constraints for the Restitution of Indigenous Peoples' Territorial Rights in Colombia²

Introduction

In this article, three limitations to how ethnic land restitution has been carried out in Colombia to date are discussed. The specific restrictions that I mention are related to 1) temporality, 2) spatiality, and 3) to the ontology of the idea of reparations concerning indigenous peoples' territorial rights³. These findings result from fieldwork conducted in 2017 and 2018 in the Aponte indigenous reserve of the Inga people.

The first section of the article briefly describes the history and functioning of Act 1448 of 2011, known in Colombia as the Law on Victims and Land Restitution. In

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³ Territorial rights mean to rule over a territory, including the subsoil, water, and other resources. Territorial rights are inherently collective, and they imply the autonomy to decide how to use the lands and other resources that are contained within a frontier. Indigenous peoples' territorial rights include the right to self-determination, self-government and indigenous justice. Enforced displacement, confinement and forced activities that are not consented by an indigenous people, are violations of territorial rights (Presidencia de la República de Colombia 2011a).

the second section, I describe the case of the Inga people in Aponte, located in the department of Nariño, in southern Colombia. In the third section, I discuss the three limitations mentioned above regarding the land restitution process, followed by a conclusion.

Armed conflict and land restitution for indigenous peoples

Since the 1960s, Colombia has lived an armed conflict between left-wing guerrillas, right-wing paramilitary groups, and state forces. Indigenous peoples have been particularly affected by it. According to the last available official figures, 344.947 indigenous people have been displaced during this time frame (UARIV 2019). In 2018, a report by the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia - ONIC) signaled that 2,954 indigenous people have been murdered in the conflict, and 1,884 armed confrontations have violated indigenous peoples' territorial rights. In addition, 2,015 cases of threats to indigenous people have occurred, and 123 incidents of killings with multiple victims have taken place in indigenous reserves (ONIC 2018).

The Colombian state has adopted a series of scattered laws and public policies for providing reparations to victims, intending to promote a political solution to the internal armed conflict. These mechanisms intend to consolidate peace and democracy. Nevertheless, they have not represented a unified strategy (Justicia Transitional n.d). The most relevant legal tool for the victims of armed conflict that appeared before the Peace Agreements signed with the FARC in 2016, is Act 1448 of 2011 on Victims and Land Restitution. Through this Act, the government of former president Juan Manuel Santos recognized the existence of the internal armed conflict. This recognition was a radical shift in comparison with the denialist perspective held by the previous president, Álvaro Uribe. Uribe considered guerrilla groups to be narcotraffickers and terrorists, not political actors.

Act 1448 includes a series of ambitious measures to assist and provide reparations for individuals and collectives that have been affected by any of the actors of the

conflict, comprising the state forces. To do so, it created two specialized public institutions: The Unity for Victims, and the Unity of Land Restitution (from now on URT) (Ministerio de Justicia n.d). Act 1448 of 2011 incorporates a transformative approach. It means that reparations are supposed to transform the social circumstances that produced the damages, not only to re-establish the conditions that existed before them. This perspective is necessary to fulfill a fundamental principle of this Act, which guarantees non-recurrence. To re-establish the situation exactly as it was before extreme acts of violence, characterized by discrimination and vulnerability, would not be enough to build long-lasting peace, justice and a broader democracy (Blanco et al 2017).

Given the high rates of internal enforced displacement in Colombia, one of the most relevant measures of transformative reparation that this act includes is the restitution of abandoned and stripped lands. The process of land restitution has two stages: the administrative and the judicial. URT leads the former. The URT documents the cases, and it includes them in the National Register of Abandoned and Usurped Lands. Then, the URT submits a demand for land restitution to specialized tribunals, where judges or magistrates are responsible for making final decisions. Because of the transformative perspective of Act 1448, the judges in charge have a fundamental role that goes beyond the usual scope of civil law. They have to mobilize constitutional law to make decisions with the capacity of transforming structural inequalities and discrimination that put some social groups in situations of particular vulnerability vis-à-vis armed conflict (Blanco et al. 2017).

Act 1448 puts a time limit for considering cases. Victims can request reparations for the damages that have occurred since 1985. Nevertheless, the restitution of lands can only be demanded for events that occurred after January 1, 1991, coinciding with the year of the adoption of the latest Colombian Constitution. The Act is also limited in terms of its time validity. It was initially established for ten years (2011-2021). In 2019 it was extended for ten additional years, meaning that it will be in force until 2031 (Redacción Judicial 2019).

After the adoption of Act 1448, indigenous and afro-Colombian organizations participated, separately, in the creation of two decrees that incorporate an ethnic differential approach in the provisions created by it (Ruiz 2017). As a consequence,

Decree-Law 4633 on territorial rights restitution for indigenous communities, and Decree-Law 4635 for Afro-descendant communities were adopted (Presidencia de la República de Colombia 2011a, 2011b). As Ruiz signals, thanks to the engagement of national indigenous peoples' platforms, Decree-Law 4633 incorporated the notion of territory as a victim of internal armed conflict. This idea highlights the vital and spiritual links that indigenous communities establish with the lands that they inhabit. Decree-Law 4633 does not define ancestral territories only as collective property, but also as an indispensable part of indigenous peoples' spiritually and kinship networks (Ruiz 2017).

The concept territory as a victim implies to transform an individualistic and liberal conception of reparations for victims of armed conflict. It highlights the collective dimension of the damages produced by armed conflict. It suggests that the violent rupture of the relationship established by indigenous communities with their surroundings is one of the most destructive effects of armed conflict (Ruiz 2017; Presidencia de la República de Colombia 2011a). Despite the vast normative innovations achieved through the advocacy of indigenous peoples' organizations, in practice, the conception of indigeneity enacted by the Colombian state, impedes the effective implementation of these provisions.

The case of the Inga people from Aponte

The relevance of a wide conceptualization of the right to territory, as proposed by indigenous organizations in Colombia, is illustrated by the case of the Inga people from Aponte, located in Nariño, in southern Colombia. During my fieldwork in this community in 2017 and 2018, professionals from the URT came to collect information to develop a demand for the restitution of territorial rights, in the frame of Decree-Law 4633. The lawsuit of the Inga from Aponte was sent to the Land Restitution Court in the city of Pasto (capital of Nariño) in late 2018. At the

moment of writing, the request has still not received a final decision⁴.

The Inga are a community of Quechua origin that inhabits several departments of southern Colombia. They began settling in the area where the Aponte reserve is located today in the XVI century, when some Inga families arrived from the department of Putumayo (Cabildo Mayor del Pueblo Inga de Aponte 2009). In the late 1980s and early 1990s, settlers from all around the country came to this reserve, attracted by the area's flourishing business of illegal poppy crops and heroin production. This activity emerged as a lucrative alternative to widespread poverty and state neglect experienced by the local population. Heroin trafficking became a significant source of funding for several armed groups in the region, as multinationals of illicit drugs were expanding (UNDP 2019).

Armed groups started to dispute the control over the territory and trafficking networks in Aponte. At the end of the 1990s, paramilitary attacks began, based on the accusation that local residents were 'abettors of the insurgency.' As a response to the expansion of illicit crops, the Colombian government launched a campaign of large-scale aerial crop spraying with glyphosate. Glyphosate fumigations caused profoundly negative environmental and social impacts, adding to the numerous human rights violations suffered by the Inga people and peasant settlers in Aponte (UNDP 2019).

Inga people have lived in this region of Nariño since the XVI century. However, only in 2003, they obtained the legal recognition of their territory as a contemporary indigenous reserve. From that moment onward, they began a process of institutional reform that allowed them to eradicate illicit crops from their entire territory, with the support of a government-funded program for voluntary manual eradication. The elimination of poppy crops prompted the departure of armed groups. As part of their process of institutional strengthening after this withdrawal, community leaders approached the URT in 2015 to request the restitution of their

⁴ As of September 30, 2019, only 14 sentences of ethnic territorial rights restitution have been emitted, in almost ten years of operation of Act 1448. Furthermore, the implementation of the measures of integral reparation included in the issued sentences is deficient (AURIV 2019).

territorial rights. This process constitutes an example of the ways in which indigenous peoples contest the limited vision of indigeneity that the Colombian state enacts.

Space, indigeneity and the restitution of territorial rights

As Radcliffe (2017) signals, indigeneity is a relational position that aims at producing difference in a particular way, which “is always embedded in power differentials at multiple scales” (p. 221). Indigeneity is deeply related to historical and institutional expressions of power regimes. Dynamics of social reproduction, legal titling of lands and construction of conceptions of indigeneity, produce concrete configurations of society and space (p. 226).

The struggle for territorial rights under the figure of the reserve is one of the main priorities of indigenous social movements in Colombia. The spatial limits of the indigenous reserve are also the boundaries of the space upon which the fundamental rights to self-determination and prior consultation contained in Colombia’s legal framework can be exerted. Nevertheless, the reserve is not an ancestral form of territoriality⁵.

The current defense by all the ethnic minorities in Colombia of territorial rights in the form of indigenous reserves, it taking place because it serves as a way of

⁵ The indigenous reserves (in Colombia *resguardos indígenas*) were adopted in 1592 and afterward derogated during the second half of the XVIII century. They were initially constituted to control the indigenous populations by the colonizers, to group them and facilitate the exploitation of their work. In the XX century, the indigenous reserves started to be considered a form of protection against the process of ethnic and cultural amalgamation that Colombia was going through. Finally, with the expedition of Law 135 of 1961 on Agrarian Reform, the titling of lands to indigenous peoples was reactivated (Garzón 2017). In 1991, the new Colombian Constitution recognized indigenous peoples’ right to self-determination, to autonomous government, and the right to customary justice systems. That same year, Law 21 of 1991 ratified International ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. With this, indigenous peoples achieved the recognition of the right to prior consultation regarding any kind of project to be held in the areas recognized as indigenous territory (Pineda 1997).

countering the commodification of land and subsequent cultural assimilation and ethnic disappearance. But many Inga leaders highlight the fact that the indigenous reserve does not match with their ancestral forms of territoriality. Inga people do not consider that their territory is limited to the hectares of land that the state officially recognized as such in 2003, when former Colombian Institute of Rural Reform created the reserve through Resolution 013 (INCORA 2003).

The Inga people, of Quechua origin, came to Nariño from Peru. They continuously circulate around the the Andean mountains, and they consider the entire region to be indigenous territory. Moreover, the indigenous reserve of the Inga of Aponte, originally constituted during colonial rule around 1700, was larger than the area included in the official resolution of adjudication of the collective territory. An Inga elder expressed to me his thoughts in this regard:

The Colombian state wants to lock us up in a cage. We, as a territory, have been locked at this point. But spiritually, we are the owners of this mountain range, of the Doña Juana mountains and all those limits. They are allocating us this point of Aponte, but we are all united. From Caquetá, Putumayo and Cauca. So, we, all the reserves, belong together. We may not come from the same indigenous ethnicity, but since we are grouped within a territorial reserve, we are all stuck together, the whole mountain range [cordillera]. So, they shouldn't look only at the reserve of Aponte; we are the owners of all of this ... the Central Mountain Range until arriving in Peru, all of these are indigenous territories (Inga elder 2018, my translation).

The indigenous reserve results from the strategy of the state to confine difference to better administer it, creating limited and legalized geographical boundaries within which ethnicity can be enacted, differentiated from the dominant mestizo space. Despite attempts by indigenous communities to introduce the concept of territory as a victim into legal land restitution mechanisms, the state's failure to incorporate a wider definition of indigenous territoriality has reinforced the legalized link between indigeneity and an enclosed space (Bocarejo 2014).

Radcliffe states that the definition of indigeneity enacted by modernity's geographical imagination naturalizes its association with "an (almost magnetic) attachment to locale, a once pristine place" (2017, p. 223). This link has significant consequences in the possibilities that indigenous peoples have for undertaking

certain spatial practices and enacting certain kinds of mobility (Radcliffe 2017, p.223). The Inga leaders expected to obtain more land through the process of territorial rights restitution. According to them, this was the only way of being substantially compensated by the state. One elder explained to me his perspective on the reparations scheme:

If the state wanted to compensate us, the officials should tell us - we have a certain amount of money for you to buy land, not in the reserve, but outside. That would be the only real reparation for us. Families have grown, what has not grown are our lands. We have been victims since colonization... we allocate 50% or 60% of our territory to the conservation of forests because this is our priority, so the area that we have for agriculture is not big enough... (Inga elder 2018, my translation)

However, the URT refused to include such a request in the list of pretentions to be sent to the Land Restitution Court. According to them, this was not feasible. As Radcliffe signals, indigenous peoples are subject to forced displacement, promoted in many ways by the same actors who have defined indigeneity as an identity that must be confined within a limited space. She points out that this “highlights how authenticity and ‘prior presence’ are less relevant than the forms of power and economy that produce indigeneity continuously in relation to the non-Indigenous subjects, sovereignty, environment, the academy, and policy” (2017, p.226).

Land dispossession and the politics of temporality

Shifting temporalities of justice and indigeneity are at stake in the struggle of the Inga people of Aponte to keep their territorial rights. A central question for the political processes in this community has been whether social justice is found by looking back or ahead. The response from the leaders of the community is that social justice regarding territorial rights is found in the ancestral past, rather than in a future construction.

There is a fundamental contradiction between the temporality of reparations, the temporality of land dispossession, and the temporality under which the members of the indigenous government of Aponte understand the idea of compensation for

their territorial rights. All these rights claims entangle a conflicting and unsettled notion of the relationships between territory, temporality, law, and politics. The Inga authorities translate the state's legal concept of reparations into the idea of harmonization of the territory. A woman leader of the community explained this concept to me in the following way:

For us, social justice means harmony and spiritual and social balance, which is achieved through respect of oneself, and of nature. Harmony is maintained through our own processes. But not according to what is now, to the current realities that we are living, but rather, according to what should be (*lo que debería ser*). And of course, to re-establish the order of things as it should be, we don't have to go back in time ten years, but many, many years further back [...] Otherwise, we are condemned to stay in the same situation that we have now (Inga leader 2018, my translation).

For the Inga, the violence exerted against them did not start 60, 50, or 30 years ago. It has been an ongoing process since colonization. To achieve the harmonization of the territory, that according to the leader mentioned above, means 'spiritual and social balance,' it would be necessary to return to the farthest past, exploring the remnants of ancestral memory that are only accessible by spiritual means.

In contrast, dispossession is a reiterative and persistent phenomenon, constitutive of state formation in Colombia. However, current legal definitions of land dispossession indicate that the restitution process is viewed as a direct consequence of the last phase of the internal war in Colombia, and that land restitution can only be requested for cases that occurred since 1991. From this perspective, land dispossession is understood as an exceptional phenomenon, and as a collateral effect of the armed conflict (Raiz-al 2015).

As a consequence, indigenous peoples' victimization is framed as something exceptional, rather than as part of a much longer and broader historical process. Such a frame is embedded in the aspiration to rectify indigenous peoples' continuous collective dispossession through circumscribed legal remedies (Raiz-al 2015). As Meertens (2016) has pointed out, the transformative potential of Act 1448 is related to the exceptionality and temporality of its measures. Nevertheless,

this is also one of its fundamental limitations regarding the long-lasting, structural land dispossession that indigenous peoples face in Colombia.

Indigenous peoples' vulnerability to human rights violations is related to the ongoing effects of colonial history and its legacies, and not only with the 'exceptional condition of civil war' (Raiz-al 2015). Because of this, the logic of exceptionality of transitional justice, and the logic of repeated dispossession in the history of state formation in Colombia is a contradiction that profoundly affects indigenous peoples. Such opposition prevents a substantial exercise of their recognized fundamental rights. Additionally, the logic of legal remedies as a future-oriented project enters in a strange relationship with the concept of reparation as harmonization of the indigenous territory.

The fact that the state intends to compensate the community only for the processes of land dispossession that took place from 1991 to 2018, in the frame of what it officially recognizes as the internal armed conflict, does not allow the Inga community to obtain meaningful harmonization of their territory. To the indigenous leaders, this would require spiritual healing of the relationship between communities and their territories, guaranteeing durable collective wellbeing and survival over time. The state does not provide sufficient means to reach enduring harmonization. For this reason, it is not possible to guarantee that dispossession will not happen again. Structural conditions of discrimination against indigenous peoples, linked with long-standing historical processes, must be transformed in order to do so.

Despite the recognition of territory as victim in Decree-Law 4633, the way in which this Decree has been applied so far, reinforces a vision of indigeneity that reproduces unequal and fragmented categories of access to citizenship. Paradoxically, this process occurs through the reinforcement of an imperative of ethnic diversity to impoverished rural communities. Ethnic diversity and victimization become the main categories of visibility under which the state perceives them, and through which it appears possible to establish a dialogue about responsibilities to guarantee collective fundamental rights (Ruiz 2017; Bocarejo 2014).

Ontology of the damages, ontology of the reparations

One day, during my fieldwork in the Inga reserve, I visited the coffee farm of an older woman to help her harvest the mature red beans. While we worked, she told me about a vision that she had during an *ambiwaska* ceremony. During her vision, she saw her ancestor, Taita Carlos, crying tears of blood for the destruction of the territory. He felt so sad because his people had allowed illicit crops to be introduced into the territory, because they had permitted deforestation, and many more types of degradation. For her, this vision meant that the territory has not yet regained harmony.

In 2013, nine years after the departure of armed actors from the Inga territory, a massive landslide destroyed the urban center of the indigenous reserve of Aponte. The public school, the church, the building of the indigenous government and almost all of the houses were lost. As a consequence, the Inga members affected by the catastrophe have lived in provisional shelters for the past six years. The authorities of Aponte consider that the 2013 landslide is a consequence of the disharmony between nature, spiritual beings and the community that has existed in their territory since the expansion of heroin production and armed conflict. However, the URT refused to include the landslide and destruction of the urban center of the reserve in the list of damages to be sent to the Land Restitution Court, as part of the demand for restitution of territorial rights. The institution argued that it was not possible to demonstrate a causal relationship between armed conflict and the landslide.

As scholars such as Ruiz (2017) and Jaramillo (2014) have signaled, until now, reparations of victims' rights with a focus on ethnicity in Colombia tend to mobilize preestablished formulas and limited options of possible claims prescribed by the state. In this way, as indicated by Ruiz, through these policies, the distinction between 'knowledge' and 'belief', continues to be reinforced, reducing the possibilities for understanding the harms of armed conflict and its possible remedies (Ruiz 2017).

The decrees of ethnic territorial rights restitution include relevant formal innovations. Nevertheless, how these decrees have been implemented until now by

the Colombian state, reinforces a definition of indigeneity that reproduces unequal categories of access to citizenship, and to the full enjoyment of individual and collective human rights. This outcome is due in part to the temporality, spatiality and ontology of the idea of reparations that the state enacts. Despite these limitations, indigenous peoples keep contesting and expanding such notions. In this manner, they enlarge the possibilities for expressing their territorialities, temporalities and ontologies.

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THOMAS NIEDERBERGER¹

Were there Nonhumans in Bagua? The Gobierno Territorial Autónomo de la Nación Wampis and the Emergence of Vertical Territoriality in the Northern Peruvian Amazon²

The territory of the Wampis nation integrates diverse spaces whose inhabitants are all related to each other. *Entsa*, the aquatic space, is where the *tsunki shuar* live. *Nunka*, the earth space, is inhabited by [...] human beings, the animals and their owners, *iwanch* and *tijae*, the plants and their mothers, particularly *nunkui*, who lives inside the earth, as well as the rivers, hills and waterfalls. *Nayaim*, the air, or heaven space, which is not separated from earth, is inhabited by *Etsa* (sun), our guide, *yaa* (stars) and *Nantu* (moon) as well as *ujumak* and many more beings that give us their power, and this is where our ancestors dwell. All these spaces are alive and depend on each other. Our nation and its people are part of this territory.

(Statute of the Wampis Nation, Article 21: Cultural definition of the Wampis territory (author's own translation))

As proclaimed in a general assembly of the Wampis people in November 2015, the Gobierno Territorial Autónomo de la Nación Wampis (GTANW) seeks self-determination over an 'integral territory' of 1.3 million hectares in the northern

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Peruvian Amazon. In the GTANW's statute, this territory is defined as being alive and holds a variety of interrelated human and nonhuman beings. By invoking *tsunki*, *nunkui*, *ujumak* and the rest, the statute departs from the use of purely legal and eco-technocratic terminology in past public statements by Wampis political organisations. The first indications of this shift coincide with the uprising at Bagua, to which the title of this article refers.

Responding to a neoliberal attack under then president of Peru, Alan García, in 2009 around 5,000 indigenous warriors – among them 1,200 Wampis – clashed with police, resulting in the ‘massacre of Bagua’ (or ‘Baguazo’) on 5 June, with an official death toll of thirty-four (ten civilians and twenty-four police) and hundreds wounded. Marisol de la Cadena notes the reaction of García to the protesters at Bagua in order to illustrate the scandal caused by the appearance of nonhuman actors on the political stage. Responding to the indigenous who ‘claimed the rivers [...] as their brothers’³ in arguing against the presence of extractive companies, García famously uttered: ‘Who are 400,000 natives to tell 28 million Peruvians that you have no right to come here? This is a grave error, and whoever thinks this way wants to lead us to irrationality and a retrograde primitivism’ (cited in De la Cadena 2015). The contempt expressed by this former Peruvian president may explain why indigenous people have shied away from mentioning relations with nonhumans in the past, even when in the presence of sympathetic audiences and anthropologists. In this context, the incidents at Bagua amounted to an ‘ontological conflict’, challenging the hegemonic assumption of an all-encompassing modernity with its underlying nature–culture divide (Blaser 2013).

In this article, I trace how Wampis have started openly and visibly to mobilise nonhuman actors in eco-political struggles. This opens a vertical dimension to the

³ De la Cadena here cites an interview with a face-painted Awajún man called Lenny, from the video ‘Los Sucesos de Bagua’ (www.servindi.org/producciones/videos/13083, minute 4:30) [accessed 19.09.2018]. Rather than being a reference to a specific water being such as *tsunki*, he seems to make a general comment on the importance of rivers and water. A similar statement is made by Awajún leader Santiago Manuin: ‘the forest, the air, the hills are our brothers [...] our Bible is written there’ (author’s own translation, cited in Espinosa 2009).

defence of territory – the extension of relationships into the underground and atmosphere – which comes to the fore in parallel with the advancing recognition of nonhumans as right-holders (Surrallés 2017).

Here, I present results from engaged anthropology as a member of the *equipo técnico* (technical team) of the GTANW's intermediate governance level, the Gobierno de Cuenca Kanus (the former federation of Rio Santiago, FECOHRSA) – a role carried out over a two-year period (2016–2018). In April 2019, I returned to Peru and discussed the main hypothesis of this article with several of the main leaders and intellectuals in the GTANW – the *pamuk* (president) Wrays Pérez, Juan Nuningo, Julio Hinojosa and Kefren Graña – as well as with my research partner Geronimo Petsain.

To sum up these discussions, Wampis leaders insist that nonhumans have always been central for territorial defence, even though this was not acknowledged publicly or in written form. Instead, they used the conservationist language of “protecting nature, forest and climate” as placeholder for the care of relationships with nonhumans. The change to an explicit invocation came with the realisation that to support their claim for the integral territory, a legal fundament based on ancestral usage and practices was needed. Going beyond the horizontal dimension of territoriality, the underground and the wider atmosphere became increasingly important in the context of oil and mining projects as well as for conservationist and carbon offset schemes. In this manner, indigenous leaders' mediation and translations between ontological features and global eco-political discourses prepared the ground for an emergent eco-autonomy that includes what I call ‘vertical territoriality’.

Introducing the ‘integral territory’ and autonomous government

The Wampis territory is situated in the Andean foothills, South of the Ecuadorean border, along the two rivers Santiago and Morona (Kanus and Kankaim in Wampis); it has a population of around 15,000 individuals. As part of the Jivaro (or Chicham) group, they have been known for a strong warrior ethics ever since their

successful expulsion of the Spanish conquistadores from their lands in 1599. Only with the militarisation in the context of border wars with Ecuador in the 1940s did the Peruvian state take control of the area (Campion 2018). From the 1950s onwards, Wampis allowed missionaries to open schools, settling in riverside “native communities” and during the 1970s–1990s obtained legal land titles for individual communities.

The genesis of the Wampis nation’s autonomous territorial government (GTANW) and the vision of forming an integral territory can be traced to two meetings of the regional federation CORPI San Lorenzo (Coordinadora Regional de Pueblos Indígenas) in 1995 and 1996. There, representatives of various peoples of the Loreto region drew draft maps of their integral territories and resolved to seek land titles ‘per people’ instead of the existing fragmented titles that were designated ‘per community’ (Noningo 2018; Chirif, García Hierro and Chase-Smith 1991).

After a long time gap, from 2007 onwards CORPI assisted in preparing the paper groundwork: defining borders, solving related disputes and commissioning legal and anthropological expertise (Garra and Riol Gala 2014). In the accompanying debates, it was resolved that an integral territory also called for an institution of governance – an autonomous territorial government – for its representation towards the state; this was a task that the previous federations of communities were no longer able to fulfil due to their fragmentation.

In November 2015, the Wampis were the first people in Peru to officially proclaim their autonomous government and integral territory, at a general assembly in the village of Soledad with 300 representatives of 85 communities. They adopted the statute of the Wampis nation, elected a *pamuk* and approved a first ordinance.⁴ Carefully drafted along the lines of the UN Declaration on the Rights of

⁴ ‘Pueblo Wampis conforma primer gobierno autónomo indígena del Perú’, *Servindi*, 30 November 2015, <https://www.servindi.org/actualidad/144577> [accessed 19.09.2018]. The Awajún, Achuar, Kandoshi, Cocama-Cocamilla, Kichwa, Chapra, Shawi and Shiwilu are advancing in the same direction. The total self-demarcated territory of these peoples covers 9.3 million hectares (about the size of Portugal) in the northern Peruvian Amazon (Surrallés and Tuesta 2017).

Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization (ILO), the GTANW has received considerable international attention. Despite this, the Peruvian government has so far not taken an official position regarding the Wampis' exercise of self-determination.



A group of Wampis youth ready for a three-day vision-seeking trek in the Kampankis hills, July 2016

There are various motives behind the formation of integral territories for different peoples, including internal political factors and the need to resolve border disputes (Surrallés 2016). Wampis leaders stress the need for ‘territorial defence’ against external threats, and in particular, the urge to protect the Kampankis range of hills, which constitutes the core of the Wampis territory. It is here that many of the present generation’s (grand-)parents settled along the headwaters before moving to the riverbanks in the 1960s and where they still hunt and fish. Crucially, it is also the place for vision-seeking (see below).

However, the Kampankis had not previously been titled, remaining nominally “state-owned” land. Wampis leaders had first sought to close this gap through categorising it as a conservation area, leading to a provisory status as ‘reserved for national park’ – the Zona Reservada Santiago Comaina. However, in 2004 an agreement to implement another new national park on the border with Ecuador, in

untitled ancestral territory of the Awajún and Wampis (the Parque Nacional Ichigkat Muja – Cordillera del Cóndor) was revoked by the state under President Alan García: in a unilateral decision, the area of the park was cut almost by half, freeing up the remainder for mining concessions. To make matters worse, in 2007 an oil concession of over 853,000 hectares was issued (Lote 116), superposed on titled community lands and the Kampankis hill range (Barclay, García Hierro, and Huaco Palomino 2009; Garra 2012). Having lost trust in the state's willingness to conserve the area, Wampis leaders decided to advance the formation of the integral territory instead, which includes Kampankis.

The need to resist the imminent threat posed by the Lote 116 oil concession was the main motivation for Wampis to participate in large numbers in the two *paro amazonico* mobilisations in 2008 and 2009, alongside opposition to a package of legislative decrees that allowed the sale and individualisation of native title land (Manacés Valverde and Gómez Calleja 2010) and which culminated in the violent clashes at Bagua on 5 June. The resistance was successful inasmuch as the legislative decrees were derogated, and in August 2018 the Supreme Court cancelled the Lote 116 concession because it had not been consulted according to ILO convention 169, thereby setting a precedent for Peru.⁵

The neoliberal attack under President García not only called into question the legal basis of the Wampis' relationship with the state but also showed what its limitations were in the first place: what for the Wampis was their own territory, the state regarded as limited rights to the land surface. Repeatedly, I heard Wampis individuals mention how scandalised they were to hear from state agents that 'everything 30cm below the ground belongs to the state'. This underscored their motivation to reclaim an 'integral territory', not only horizontally but also vertically, below and above the ground. In the section of the Wampis statute that opens this article, nonhumans cover the entire range of relationships to the

⁵ 'Corte Superior suspende la exploración en el Lote 116 porque no fue consultada', *La República*, 29 August 2018 <https://larepublica.pe/politica/1308055-corte-superior-suspende-exploracion-lote-116-consultada> [accessed 19.09.2018].

territory, including forest, waterbodies (abode of *tsunki*, master of aquatic life), underground (abode of *nunkui*, mother of edible plants) but also the air and space.

The appearance of nonhumans in text written by Wampis themselves is a recent phenomenon. A review of the archive of FECOHRSA (Federación de Comunidades Huambisas del Río Santiago, one of the GTANW's precursors) for the period 1995–2009, which includes assembly minutes and correspondence with various authorities, shows an increasing prominence of conservationist terminology but hardly any mention of concepts in Wampis language and even fewer references to nonhuman agency. This can be explained by the aim of these documents, written in a formal style in a foreign language, to build legitimacy and gain recognition from the state, avoiding anything that may be judged as signs of 'irrationality and retrograde primitivism' (Alan García, cited above). The explicit importance assigned to ontological features in the Wampis statute of 2015 thus shows a recent change, which coincides with the Baguazo.

Mobilising nonhumans for the defence of territory

There are few explicit and public invocations of nonhumans registered for the period shortly before and during the Baguazo, but it can be argued that the ground was prepared there. Based on interviews with Awajún leaders about the internal dynamics of the mobilisation, Silvia Romio (2018) describes a revival of forms of organisation, leadership roles, the vision-seeking of warriors through *ayahuasca* rituals, the public exposition of such visions by elders and the performance of *anen* songs. The Wampis leaders I spoke with confirmed the important contribution of women who had stayed in the villages during the mobilisation, where they gathered to sing *anen* to protect their husbands and sons in faraway Bagua. The power of *anen* songs works through the invocation of nonhumans, ancestor spirits and the like. Many credit the fact that no Wampis were killed in the confrontation to the protective power of these songs, which were also communicated through non-

traditional means such as radio transmitters. This ‘public’ quality of *anen* – previously treated as secret knowledge – seems to be a new phenomenon.⁶

This ancestral knowledge was guarded, there were many women and men who knew – when there were internal conflicts, they used this practice too. Therefore, when this serious confrontation took place, the women and persons who knew these songs, the *anen*, had to do it, because this was effective. There was this belief, this faith. So, we said: Those who are of the religions, pray! Those who know *anen*, do it! Because therein is our power. We young people, ready with our laws, to dispute with them. (Juan Nuningo, interview, 23 April 2019).⁷

Juan Nuningo further mentioned that the volunteers preparing to travel to Bagua were asked to comment on their visions, and if a person had a dream that was interpreted as indicating weakness or danger he was recommended to stay at home. The qualities of the *waimaku* visionary warriors thereby gained new relevance, and in consequence so did vision-seeking practice and use of the psychoactive plants tobacco (*tsaan*), brugmansia (*maikua*) and ayahuasca (*natem*). After being out of fashion for a long time, due to missionary influence, the Wampis statute now contains a section about the ‘duty to encourage [these plants] use in young people’. While these changes can be linked pretty directly to the Baguazo, for other practices that relate to nonhuman agency the connection is not so obvious.

Both Juan Nuningo and Julio Hinojosa explain that they came to realise the necessity of setting down the importance of nonhumans in writing due to the need to legally substantiate the ownership claim over the Kampankis hills. This happened

⁶ In ethnographic literature, *anen* are described as secret knowledge, passed on like precious property and mostly sung in solitude or silently (Brown 1986; Codjia 2017).

⁷ ‘estaban guardados los conocimientos ancestrales, había muchas mujeres y varones que conocían – cuando al momento de estos problemas, conflictos internos, entre ellos también, hacían esta práctica. Entonces, cuando habido este enfrentamiento serio, esas mujeres conocen eso, personas que conocen los cantos anteriores, el *anen*, tenía que hacerlo, porque eso daba efecto. Había esa creencia, esa fe. Entonces decimos hay que hacer eso. Los que son de religiones, que ore! Los que conocen anen, también que lo hagan! Porque ahí esta nuestro poder. Eso ha sido así. Nosotros nuevos jóvenes, personas preparados con nuestros leyes, para discutir con ellos.’

in the context of meetings and discussions about a cultural-historical mapping project in 2007 and 2008, shortly before the Baguazo.

Only then, in the assemblies, did we think: what is it that are we trying to protect? What is here? Here are the waterfalls and in the waterfalls there are the *arutam* [ancestor spirits]. In the mountains are the *tijaes* [forest people], right? And what dwells in the depths of the rivers and lakes? The *tsunkis*. And inside the earth? There is *nunkui*, who is sacred, she has to be respected. (Julio Hinojosa, interview 24 April 2019)⁸

This constituted a shift as, in Nuningo's words, before 'we only said that we defend our territory, our forest, because there are the medicinal plants, the animals that we eat, it's our market – only this'. Interestingly, Nuningo reckons that this was encouraged by the negotiations with state functionaries, who used the lack of *sustento tecnico* (technical justification) as an argument to put down Wampis demands. Understanding that the spiritual relationships with the territory were protected under ILO 169 and UNDRIP, Wampis leaders therefore sought to explain these connections in written form. The anxiety to stop the negative impacts of oil exploration made it especially urgent to insist that these relationships covered the underground realm as well: if *tsunki*, the "mother of the river", was scared away by noise and contamination, there would be no more fish; and regarding *nunkui*, 'for the oil exploration, they make the earth tremble, thus, they [*nunkui*] flee [...] the yucca loses productivity, the fertile soil can become infertile, it can't produce' (Julio Hinojosa).⁹ Note that these are impacts that Wampis believe already happen at the exploration stage, due to the use of explosives, noisy machines, motor-boats and so forth, which are otherwise seen as relatively unproblematic from an

⁸ 'Ahí recién, en las asambleas, hemos dado cuenta, porque vamos proteger? Que cosa hay acá? Acá están las cataratas, en las cataratas están los *arutam*. En las cordilleras están los *tijaes*. No? Y acá en algunas partes, están cuencas grandes como Santiago y Morona, y que cosa hay dentro en la profundidad? En los pozos. Están los *tsunkis*. Y interior de la tierra, que cosa esta? Esta *nunkui*, adentro, que es sagrada, hay que respetarla.'

⁹ '*Nunkui* - la exploración de petróleo, lo hacen temblar la tierra, entonces, ya pues, también se huyen [...] ya no da la productividad de la yuca, ya la tierra fértil puede volver a ser infértil, no puede producir.'

environmentalist perspective. This perception of an existential threat, invisible to outsiders, helps to explain the Wampis' immediate and resolute resistance against the Lote 116 oil project. Furthermore, it contributed to the strategy devised to defend Wampis self-determination through the claims for the integral territory and formation of an autonomous government.

The first ordinance of the GTANW stresses the importance of *nunkui*, 'provider of fertility of the earth and the reproduction of seeds, guarantor of abundance and food security, facilitator of spiritual strength of women and inspiration for the norms and techniques for sustainable treatment of soils', and of *tsunki*, origin of 'the knowledge about management of the springs, aquatic fauna and fishery practices'.¹⁰ These beings are thus linked directly with the GTANW's desire to exert resource governance rights, framed in conservationist language. *Nunkui* and *tsunki* feature prominently as "frontline" nonhuman actors in GTANW communications, thanks to their analogies with other, better-known "Mother Earth" figures (*pachamama*) and Hollywood adaptations (e.g., the humanoid amphibian in *The Shape of Water*); their "underground" nature predisposes them for fighting oil and mining companies. The aptness of other beings is less obvious, but the GTANW is promoting discussions about their role and possible contributions to territorial defence. This includes a re-evaluation of storytelling, as "the real history of our people". At an oral history workshop organised by the GTANW, elders revealed stories of different animal-human beings who had fought against oppression, drawing comparisons to present times. For instance, the history of the defeat of the *unkaru* crab, which was made possible by strategically coordinated actions by different animals, was pointed out as a guide for how the GTANW should proceed in countering extractivist projects.

There are also sinister forms of nonhuman action that do not easily lend themselves to public communication but nevertheless may intervene and shape political mobilisation. Foremost, this concerns witchcraft attacks, which can have political motivations and be directed against individuals as well as against entire

¹⁰ *Ordenanza No. 1*; GTANW 2015.

communities or kinship groups. For instance, I witnessed the defence measures taken in my host community after a visiting sorcerer had allegedly released a *pasuk*, a spirit being that can take the shape of different animals and humans and randomly causes illness among people who cross its path (see also Garra 2017, 76; Brown 1984, 209). The contracted defence sorcerer identified the motive for the attack as jealousy against the politically powerful community from a competing one close-by. While witchcraft is a constant, there seem to be changes in the interpretation of its motives. Recently, the GTANW communicated that a *pasuk* had appeared in the context of inter-communal conflict created by the divide-and-rule tactics of an oil company that seeks to develop the Lote 64 concession close to Rio Morona. In the communique, the term “witchcraft” is avoided and the *pasuk* is framed as a ‘cultural syndrome characterised by the Health Ministry as a collective psychosis’. As for the Wampis the ‘state of [a person, or people’s] health reflects the social situation [in which] we live’, this is denounced as a ‘heavy sociocultural impact’ caused by the oil company.¹¹



Working instruments left by the shaman after the expulsion of a pasuk spirit, February 2017

¹¹ ‘GTANW denuncia grave impacto sociocultural de maniobras de Geopark Y Petroperu’, 23 October 2018. www.nacionwampis.com/gtanw-denuncia-grave-impacto-sociocultural-de-maniobras-de-geopark-y-petroperu-2 [accessed 15.11.2018]. See also Chirif and Barclay 2019.

Another form of nonhuman, or rather quasi-human, action is the appearance *pishtaco*. Described as a tall, white, bearded *gringo* man, this vampire-like figure seeks victims in order to extract their fat and body parts. Alongside several reported sightings during my stay, in one case the origin of a *pishtaco* scare was my own visit to a remote community. Indeed, one of the tasks of my research partner, Geronimo Petsain, was to prevent such scares by carefully explaining the motives for my visits. There are several variations of the *pishtaco* figure (which has its origins in the Andes) but they all have (semi-)human form, sometimes disguised as government officials, vaccination crews or NGO workers to hide their intention of sucking out or extracting life energy or infecting people with deadly substances (Santos-Granero and Barclay 2011). Apparently, such sightings increased and took on a new quality around the time of the Bagua mobilisations, indicating that ‘this time indigenous peoples are certain that the Peruvian State has allied with large extractive corporations not only to despoil native peoples from their life forces, but to exterminate them’ (Santos-Granero and Barclay 2011). However, the existence of *pishtaco* is debated, or denied, by many Wampis and is even a source of ridicule among Wampis men with higher education. They do not appear in public communications of the GTANW. Still, the repeated appearance of *pishtaco* can be understood as indicating a deep suspicion about the motives of non-indigenous persons visiting Wampis territory and a reluctance to engage with them – a form of silent resistance.

Vertical territoriality and the emergence of Wampis eco-autonomy

The Wampis’ struggle for autonomy has an intrinsic ecological dimension, ontologically rooted in manifold relationships with nonhuman actors. It seems likely that the latter did indeed contribute to the Baguazo uprising in 2009. Certainly, we can state their increased visibility for external audiences. *Nunkui*, *tsunki* and their cohorts have been around since time immemorial; their recent appearance in the context of eco-political mobilisations does not make them ‘new’

but reflects a strategic decision by the Wampis that it is time to let them speak to the rest of the world.

In 1995, Beth Conklin and Laura Graham described the tensions that emerge from the strategic alliance between indigenous movements and international environmentalism as Amazonian ethnic identity is represented as perfect embodiment of a “global ecological imaginary” and divergent interests are painted over: ‘Environmentalists’ primary goal is to promote sustainable systems of natural resource management. Indigenous peoples ultimately seek self-determination and control over their own resources’ (Conklin and Graham 1995, 703). Since the late 1990s, the alliance has gained further traction through the strategic position indigenous peoples occupy in climate change negotiations. At the same time, indigenous peoples are increasingly trapped between the temptations of consumerism, external pressure to engage in extractivist enterprises (Rubenstein 2004) and Western imaginaries about the ‘ecological native’ (Ulloa 2005), in parallel to the continuation of the old “noble savage” trope. Indigenous groups that resist extractivist projects consistently face accusations of parroting a foreign discourse so as to capture NGO funds or of being naively instrumentalised to advance an eco-imperialist agenda against the development of the sovereign nation-state. In this context, what does the increased visibility of nonhumans mean for the GTANW’s autonomy project and beyond? How does it change the positioning of indigenous peoples in eco-political struggles?

First, it needs to be pointed out that the increased visibility of nonhumans happens in line with changes in legal frameworks. As Alexandre Surrallés argues, the UNDRIP of 2007 has effectively extended human rights to nonhumans through provisions such as Article 25, which recognises the right of indigenous peoples to ‘maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters and coastal seas’ – in animist cosmology, this can only refer to the entirety of affective exchanges with different nonhuman, animal, plant and spirit beings; therefore, the subject of fundamental law ‘moves from the “thinking subject” to the “feeling subject”’ (Surrallés 2017).

Wampis territoriality as expressed in relationships with nonhumans goes far beyond the fragmented “flat earth theory” commonly employed by state functionaries (limited rights to land surface). The vertical dimension of territoriality – underground and space – makes for a holistic understanding of an integral territory, alive with interrelated beings that command respect in their own right. Not all of them are friendly but all form part of the Amazonian ‘political economy of life’, which is based on the belief that different beings, including humans, are in fierce competition for the scarce resource that is life energy (Santos-Granero and Barclay 2011). It calls attention to the fact that in many public declarations by Wampis and other indigenous peoples we find an emphasis on protecting “life”, next to ecologist terminology of safeguarding “nature”, the “environment”, “ecosystems” and the like. Regarding the postulated tension between indigenous autonomy and conservationism, part of the solution thus appears hidden in plain sight: “life”, “nature”, “ecosystems” and similar terms seem to be used by Wampis leaders as placeholders for nonhumans, or rather, the entire web of life made from manifold relationships between humans and nonhumans and between different kinds of nonhumans. This creates an ‘equivocation of translation’ (Viveiros de Castro 2004): although using the same terminology, they may not mean the same thing as a Western ecologist when talking about “protecting nature”.

Similarly, I suspect that the particularly strong reaction Wampis express against the danger of environmental contamination is in part due to the translation of ‘pollution’ into the Wampis word *tseas*, which means ‘poison’ – associated with fish poisoning, poisonous darts and poisoned beverages used to secretly kill enemies. Contamination can therefore be understood as a wilful act of aggression that aims at killing the victim in a most unpleasant way, going much further than the negligent diffusion of toxic chemicals into the environment by referring to a broad range of violent disruptions of human and nonhuman life. Such ‘equivocations of translation’ may give rise to many misunderstandings but nevertheless facilitate connection between indigenous ontologies and a strategic positioning within global environmentalist discourses. In effect, the “new” visibility of nonhumans proves wrong the accusations that Wampis may have merely adopted Western ecologist discourse for the self-interested pursuit of financial benefits derived from autonomy rights; on the contrary, it calls for interpreting such ecological discourse as an

ontologically rooted “indigenous environmentalism” that is able to bridge contradictions between ecology and autonomy, towards something we could term “eco-autonomy”. This is an emergent phenomenon, and there is no guarantee that in future the Wampis will not decide that the risk of annoying *nunkui*, and so getting less abundant manioc harvests, or of *tsunki* holding back the fish is worth taking compared to the immediate benefits of cash, jobs and education opportunities. Relationships with nonhumans are, after all, negotiable. Also, not all types of nonhumans are helpful in mobilising support from global publics. It is thus necessary to analyse when, how and why certain types of nonhumans enter the debate, while others do not, and to respect the decision of indigenous peoples themselves about the proper time and place to invoke nonhumans in their strategic communications.

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LARISSA DA SILVA ARAUJO¹

Baianas de Acarajé against FIFA: Coloniality Nowadays²

Women from many generations work as baianas de acarajé, a popular knowledge that has been passed down for many centuries in (mainly) the state of Bahia, Brazil. Baiana de acarajé is an afro-Brazilian craft, performed by autonomous women who work as street vendors of food, such as acarajé, abará, “student cake”, cocada, among others. During the period of slavery (1500–1888), the trade of acarajé helped many enslaved women to buy their freedom (Torres 2007). Indeed, during and after the colonial period (1500–1822), this craft meant the only alternative of supporting their communities and guaranteeing their economy, culture and religion (IPHAN 2007). Until nowadays, whole families are sustained with the trade of acarajé and other food products (personal communications, 2013).

Since 1992, baianas de acarajé have been united in an association that represents their interest as street vendors. Since its creation, the Associação de Baianas de Acarajé e Mingau (Association of Baianas de Acarajé and Mingau – ABAM) has won the right to work as autonomous workers in the city of Salvador, in the state of Bahia. Indeed, due to disputes with evangelic baianas who sell acarajé as “jesus cake” and with enterprises that were selling pre-cooked and freezed acarajé, ABAM

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worked in collaboration with the Instituto Nacional de Patrimônio Histórico e Cultural (National Institute of Historical and Cultural Heritage – IPHAN) to include the craft of baianas de acarajé in the Book of Knowledges. Hence, since 2007, IPHAN has defined what are the characteristics of their craft (how they should dress, the cooking procedures and its cultural and religious meaning) and recognized their craft as a national intangible heritage. This title helped them to overcome these disputes with evangelic groups and private companies.

The dispute with FIFA started in 2012, when baianas de acarajé discovered they would not be allowed to practice their craft during the FIFA World Cup 2014. At that moment, it was FIFA who decided who could work in its “exclusive zones”. Once baianas de acarajé had not participated on FIFA’s binding process, they were excluded from these exclusive zones. Since then, baianas started to act to guarantee their right to work, mobilizing the language of the state and the language of the streets to achieve this goal.

According to their narratives, baianas de acarajé started selling acarajé inside football stadiums at least 50 years ago. But during preparatory works for megaevents held in Brazil in 2014 and 2016, numerous human rights violations happened throughout the construction works in order to comply with the requirements of international capital. In this essay, departing from baianas de acarajé narratives, I interpret in which way hosting the 2014 Fédération Internationale de Football Association (International Federation of Football Associations – FIFA) World Cup interfered on their lives and how they reacted to it.

I draw on the narratives of baianas de acarajé, expressed through conversations and semi-structured interviews conducted during ethnographic fieldwork, as well as, on laws and materials related to the case were analyzed – namely, the Lei Geral da Copa (General Cup Law), the Duties Matrix of World Cup and its additaments (governmental budgets to works and other projects related to World Cup, such as stadiums, airports, etc), the recommendation of Public Prosecution that defended baianas de acarajé, FIFA’s bidding documents, FIFA’s and touristic public enterprises ads, the online petition organized by the Association of Baianas de Acarajé (ABAM) and a systematization document of an evaluation meeting

produced by *baianas de acarajé*. I also used media sources, like interviews, statements and news. With these sources, I could identify this narrative of the facts, as well as comprehend the official discourses that were constructed and mobilized to justify the realization of mega events.

Analyzing the case through intersectionality and the perspective of situated knowledge, I am able to focus on more than one category of analysis (gender, race and coloniality). Thus, I consider the categories are articulated on the same structure of domination and exploitation that constitutes and supports the power relations between the subjects through their interaction. Indeed, these perspectives allowed me to investigate the case study through *baianas de acarajé*'s lens. They had the privilege of knowing the whole with more details, even though they occupied an unprivileged position on this dispute (Haraway 1995 apud Cardoso 2012).

Baianas de acarajé excluded by FIFA

On October 2012, ABAM's president discovered that they would not have permission to sell on the "exclusive FIFA zones" from a journalist of a local newspaper. They had not participated on FIFA's bidding process of trading concession for food and beverage companies³, a process opened in January of that year. In Salvador (capital of Bahia state), exclusive FIFA zones constituted places either inside of or contiguous to neighborhoods of the stadium Fonte Nova Arena and of "FIFA Fan Fests". In these exclusive FIFA zones, only FIFA, its sponsors and licensed companies would be permitted to trade, so FIFA could guarantee its profits from the mega event.

On May 29th, 2013, FIFA announced the bidding process result. The concessionaires Aramark and Convivas Brasil were selected to sell the products of enterprises sponsoring the mega event. Aramark is a USA company with an annual

³ Invitation to tender for the rights of the FIFA Food & Beverage Concessionaire Programme Phase I (Fifa 2012).

profit of 15 billion US dollars, which sells food and clothes across 22 countries. Convivas Brasil is a subsidiary in Brazil of a Swiss transnational company, responsible for a platform of service providers in corporate hospitality and event management. In their press statement, FIFA also announced that on the menu of foods offered by the companies would have options of typical regional dishes, such as acarajé in Salvador, feijão tropeiro in Belo Horizonte and the bolo de rolo in Recife and that the companies would work with local Brazilian service providers.

In my first visit to Salvador, in September 2013, I talked for the first time with baianas de acarajé directly involved with the dispute during a meeting of Popular Committees for World Cup (ANCOP). They told me they were afraid of being excluded from the World Cup. It meant they would probably be incorporated by other companies or lose their “selling points”, consequently losing their autonomy and management of production, resulting in a collective loss of traditional aspects of their work. Even though the production of acarajé has been resignified and modified through the years, some aspects remain during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: the presence of baianas on the public space, the detention of ritualistic and culinary knowledge, passed through the generations, and the autonomy on the production and trade process (Torres 2007; Brasil 2007; Souza 2012; Santos 2013).

They were worried with the lack of options to maintain their income during the games and the importance of their presence in the public space. It was clear to them that the exceptional situation, temporarily installed with World Cup, could quickly become permanent.

Additionally, acarajé is not only a different food, produced with “exotic” ingredients and typical of Afro-Brazilian cuisine. This food is inserted in a food system that involves different subjects and knowledges, from its production to its consumption. There is an extensive literature on the anthropology of food that deals with the meanings that food can have. According to Lima (2010: 40 in Santos 2013), food can be taken in a comprehensive sense, as a system that goes from the consumption and involves the forms of social interaction, symbolic expression and ritualization. Machado explains that the messmate, when eating, “shares a system of

definitions of what is ‘edible’ and ‘tasty’, incorporating properly the definitions of a food system that makes it part of a group” (2013: 241, my translation).

Indeed, the knowledge that involves the production of acarajé is called craft precisely because there is a secrecy around it, known only by the members of this food system and by the practitioners of an afro-Brazilian religion called candomblé. In this religion, acarajé is a votive food, that is, it is a food offered to Iansã/Oiá, a warrior orixá (goddess) that is the protector of this food and of those who cook it. According to the legend, Iansã taught other women how to cook this food and they must keep the tradition, teaching the secrecy to other female relatives (Iphan 2007; Torres 2007). That’s the reason the majority of baianas de acarajé are women, and in general the knowledge about the craft is passed from mothers to daughters or other young women from their kinship networks. In general, even baianas who are guided by other orixás or are believers of other religions respect the origins of the craft in candomblé, acknowledging the importance of Iansã as protector of the craft (Santos, 2013). Out of this context, offered to the public by foreign companies, the food would stop integrating this alimentary system and would come to have simply a material value, of commodity.

Finally, baianas de acarajé are self-employed autonomous traders. Thus, the prospect of work as employees of multinational companies, selling the acarajé as a mere commodity – withdrawing it from the food system of which it is part and revealing the secrecy of their craft – was not an attractive one for them.

Until the inauguration of the Fonte Nova Arena in April 2013, two months before the FIFA Confederations Cup, considered the test for the World Cup, the entity had not yet decided whether baianas would be granted permission to carry out their trade in exclusive FIFA zones.

Baianas de acarajé acting against FIFA prohibition – heritage and direct action

Known for loving football, a significant part of the Brazilian population was excited about Brazil hosting the World Cup, not only because it would incentive national development, but because they would be able to watch the biggest football party in

person. Thinking on their symbolic importance for national culture, since baianas de acarajé represent not only afro-Brazilian traditions but Brazilian population, they assumed FIFA and Brazilian government would not exclude them from this important event and this trouble could be overcome. When they learned of the bidding, which they could not join, and of FIFA's ban, the baianas began to think about and articulate strategies to negotiate with the public power.

First, Baianas de Acarajé Association tried to negotiate with Brazilian government, in its different spheres and public bodies, with institutions from local, provincial and national government, their standing and trading during 2014 FIFA World Cup, without FIFA's restrictions. However, they considered to move to another strategy when Brazilian government assumed that "the owner of the party is the one who pays for it" (as said the Ministry of Culture to ABAM). In this case, supposedly FIFA was paying for it, so the entity had the power to determine whether baianas de acarajé could work or not during the World Cup. After negotiations, baianas de acarajé decided use tactics of direct action, through virtual mobilization and protests in front of the new stadium. With these strategies, they gained national and international attention to their problem and were heard by the government and FIFA.

With the support from the international NGO Change.org organizing online petitions, ABAM carried out a campaign to collect signatures in support of their stay in exclusive zones. The petition was addressed to the national representative of the Local Organizing Committee, composed of former Football Player Ronaldo Nazareno, FIFA's President Joseph Blatter, Sports Minister Aldo Rebelo, SECOPA Secretary Ney Campello and the Head of SECOPA's office, Lilian Pitanga. The online petition lasted for eight months and collected more than 17,000 signatures.

On April 5, 2013, the day of the inauguration of Fonte Nova Arena, baianas protested on Avenida Dique, in front of the stadium. They distributed t-shirts from the state's most well-known soccer teams, Bahia and Vitória, as well as acarajés to passers-by and to the drivers of vehicles. The objective was to draw the attention of the public authorities that arrived for the inauguration of the stadium. The Presidency of the Republic's advisor, José Claudionor, received the petition

requesting the permanent return of baianas to the stadium, not only during the mega-events.

According to baianas, although they always participated in events representing Afro-Bahian tradition and culture, they had not been invited to the inauguration. So, they wanted to manifest their indignation in front of the new stadium. In addition, they also made a strong complaint against the consortium that rebuilt the Arena (Fonte Nova Negócios e Participações SA), since it did not envision and construct commercial spaces for them inside the building.

Even though some state organs received a recommendation of the Public Prosecution Office for acting in favor of baianas de acarajé, they remained inactive. In the sequence, the Public Prosecution Office filed an injunction to guarantee to the entry of baianas during the Confederations Cup. From then on, they got support from the Federal Government, which intervened and asked FIFA to make an exception for them. According to ABAM president, about a month before the Confederations Cup, FIFA had authorized six baianas to sell acarajé at the Fonte Nova Arena. However, the authorization was not yet definitive, as it would be a "test" for the 2014 World Cup.

On October 26, 2012, the governor of the State of Bahia, Jacques Vagner, gave baianas the title of State Intangible Heritage. This title, like the one granted by the Institute of National Historical and Artistic Patrimony (IPHAN) in 2007, emphasized the importance of the craft of baianas de acarajé as a state heritage, recognizing their work as a craft that must be preserved and perpetuated through the support of public policies.

At the ceremony of delivery of the title, the governor granted an interview saying that it was inconceivable not to have baianas de acarajé inside the Arena Fonte Nova. However, according to president of ABAM, whenever the baianas sought state support, they were not answered. In this case, IPHAN was silent and did not contribute to the protection of the baianas' craft.

In all narratives, in various situations, during informal conversations, interviews, before and after the World Cup, baianas emphasized their desire to be respected.

The expressions “we want respect”, “we want to be respected”, “our work deserves respect”, “I want to be treated with respect and dignity”, “without respect and no dignity ... we do not support”, appeared constantly, often tied to the evaluation of “having heritage”, as “they gave us the title of heritage, then you have to respect us”, “we thought that when we became a cultural heritage, the state would embrace us and protect us as if we were daughters, but we are disrespected nonetheless”, “I would like them to respect us more and make the IPHAN document valid, because baianas are a national intangible heritage” (personal communications, 2014).

The feeling of indignation and revolt expressed by these women was driven by the lack of respect that resulted from the established power relations. Their narratives also provoked me to reflect on the role that recognition through the title of heritage exercises in this dispute between baianas, FIFA and the State. Baianas expected respect for their condition – as a black woman, an autonomous worker, households, member of Afro-descendant communities, inheritors of a specific knowledge – would finally happen. Moreover, I could also perceive the expectation that the heritage title would raise them to a level of greater interlocution with the State and with FIFA, open channels of dialogue with the institutions and allow them to conquer public policies of protection, safeguarding their craft and fostering the autonomous initiative of other women.

In the dispute with FIFA the title of heritage also helped them to claim their rights. However, they consider the title has also trapped them in a static conception of the traditional and the cultural. In the case of the expectation of greater dialogue with the State and FIFA, baianas considered that the use of the heritage instrument was an important strategy. According to one baiana, “we put the title of heritage in front of the dispute”, arguing it was the State’s obligation to safeguard the knowledge protected as heritage. Through this argument, they managed to acquire the authorization for working in the zones of exclusion. Both in the online petition and in the recommendation of the Public Prosecutor to the state secretariats, the title of heritage was mobilized as a key concept.

On the one hand, the title of heritage implies the recognition of the uniqueness of the identity of baianas de acarajé, a political identity that distinguishes the craft of

these women as a knowledge of their own. In their narratives, there is pride in this recognition.

On the other hand, when speaking about this subject, they also questioned me about the usefulness of this title, because it brings them obligations (wearing typical clothes every day, for example) without concrete counterparts of safeguard and protection. Accordingly, the tourism-related institutions of Bahia and Salvador view them as postcards, exhibiting them as exotic representatives of African traditions in the country. However, there are no policies that integrate baianas with tourism actions. Even when they got permission to enter the stadium, there was no support for them, such as a specific line of credit for the World Cup or subsidy for the proper installation of their trays. Thus, in their narratives, there is also a claim that until now heritage has not been useful, making no difference in their lives or only serve to companies from the tourism sector to use it as a justification to exploit them.

In this sense, the title of the heritage acquired an ambiguous character: baianas understand its importance as a method of translation of their yearnings and demands to the language of Law, necessary to challenge the State. However, it has also become a right with empty material content, since the actions in the public policy level, necessary to give shape to this right, are not realized. In fact, it creates for them an obligation to maintain themselves in the form that the heritage conceived them. In short, they are recognized as subject to the law, but are not recognized as agents of this right. Thus, it is evident that the State dialogues with the "Other" through the code that it created to classify and dialogue with this Other.

Baianas' perspective of resistance – amefricanidade

“Do you know why we took action in this history against FIFA? We're used to it, when there is a fancy party, they always take us out. We will come back anyways. But you know, acarajé is from Iansã, right, so do you think she'd be quiet?”, a baiana told me. This explanation opened my eyes to the ontological claim baianas

de acarajé were proposing. According to Yoruban knowledge, Iansá positions herself in front of Xangô (an orixá known to be a warrior god) in the battles, helping him and opening the way for this orixá in the wars. In the same sense, the orixá would be guiding the baianas of acarajé to go to fight, impelling them to rebel, to face a stronger power.

Reflecting on this ontology, I came to understand the insistence of baianas to be strongly visible during the FIFA World Cup. Their presence in the streets was the stone in the shoes of the state-business front (Segato, 2014a). When they shared the public space, they were able to reclaim their agency as political actors. Once they were seen in this place, one could not deny their existence; once they were heard, one could not ignore their difference. Therefore, the resignification that black women gave to the public space (equivalent to the political sphere in Modernity) is an essential aspect of the coloniality of gender and power subversion (Segato 2012, Quijano 2014).

This quote also helped me to understand why it was important for the baianas to serve as an example to other groups and collectives who have also been questioning FIFA against the violation of their rights. In an interview, ABAM's President stated that "the most important thing is not to be there to sell but is to be there and to show what we have achieved! Because we opened doors so that other people in other states could now be in the World Cup, the tapioqueiras of Recife and the feijão tropeiro of Minas Gerais". In this sense, their claiming for appearing would be a statement of their and other sellers importance as political, economic and cultural agents.

I understand that in the struggle of the baianas there are still two aspects that are distinctive of their process of resistance: one is that there is a symbolic system that constitutes the Afro-Brazilian identities, built collectively for centuries, and for which they struggle to preserve. And the other is that this process did not begin in the dispute with FIFA, nor does it close with the end of mega-events, but it is also part of the history of black women in Brazil. Therefore, the knowledge inherited when one learns the craft does not only concern the alimentary system in which acarajé is inserted, but also the wisdom related to the conflicts of daily life.

According to Torres, “the insistence on the preservation of an Afro-Brazilian religious symbolic system as a support for its activity during this trajectory resembles what Michel Foucault (1989:89) calls ‘diffuse resistance’” (Torres 2007:249). As a result, Torres says that the vendors resisted in their own way, with cultural responses to the immediate adverse situations that were placed in the way. To this repertoire Lélia Gonzalez (1988) denominated *amefricanidade*.

Amefricanidade, for Gonzalez, reflects the historical experience of the diaspora and the African heritage that revived the forces of resistance and creativity in the struggle against enslavement, extermination, exploitation, oppression and humiliation that the coloniality of power created (1988: 78). In this perspective, Gonzalez explains that in the colonial period, “the revolts, the elaboration of strategies of cultural resistance, and the development of alternative [created] forms of free social organization” (1988: 79) in quilombos, for example, and in the craft of the *baianas de acarajé*. As I said before, the craft, which is passed from mother to daughter, is an example of *amefricanidade*. Indeed, it is decolonized difference and strategy of resistance. But *baianas de acarajé* craft is not only a practical knowledge related to food and the inheritance of resistance; there is also a secret, typical of the trade, shared among the *baianas* through codes and knowledge that cannot, nor should be, fully translated into the language of the colonizer. From this, I must add to Gonzalez's *amefricanidade* the knowledge and code proper of the original peoples and diasporic peoples of Brazil.

I understand, therefore, *amefricanidade* as the strategies of negotiation, adaptation, struggle and survival developed from the experiences, thought and reflexion in a process of intersection between own knowledge and the knowledge of the Other, between their resistant code of the Other.

I think, therefore, that these experiences of struggle, whether through direct confrontation, stubbornness, negotiation, or adaptation, are part of the repertoire of strategies that enslaved Africans during the colony and their descendants activated to carry out their “people’s project”. That is, to define itself and guarantee the continuity of peoples in history (Segato 2014).

In conclusion, I consider baianas de acaraje dispute against FIFA is an extended example of amefricanidade. It brings together not only the practical experiences of negotiation and resistance in the daily struggle of colonial relations, but also the mythological knowledge that reflects the expectations, frustrations, desires, needs and propositions of truth that the colonized peoples shared in the continuation of this fight for the project of being as a people.

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URPI SACO CHUNG¹

Ocupando y Ampliando Categorías (in)Esperadas: Formas de Ser y de Convertirse en Indígena dentro del Sistema de las Naciones Unidas²

Introducción

Actualmente, en el ámbito internacional de los derechos humanos, especialmente en las Naciones Unidas (ONU), ya no es excepcional ver a delegadas y delegados indígenas³ en una reunión en Ginebra o en Nueva York. En reuniones como la COP⁴ donde se discuten temas de cambio climático, la presencia de personas indígenas es esperada. En las ciencias sociales, así como en otras disciplinas, tendemos a asociar y crear narrativas sobre el cambio climático que relacionan la minería, la extracción de recursos, la economía neoliberal, los derechos humanos a los pueblos indígenas. Por otro lado, es menos frecuente ver a delegados indígenas haciendo una declaración durante una sesión del Consejo de Derechos Humanos o en alguna reunión de la ONU donde el tema principal no sean las cuestiones que las Naciones Unidas definen como indígenas.

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³ En este texto utilizaré 'delegados, delegadas indígenas' y 'personas indígenas' indistintamente.

⁴ Conferencia de las Partes (CP o COP) es el órgano supremo de la Convención Marco de las Naciones Unidas sobre el Cambio Climático.

El ejemplo sobre la COP ilustra parcialmente cómo algunas categorías o conceptos están ocupados por ideas, significados y prácticas. Esta agregación y articulación de categorías (indígena, minería, cambio climático) se convierten en una narrativa basada (inicialmente) en ideas, prácticas y significados que generan conocimientos sobre lo que es 'ser indígena'. Este proceso abstracto se genera casi mecánicamente en nuestras mentes, sin embargo, no es neutral, es político y está sujeto a historias, lugares y relaciones de poder.

Frente a la pregunta qué significa ser indígena, existen múltiples respuestas. Esta es una pregunta recurrente en el campo de la investigación en temas indígenas y en la investigación antropológica (Blaser 2014; Conklin, 1997; Hale & Millamán 2005; Kuper 2003; Laurent 2016; Lucero 2006; Martínez Novo, 2006 entre muchos otros). Esta discusión genera controversias que no busco resolver en esta contribución. Sin embargo, pienso que a través del estudio de la participación indígena dentro de la ONU podemos comprender algunas de las complejidades de estas controversias y del uso en contexto, de la categoría de 'indígena'.

Esta contribución es parte de un ejercicio que busca entender la categoría indígena mediante la participación de personas auto identificadas como indígenas en algunas reuniones de la ONU. Exploraré algunas reflexiones inacabadas sobre cómo la categoría analítica 'indígena' es representada dentro de algunos espacios del sistema de la ONU, sobre cómo estas representaciones encajan con ideas esperadas de lo que 'es ser indígena' en estos espacios, y sobre cómo a través de la observación de la puesta en práctica de las categorías esperadas, los significados de la categoría indígena son ampliados dentro de un contexto y lugar específico.

Quisiera mencionar que las reflexiones que presento a continuación se han ido formando gracias a los encuentros epistémicos que he mantenido con personas indígenas durante, principalmente, los dos últimos años y también durante encuentros anteriores. Esta jornada reflexiva y los encuentros con dichas personas han enriquecido mis reflexiones, sin embargo, soy completamente responsable de las ideas que presento a continuación.

Este artículo está organizado de la siguiente manera. Haré una muy breve referencia a los espacios dentro del sistema de la ONU donde las y los delegados indígenas

participan mayormente. Seguidamente, describiré, a grandes rasgos, cuáles son los procedimientos a seguir y cómo se desarrolla un tipo de participación de las y los delegados indígenas dentro de una sesión de la ONU. Prosigo con una observación etnográfica y termino con algunas reflexiones sobre cómo seguir pensando las participaciones indígenas más allá de expectativas impuestas y esperadas.

Sobre los encuentros con y en las Naciones Unidas

Es difícil referirse de manera breve a la historia de la participación de personas indígenas en espacios internacionales de derechos humanos y en la ONU. Existen muchas investigaciones sobre el movimiento internacional de los pueblos indígenas, el sistema de la ONU, los derechos humanos, los derechos de los pueblos indígenas, la Declaración de las Naciones Unidas sobre los Derechos de los Pueblos Indígenas (UNDRIP) y los diferentes movimientos indígenas en América Latina y el Caribe (Blaser; 2009; Dahl; 2012; Kenrick y Lewis, 2004; Lucero, 2006; Minde, 2008; Morin, 2012; Schulte-Tenckhoff, 1997, 2016; Schulte-Tenckhoff y Khan 2011, Stamatopoulou, 1994, éstos son solo algunos y notablemente con diferentes puntos de vista y perspectivas). A lo largo de la historia de los organismos internacionales de derechos humanos, el movimiento internacional indígena ha logrado visibilidad a través de muchos eventos y circunstancias. Una de las plataformas en el ámbito internacional donde participan es el sistema de la ONU, aunque no es el único. En sus diferentes organismos, las personas indígenas presentan una gran variedad de problemas y demandas comunales. Desde finales de los años setenta, la presencia internacional del movimiento indígena comenzó a ser más prominente en el ámbito de la ONU, sobre todo por la activa participación de personas indígenas y la creación de mecanismos que tratan la temática indígena.

El sistema de derechos humanos de la ONU en conjunto con la participación de delegadas y delegados indígenas han creado espacios, mecanismos y procedimientos donde se tratan temas indígenas. En éstos, las personas indígenas organizan, participan y tienen cierto poder de decisión. El Foro Permanente para las Cuestiones Indígenas (UNPFII), el o la Relator(a) Especial sobre los Derechos de los Pueblos Indígenas y el Mecanismo de Expertos sobre los Derechos de los

Pueblos Indígenas (EMRIP) son los tres mecanismos establecidos dentro del sistema de las Naciones Unidas que tratan específicamente asuntos indígenas⁵. Antes de la existencia de estos mecanismos, el Grupo de Trabajo sobre Poblaciones Indígenas (WGIP), y el Grupo de Trabajo sobre el Proyecto de Declaración (WGDD) fueron dos instancias importantes que establecieron hitos y prácticas institucionales importantes en la historia de los pueblos indígenas dentro la ONU. Las y los delegados indígenas, el personal de la ONU y los representantes de los Estados han participado en la redacción de documentos importantes como la Declaración de las Naciones Unidas sobre los Derechos de los Pueblos Indígenas (UNDRIP) y continúan escribiendo informes, estudios, reportes alternativos para diferentes organismos de la ONU.

Dentro de la ONU, además de los mecanismos que tratan únicamente temas indígenas y la producción de documentos, la Oficina del Alto Comisionado para los Derechos Humanos (ACNUDH) en Ginebra, dentro de su Sección de Pueblos Indígenas y Minorías (IPMS), tiene dos estructuras institucionales importantes que promueven concretamente la participación indígena en la ONU. El Programa de Becas Indígenas (IFP) y el Fondo Voluntario de las Naciones Unidas para los pueblos indígenas (UNVFIP). Estas dos estructuras dotadas de presupuestos juegan un papel importante en el fomento de un tipo de participación indígena en el sistema de la ONU. No son los únicos dentro del ámbito internacional. Otras organizaciones y agencias internacionales que trabajan con asuntos relacionados a los pueblos indígenas tienen sus propias becas y pasantías. Por ejemplo, la Organización Mundial de la Propiedad Intelectual (OMPI), y la Organización Internacional del Trabajo (OIT), entre otras. Actualmente, las personas indígenas participan mayoritariamente en los mecanismos que tratan temas indígenas y en otros mecanismos de la ONU como delegadas y delegados enviados por sus comunidades, como representantes de organizaciones indígenas y ONGs, como personal de la ONU y como representantes de los gobiernos oficiales de sus Estados nacionales.

⁵ Estos tres mecanismos tratan temas indígenas y son dirigidos principalmente por personas indígenas que trabajan dentro del sistema de la ONU.

Sobre ser y/o convertirse en indígena en y para las Naciones Unidas

Las y los delegados indígenas que participan en el sistema de la ONU son generalmente elegidos por sus comunidades. Para muchos de ellas y ellos, la exposición a este espacio internacional implica diversos cambios en sus vidas y en la vida de sus comunidades. La mayoría de las y los delegados indígenas con los que conversé coincidieron en que es necesario participar en estos entornos internacionales para hacer visibles sus pueblos y las situaciones por las que pasan, ‘es una forma de mostrar que tenemos problemas’, ‘si no vienes, piensan que todo está bien en tu territorio’, ‘venimos para hacer presión’⁶. En algunos casos, sus reclamos necesitan atención y presión internacional. Estos reclamos pueden terminar en sentencias de tribunales internacionales.

Durante mi trabajo etnográfico, he asistido a varios mecanismos, reuniones y sesiones en las Naciones Unidas (Ginebra y Nueva York) donde personas indígenas participaron, principalmente, haciendo declaraciones y compartiendo las diferentes situaciones que viven en sus territorios. En general, para participar en la mayoría de reuniones de la ONU⁷ es necesario estar acreditado⁸. Esto significa que las personas indígenas tienen que ser parte de, o invitados por, una organización con estatus consultivo ante el Consejo Económico y Social de la ONU (ECOSOC). Tener esta acreditación implica registro, solicitud y aceptación. Este es un proceso laborioso y toma tiempo. Las personas indígenas llegan por diferentes medios a estas reuniones, muchas veces apoyados (económicamente) por sus comunidades, por organizaciones de base, mediante una ONG (local, nacional, internacional) que trabaje en su territorio o sobre un tema en particular (acaparamiento de tierras, minería, cambio climático, agua, educación, etc.), con el gobierno del Estado-nación donde se

⁶ Estas son frases de conversaciones informales que he tenido con personas indígenas en Ginebra y en Nueva York (2016-2019).

⁷ Por ejemplo, las sesiones del Consejo de Derechos Humanos, los exámenes periódicos universales (EPU), del Comité para la Eliminación de la Discriminación Racial, del Comité de los Derechos del Niño, etc.

⁸ Ver: <https://csonet.org/index.php?menu=34>

encuentran sus territorios, invitadas por la ONU, invitadas por universidades, como especialistas, abogados, etc.

Su participación en las reuniones puede consistir en presentar datos de un informe alternativo, como panelistas o haciendo declaraciones (forma más practicada). Durante una reunión, se hacen declaraciones sobre diferentes temas como: luchas en sus territorios, violación de los derechos humanos y de la Declaración sobre los Derechos de los Pueblos Indígenas, etc. También se organizan eventos paralelos. Además, durante los viajes a cualquiera de las sedes de la ONU, se organizan también reuniones con el personal de los comités y convenciones de la ONU y con los representantes oficiales de sus países ante la ONU (misiones permanentes, embajadas, etc.). De igual manera, tratan de conocer y establecer contactos con otras organizaciones y ONGs locales e internacionales.

Un ejemplo de participación de personas indígenas en la ONU ocurre en el Consejo de Derechos Humanos (CDH). Este órgano intergubernamental de derechos humanos se reúne regularmente en Ginebra tres veces al año. Durante el último período de sesiones, que se lleva a cabo en septiembre, está agendado un panel de discusión sobre los derechos de los pueblos indígenas. Como en muchas sesiones de la ONU, una de las formas de participar durante la sesión consiste en hacer una declaración de tres o dos minutos. La limitación del tiempo influye y limita el contenido de la declaración. De manera sumamente simplista, podríamos resumir la estructura de la declaración (sea de personas indígenas o no indígenas) de la siguiente manera: agradecimientos y saludos al presidente de la sesión y/o a los panelistas, breve presentación de una situación relacionada (de preferencia) con el tema tratado durante el panel, y se concluye con algunas demandas, sugerencias o recomendaciones para mejorar la situación en mención. La declaración es expresada (leída principalmente) en uno de los idiomas oficiales de la ONU (inglés, francés, español, ruso, chino, árabe) y es interpretada en simultáneo.

Además, existen otros procedimientos logísticos que deben realizarse previamente para poder hacer una declaración durante una sesión de CDH. Como se dijo anteriormente, es necesario que la organización que hace posible la participación de la persona indígena este acreditada ante ECOSOC, ya que esa es la única manera para, después, hacer el trámite para recibir una credencial de ingreso al lugar físico

donde se desarrolla la reunión. La persona que va hacer una declaración debe inscribirse en línea la lista de oradores, imprimir y dar copias de su declaración a la secretaría del CDH para facilitar el trabajo de los intérpretes, etc., y solamente tomará la palabra si el tiempo lo permite. Muchas veces las sesiones se alargan y el tiempo para participar se acorta. Por lo tanto, la lista de oradores puede verse limitada y solo participaran las personas que se encuentran al inicio de la lista. A partir de esta descripción podría argumentar que una persona indígena que participa en el CDH encarna y representa prácticas y conocimientos de la ONU al (intentar) hacer una declaración. Pues ha incorporado temporalmente y está representando los códigos de una forma de hacer de la ONU.

¿Cómo se conocen, se incorporan, se representan estos códigos? Según mis observaciones, las personas indígenas saben cómo representarlos, como usarlos. Pareciera que lo saben solo por el hecho de estar en el lugar. Los comprenden sin necesariamente conocer completamente cómo funciona toda la dinámica de una sesión del CDH. Además, han sido informados por sus anfitriones en Ginebra o por sus contrapartes en su país de origen. Sin embargo, conocer el protocolo y ponerlo en práctica son dos experiencias diferentes. Algunas personas indígenas me comentaron que cuando hicieron una declaración por primera vez se sintieron nerviosas. Otras personas que habían tenido experiencias anteriores, se sintieron más cómodas cuando la hacen por segunda o tercera vez, y otras se sienten familiarizadas con la dinámica ya que vienen participando durante muchos años en estas reuniones. Si la persona ha participado una vez, la próxima vez será más fácil, ya que la práctica se va convirtiendo en un conocimiento adquirido, encarnado.

Existen varios medios (para personas indígenas y no indígenas) de formación para conocer y familiarizarse con los procedimientos de una reunión de la ONU, con los temas de derechos y mecanismos indígenas en el ámbito internacional, etc., como ejemplos tenemos, el programa de becas para pueblos indígenas (organizado por el ACNUDH), capacitaciones internacionales en derechos humanos, diplomas universitarios de derechos indígenas, etc.

Después de esta breve y simple descripción de cómo ocurre la participación de una persona indígena en una sesión del CDH (este formato es repetido en muchas sesiones de otros mecanismos de la ONU; existen también otras formas de

participación), podría hacer la siguiente reflexión. En dichos momentos y espacios convergen diferentes (al menos más de dos) epistemologías. Por ejemplo, una mapuche (para complejizar), una indígena, una urbana y una internacional. Una persona mapuche sabe cómo estar, hacer en su mundo mapuche⁹, conoce el movimiento indígena internacional, el entorno urbano de su país de residencia, y sabe cómo representar las formas internacionales de ser y hacer de la ONU, sabe cómo ser indígena en la ONU. Y sigue siendo una persona mapuche, indígena y está constantemente (re)creando y repensando su indigeneidad internamente y frente a las personas mapuches, indígenas y no indígenas. Sin embargo, la ONU, no conoce, no sabe sobre las formas de hacer Mapuches.

Los encuentros: las y los indígenas esperados

Como he mencionado anteriormente, las personas indígenas se encuentran e interactúan con diferentes conocimientos. Ellas (como nosotros) tal vez no se dan cuenta que lo hacen todo el tiempo, ya que los encuentros ocurren de manera casi espontánea. Esto no significa que no sean momentos tensos, disruptivos y de conflicto. Dado que los procedimientos para participar en la ONU son bastante estructurados, estos encuentros implican esfuerzos, energía, intuición, capacidad para relacionarse rápidamente con algunos códigos, y comprender algunas lógicas de funcionamiento.

Podemos comprender un tipo de participación particular (como hacer una declaración) como una representación encarnada de múltiples conocimientos. Hacer una declaración, es una representación del discurso y de las prácticas de la ONU entrelazadas con prácticas y conocimientos indígenas (el uso de lenguas indígenas al inicio y al final de la declaración, prácticas, lógicas y maneras de

⁹ De igual manera, en un mundo mapuche o indígena específico, se puede vivir de diferentes formas, como niño/a, mujer, varón, anciana/o, chamán, viuda, intelectual indígena, etc. Es importante subrayar las formas heterogéneas de cómo las personas indígenas viven sus vidas en sus territorios y mencionar también que hay muchos códigos compartidos y otros en disputa.

describir un evento, lenguaje corporal, etc., que pertenecen a las epistemologías indígenas). Este encuentro enredado de formas de hacer es también el resultado de la necesidad de movilizar conocimientos útiles según la situación, el tiempo, lugar y contexto.

Cuando me refiero a este tipo de encuentros en mis observaciones, exploro lo que entiendo como él o la ‘indígena esperado(a)’, y los significados que ocupan dicha categoría para la ONU. Me referí anteriormente a cómo en las ciencias sociales usamos categorías para explicar y describir, parcialmente, la socialidad de nuestro cotidiano. Vale la pena volver a mencionar que, al dar significados a una categoría, éstos la limitan. Sin embargo, necesitamos estas categorías ocupadas por significados para comenzar un análisis sobre cualquier asunto. Al reconocer los límites de las categorías a medida que avanza nuestro análisis, nos damos cuenta que las categorías son flexibles, elásticas y que suelen contener más que los significados que momentáneamente les habíamos dado. Necesitamos reconocer que las categorías y significados están en movimiento, tienen matices y cuestionan las jerarquías de conocimientos.

Muchas veces, en el entorno de la ONU, se espera que las personas indígenas sean indígenas de muchas maneras, de maneras que saben y de otras que, a priori, no saben serlo. Existe una expectativa que se crea a partir de una idea esperada de lo que significa ser indígena, ser indígena en la ONU y de cómo encajar en esa categoría. Podríamos decir que el cumplimiento de estas expectativas es necesario para que las y los delegados indígenas puedan participar en la ONU.

Los significados asociados a la categoría indígena pueden estar relacionados a un posicionamiento político, a prácticas, a orígenes y a la tierra, a ser estratégico, a la performatividad, a ser parte de la ONU, pero sobretodo están relacionados a la libre determinación y al ser reconocido como integrante de un pueblo y de una comunidad. Generalmente, las personas a las que llamamos indígenas se auto identifican discursivamente, como ‘soy quechua’, ‘soy awajún’, ‘soy mapuche’ antes

de auto identificarse como indígena¹⁰. La categoría está, a priori, ocupada por una pluralidad de significados discursivos y es representada de múltiples maneras. Es decir, es recreada incesantemente por las personas indígenas y no indígenas, no es permanente, y existe en relación con o frente a sus interlocutores.

Desde de la ONU, han habido varios intentos de definir a los pueblos indígenas. Existe una definición de trabajo elaborada como una categoría legal y política. Esta definición tiene cuatro criterios: los pueblos indígenas no son dominantes en términos económicos, políticos y socioculturales, aunque no necesariamente en términos numéricos; son los descendientes de los habitantes de un territorio dado; han sido víctimas de genocidio, conquista y colonización; y buscan mantener su identidad. Esta definición de trabajo es útil en cierta medida y puede adaptarse a la mayoría de pueblos indígenas que pasaron por procesos de colonización, sin embargo, no se ajusta a todos los pueblos que hoy se consideran indígenas. Asimismo, existen controversias sobre dichas definiciones, sobre la categoría indígena y por ende sobre la noción de indigeneidad (Schulte-Tenckhoff, 2012). La mención de esta definición es útil aquí, pues permite un entendimiento (inicial) de cómo se percibe lo indígena (como categoría) dentro del sistema de la ONU.

Para ampliar la comprensión de la categoría 'indígena' en el entorno de la ONU es necesario evitar asumir definiciones estáticas. Sin embargo, reconocemos que existe una idea colectiva, casi generalizada y compartida de lo que se imagina es 'ser indígena' en general (idea que debe ser cuestionada incansablemente). Esta expectativa se ha creado a través de muchos procesos históricos, investigación, medios de comunicación, etc. Según mis notas etnográficas, la idea esperada de ser indígena en la ONU es más amplia y es más ambiciosa que la definición de trabajo mencionada anteriormente. De alguna manera, ser indígena en la ONU implicaría, además de cumplir con los criterios de la definición de trabajo, vivir en territorio indígena, ser reconocidos por sus pueblos, abogar por los derechos indígenas y

¹⁰ En esta contribución utilizo conscientemente el carácter homogeneizador e institucionalizado de la categoría 'indígena' ya que no desarrollaré de manera profunda un caso específico sobre un pueblo o personas indígenas.

humanos, tener algún liderazgo reconocido en sus comunidades, hablar un idioma de la ONU, haber participado en otras instancias internacionales o regionales de derechos humanos, entre otros requisitos. Estas son algunas de las características esperadas que una persona indígena debería tener (o está adquiriendo) cuando participa en una reunión de la ONU. Además, parece ser importante que hablen una lengua indígena, usen su vestimenta tradicional, y conozcan o realicen prácticas tradicionales.

Por lo tanto, para participar activamente en alguna sesión de la ONU, se le pide a la persona indígena que cumpla con todas estas (y otras) expectativas. Es una tarea difícil poder representar todos los discursos y prácticas simultáneamente, sin embargo, las personas indígenas lo hacen. Representar al ‘indígena esperado’ implica realizar prácticas y discursos que amplían lo esperado, pues la persona indígena representa lo esperado y mucho más, lo inesperado. En una sesión del CDH, las personas indígenas deben ser lo suficientemente flexibles para adaptarse al formato de participación y a formas de hacer diferenciadas. Las formas de participación en una reunión en sus territorios pueden ser diferentes, aunque también existen prácticas parecidas, similitudes epistemológicas, pese a que históricamente, algunas prácticas se valoran más en algunos entornos no indígenas y otras no son tomadas en serio. Esta situación pone en evidencia los desafíos de estar y actuar entre diferentes tipos de conocimientos, valores y jerarquías epistémicas, y de representar estas expectativas a interlocutores indígenas y no indígenas. Es importante mencionar que existen también expectativas entre personas indígenas del mismo pueblo y frente a otros pueblos. Estos encuentros implican incorporar conocimientos no indígenas para evitar disolver una identidad indígena esperada.

Entre lo esperado y lo inesperado, observación de una declaración en el Consejo de Derechos humanos

A continuación, presentaré algunas reflexiones sobre la observación de una declaración realizada por una mujer indígena durante una sesión del CDH. A través de esta observación trato de ampliar la comprensión sobre la categoría indígena dentro de un espacio específico del sistema de la ONU y de desafiar sus

limitaciones homogeneizadoras. Es decir, trato de mostrar como nuestras categorías analíticas están cargadas también de significados (in)esperados que son necesarios visibilizar.

Durante la vigésima reunión de la 39 sesión ordinaria del Consejo de Derechos Humanos, el 19 de septiembre de 2018, se llevó a cabo un panel de discusión sobre la inclusión de los pueblos indígenas en la Agenda 2030. Cada año el CDH organiza un panel de discusión, que dura generalmente medio día, específicamente relacionado a los derechos de los pueblos indígenas. Durante esta sesión, una participación indígena me interpeló de diferentes maneras y me hizo repensar ¿qué considero o consideraba como categoría (in)esperada?

Después de haber observado múltiples reuniones y sesiones relacionadas a temas indígenas en las Naciones Unidas en Ginebra, en Nueva York, y a través de la página web de la ONU, me había acostumbrado a escuchar la forma ‘prefabricada’ de declaración mencionada anteriormente. Había internalizado ese formato como ‘regular’ así como probablemente lo internalizan las personas indígenas y no indígenas que frecuentan y participan de estos espacios. La observación repetida de una práctica, puede resultar contraproducente y convertirse en una debilidad a la que nos enfrentamos las y los investigadores cuando nos exponemos a experiencias etnográficas que parecen similares. Es una debilidad porque nos predispone a no escuchar lo que no se dice, a no mirar más allá de lo que vemos. Yo había estado viendo y oyendo lo esperado, sin permitirme percibir lo (in)esperado. Había limitado mi sensibilidad de observación dentro de mis propias experiencias etnográficas.

Durante el mencionado panel en Ginebra, una mujer indígena representante del pueblo Guaraní Kaoiwá de Matto Grosso do Sul, Brasil, hizo una declaración que para mí fue (in)esperada. Los casi tres minutos de la declaración parecieron más largos de lo normal, más complejos, y según mi intuición, no pasaron

desapercibidos para muchas de las personas presentes en la sala XX del Palacio de Naciones en Ginebra¹¹.

Aquí una breve descripción de la participación. La mujer Guaraní Kaoiwá comenzó a leer la declaración en español. La leyó lentamente y con dificultad. Normalmente los oradores (indígenas y no indígenas) leen sus declaraciones rápidamente porque no tienen mucho tiempo para exponer todo lo que quieren decir. Los oradores que presentaron antes y después de ella lo hicieron de la manera esperada. Sin embargo, cuando ella inicio su participación, se sintió, al menos por un par de minutos, una tensión dentro de la sala. Asimismo, he escuchado decir que el leer lentamente puede ser una estrategia para obtener toda la atención de la sala. Sin embargo, no puedo afirmar que esta haya sido la intención en este caso. La mujer leyó el texto en español durante dos minutos aproximadamente y luego cambió del español al portugués (durante un minuto), no leyó, habló.

Para la oradora, el español no era un idioma en el que ella se sentía cómoda, no lo dominaba como una persona hispano hablante, era un idioma ajeno. La situación fue diferente cuando hablo en portugués ya que es el idioma oficial del país en el que ella vive. Además, éste puede ser el primer, segundo o tercer idioma que ella conoce. Su idioma materno puede ser una lengua indígena o el portugués. Igualmente, recordemos que el portugués no es un idioma oficial de las Naciones Unidas, por lo tanto, la interpretación instantánea y los subtítulos que se pueden observar en la video grabación de su presentación no son completamente fieles a lo que ella dijo en portugués.

Yo como observadora, estaba esperando la lectura rápida de la declaración. Esta es una práctica institucionalizada, incluso recomendada y sugerida desde las Naciones Unidas, ya que es parte de las formas de hacer de este espacio. Yo estaba buscando

¹¹ Véase la participación en este enlace (en el minuto: 1:32:55 - 1:25:39) <http://webtv.un.org/search/panel-discussion-on-inclusion-of-indigenous-people-in-2030-agenda-20th-meeting-39th-regular-session-human-rights-council-5836878420001/?term=indigenous%20panel%20HRC&cat=Human%20Rights%20Council&sort=date&lan=original>

oír a la indígena esperada, a la que encajaba en la categoría de indígena en la ONU. De hecho, la mujer Guaraní Kaoiwá estaba parcialmente ilustrando esta categoría mientras leía la declaración. No obstante, la lectura en español, evidencio que la persona no se encontraba cómoda en este idioma ni en su lectura. Se notó una gran diferencia cuando cambio a portugués ya que ella pudo expresar sus ideas y emociones de manera más fluida. Muchas reflexiones surgieron en mi en ese momento. Desde la no la interpretación del idioma portugués en reuniones de la ONU; la lectura en español como una habilidad y el acceso a estos conocimientos y dominio de esta habilidad; e incluso la no necesidad, el no uso o la no valorización de esta habilidad para algunas personas que no la necesitan en su vida cotidiana¹². Es en este momento, inicialmente pensé, el sistema de la ONU solo escucha al que representa sus códigos y habla sus idiomas. La persona indígena habló en su idioma al momento de leer el texto. Seguidamente, cuando cambió al portugués mostró ser un reto para la interpretación de las Naciones Unidas. En ese momento ella ya no habló uno de los idiomas oficiales de la ONU. Sin embargo, fue más cómodo para la oradora decir lo que venía a exponer de manera concisa. En grandes líneas ella dijo: ‘...que traía su dolor y el de su pueblo... y que necesita ayuda de la ONU... porque su pueblo está sufriendo mucho... y pide al presidente de la ONU hable con el presidente de Brasil, para que este último ponga más atención a los pueblos indígenas’ (mi traducción e interpretación del portugués al español).

Más allá del uso de diferentes idiomas y del tocado tradicional distintivo de su pueblo indígena que ella llevaba puesto, la lectura y toma de palabra evidencian muchas complejidades e incomodidades. Es significativo resaltar que el texto que ella leyó en español hacía mención a los objetivos de la agenda 2030. Era un texto preparado con un tema ‘ONU’. Seguidamente, cuando habló en portugués, el tono del discurso fue diferente. Fueron frases que pedían atención a una situación particular de su pueblo dentro del marco nacional en el que se encuentra. La

¹² Que está relacionada con la consecuente presencia limitada del sistema ‘oficial’ educativo estatal brasileño en territorio indígena, discriminación e inequidad en el acceso, entre otras múltiples razones estructurales relacionadas a la alfabetización estandarizada.

declaración se tornó, quizás, menos protocolar, cargada de emociones, y el mensaje fue directo.

Asimismo, lo que me continúa interpelando es la multiplicidad y complejidad de la declaración y su puesta en práctica dentro de la rigidez del espacio. No es la primera vez que esto ocurre, tampoco será la última. La participación de la oradora se ajustó a la categoría esperada, sin embargo, la participación evidenció mucho más. Estaba ataviada con un tocado tradicional, se pronunció sobre la Agenda 2030, hablo en dos idiomas, y obtuvo brevemente la atención de la sala. Imagino que después de su participación posiblemente tuvo reuniones y encuentros con representantes de ONGs, representantes de la Misión Permanente de Brasil frente a las Naciones Unidas, paseó por Ginebra, volvió a su comunidad, volvió a ver su participación en internet, sigue luchando por su causa, es madre de familia, lideresa en su comunidad, etc.

Aperturas: ampliando las categorías (in)esperadas

Esta contribución, es parte de un conjunto de observaciones y reflexiones sobre la participación indígena dentro del sistema de la ONU. La observación descrita es una de ellas y quisiera precisar que no dialogué con la persona en mención. Dicha participación fue fundamental para mis observaciones, sobre todo cuando se trata de problematizar las categorías esperadas, y en consecuencia, cuando se trata de desestabilizar nuestras narrativas sobre las personas que hacen parte (para nosotros) de esta categoría. De cierta manera, este ejemplo apunta hacia la necesidad de re-encuentrar el exceso— o humanidad— dentro de la categoría (in)esperada, ya que somos más que categorías y definiciones.

La participación de la mujer Guaraní Kaiowá, envió varios mensajes en varios lenguajes e idiomas. Los más evidentes fueron los asuntos relacionados a la Agenda 2030 y el pedido al presidente de la ONU. Otros más sutiles fueron transmitidos en su lectura incomoda en español, y en la toma de palabra en portugués. Cumplió con lo esperado por la ONU, pero también nos brindó algo inesperado: la lectura en español, el casi imperativo de tener que escuchar la incomodidad. Este momento

inesperado visibiliza al indígena que quizás no se quiere ver o escuchar porque no conoce todas las formas de hacer de la ONU (los idiomas oficiales, por ejemplo).

He reflexionado y repensado estas reuniones como espacios hegemónicos, coloniales, de imposiciones, de protocolos, casi inflexibles. Sin embargo, también son espacios idealizados que generan cierta expectativa para muchas personas libremente determinadas como indígenas. Esto se debe a que estos espacios pueden ser espacios de referencia para demandas y pedidos específicos. También son espacios donde algunos pueblos indígenas pueden pedir el reconocimiento oficial a sus estados, aunque resulta desafortunado que aún tengan que hacerlo. La ONU encarna todavía ese ideal de defensor de derechos humanos, y como se mencionó al inicio, participar de este espacio puede dar la visibilidad necesaria a ciertas situaciones urgentes y no tan urgentes que afrontan los pueblos indígenas del mundo. Lamentablemente, las expectativas y las formas de hacer los pueblos indígenas no se filtran dentro del sistema de la ONU, como si lo hacen las prácticas de la ONU en las vidas de las personas expuestas a ella. Han habido avances dentro de la burocracia de derechos humanos pero no son tan rápidos como el aprendizaje de las y los delegados indígenas en relación a las formas de hacer de la ONU.

Por lo tanto, el uso de categorías es útil para comenzar a explicar y analizar eventos, interacciones y lo extra y ordinario de la vida cotidiana. El participar en una reunión de la ONU implica encuentros múltiples de conocimientos y epistemologías. Las formas de hacer y ser plurales de la ONU y las indígenas se interrelacionan y coexisten. Estas formas de hacer y ser son heterogéneas y deben entenderse así. Esta diversidad se representa a través de la contestación y de la adaptabilidad a las formas de hacer esperadas (por ejemplo, cumplir con los protocolos de la ONU, cumplir con las expectativas de la comunidad, etc.).

Como fue mostrado en este artículo a través de una observación etnográfica, la ampliación de los significados de la categoría indígena puede verse cuando una delegada indígena realiza una declaración. Este es un momento donde se representan diferentes conocimientos. La categoría indígena esperada es desbordada en la práctica y en sus significados. La persona indígena adapta, apropia, traduce códigos, interpreta, encarna, cambia y aun así permanece indígena (a su manera y para ella misma). Además de estar interrelacionando todos estos conocimientos,

ellos co-constituyen continuamente su identidad. Este proceso es racional, emocional, no permanente y contextual.

Las personas indígenas tienen una larga historia de participación en la ONU. Esta trayectoria debe leerse bajo diferentes perspectivas, como son los procesos de colonización y descolonización, las relaciones de poder y las tensiones políticas dentro y entre los estados miembros, la historia del compromiso y la participación activa de los pueblos indígenas, por mencionar solo algunos. Un análisis profundo de estas complejidades nos ayuda a comprender mejor cuán heterogénea es realmente la participación de las personas indígenas en la ONU. Esta participación es relacional, muestra la interconexión de varios conocimientos y nos puede ayudar a matizar categorizaciones binarias, jerárquicas y esperadas de lo que es ser ‘indígenas y no indígenas’.

La necesidad de exceder y ampliar los significados de diferentes categorías es evidente y no es un debate nuevo. El argumento presentado en esta contribución busca reconocer el exceso en la categoría indígena. Este reconocimiento nos permite ampliar el análisis y la comprensión en torno a la participación de personas indígenas en la ONU y a la representación de indigeneidad dentro de un espacio internacional a través de conceptos etnográficos (De la Cadena 2015) y categorías etnográficas. Esta mirada no busca crear nuevas categorías ni limitarlas, sino contribuir a mejorar nuestro entendimiento de lo que significa ser indígena en y para la ONU actualmente. Al ampliar nuestro discernimiento sobre las categorías existentes nos involucramos en un proyecto teórico-político de descolonización, y en la desjerarquización de significados, conocimientos y categorías. Este proyecto implica provincializar (Chakrabarty, 2008) epistemologías dominantes e ir hacia una reconfiguración, al menos en la academia, de jerarquías de conocimientos y direccionarnos hacia una justicia epistémica (Santos 2018). Asimismo, este tipo de proyecto requiere de un debate que no se limite a definiciones estáticas, sino que incorpore el esencialismo estratégico (Spivak 1984), la performatividad (Conklin, 1997; Graham, 2002; Warren & Jackson, 2002), y otros conceptos que permitan seguir ampliando el debate sobre indigeneidades, sobre definiciones abiertas de identidades indígenas y sobre constantes procesos de co-constitución identitaria.

Finalmente, me gustaría que este análisis contribuyera a dos conjuntos de preguntas: a una reflexión general sobre cómo ampliamos significados sobre que significa ser indígena para y en el sistema de la ONU y también fuera de él; y a cómo podemos repensar colectivamente metodologías, posicionamientos y reflexividades cuando realizamos investigaciones con personas indígenas. Anheo poder trabajar con ellas de manera colaborativa y no extractivista, sin embargo, esta contribución es un ejercicio académico limitado. No obstante, espero por lo menos provocar más diálogos, aperturas e inconformidades.

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Occupying and Expanding (un)Expected Categories: Ways of Being and Becoming indigenous within the United Nations System²

Introduction

Today, in the international human rights arena, and especially at the United Nations (UN), it is no longer exceptional to see indigenous³ delegates at a meeting in Geneva or New York. In meetings such as the Conference of Parties (COP⁴) where climate change issues are discussed, the presence of indigenous people is expected. In the social sciences, as well as in other disciplines, we tend to associate indigenous peoples with narratives on climate change that relate to mining, resource extraction, neoliberal economics, and human rights. On the other hand, it is less common to see indigenous delegates making a statement during a session of the Human Rights Council, or at UN meetings where indigenous issues, as defined by the UN, are not the main topic.

The example of the COP meetings partially illustrates how some categories or concepts are already occupied by ideas, meanings and practices about indigeneity,

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³ In this text I will use 'delegates', indigenous delegates' and 'indigenous peoples' interchangeably.

⁴ The Conference of the Parties (COP) is the supreme body of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

resource extraction and climate change. In particular, we can see how the aggregation and articulation of categories through ideas, practices, and meanings, create a narrative about what it means to 'be indigenous'. This abstract process is generated almost mechanically in our minds, but it is not neutral, it is a political process that is constructed from particular stories, places, and power relations.

There are multiple answers to the question of what it means to be indigenous. This is a recurrent question in the scholarly debate on indigenous issues and in anthropological research in particular (Blaser 2014; Conklin, 1997; Hale & Millamán 2005; Kuper 2003; Laurent 2016; Lucero 2006; Martinez Novo, 2006 among many others). The question of what it means to be indigenous generates controversies that I do not seek to resolve in this contribution. However, I think that through the study of indigenous participation within the UN system we can understand some of the complexities of these controversies, and the use in a particular context, of the category 'indigenous'.

This contribution is part of a project that seeks to understand the indigenous category through the participation of self-identified indigenous people in the context of several UN meetings. I will outline some unfinished reflections on how the analytical category 'indigenous' is represented within some spaces of the UN system. I will thereby explore how these representations fit with expected ideas of what it 'is to be indigenous' in these spaces, and how, through the observation of the performance of expected categories, the meanings of the indigenous category are expanded within a specific context and place.

I would like to mention that the reflections I present here have mainly been shaped by the epistemic meetings I have had with indigenous people during the last two years, but also by previous meetings. Although this reflective journey, as well as the meetings that I have had with these peoples, have enriched my reflections, I am fully responsible for the ideas that I present below.

This article is organized as follows: In the first section, I will describe briefly the spaces within the UN system where the indigenous delegates usually participate. In the second section, I will then describe in broad terms what procedures are followed within a UN session, and how the participation of indigenous delegates takes place.

In the third section, I continue with an ethnographic observation of a participation of an indigenous delegate in the UN Human Rights Council. Finally, I end with some reflections on how we can continue to think about indigenous participation in bureaucratic spaces beyond the imposed and the expected.

About encounters with and at the United Nations

It is difficult to summarize the history of indigenous peoples' participation in international human rights spaces and the UN. There is an extensive scholarship on the international indigenous peoples' movement, the UN system, human rights, indigenous peoples' rights, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the multiple indigenous movements in Latin America and the Caribbean (Blaser; 2009; Dahl; 2012; Kenrick and Lewis, 2004; Lucero, 2006; Minde, 2008; Morin, 2012; Schulte-Tenckhoff, 1997, 2016; Schulte-Tenckhoff and Khan 2011, Stamatopoulou, 1994, *inter alia*). Throughout the history of international human rights bodies, the international indigenous movement has achieved visibility through many events and circumstances. The UN system is one of the platforms in the international arena where indigenous peoples participate, although it is not the only one. Indigenous peoples present a wide range of collective issues and demands in the different bodies of the UN. Since the late 1970s, the international presence of the indigenous movement has become prominent at the UN level, mainly due to the active participation of indigenous peoples and the creation of various mechanisms that address indigenous issues.

The UN human rights system in conjunction with the participation of indigenous delegates has created spaces, mechanisms and procedures, where indigenous issues are addressed. There, indigenous people organize, participate and have some degree of decision-making power. The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP) are the three

mechanisms established in the United Nations system that specifically deal with indigenous issues.⁵ Prior to the existence of these mechanisms, the Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP), and the Working Group on the Draft Declaration (WGDD) were two important bodies that produced important milestones and institutional practices in the history of indigenous peoples within the UN. Indigenous delegates, UN staff and State representatives have participated in the drafting of important documents such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). They continue to write updates, studies, and alternative reports for different UN bodies.

Within the UN, there are spaces of indigenous participation in addition to the mechanisms dealing solely with indigenous issues and the production of documents. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Geneva, within its Indigenous Peoples and Minorities Section (IPMS), has two important institutional structures that specifically promote indigenous participation in the UN. The Indigenous Fellowship Programme (IFP), and the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations (UNVFIP). These two budget-holding structures play an important role in promoting one kind of indigenous participation in the UN system. However, these are not the only relevant structures in the United Nations. Other international organizations and agencies working on indigenous peoples' issues have their own fellowships and internships, for example the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), and the International Labour Organization (ILO), among others. Currently, indigenous peoples usually participate in these UN mechanisms as delegates sent by their communities, as representatives of indigenous organizations and NGOs, as UN staff, and as official government representatives of their nation states.

About being and/or becoming indigenous in and for the United Nations

⁵ These three mechanisms address indigenous issues and are mainly led by indigenous people working within the UN system.

Indigenous delegates participating in the UN system are generally elected by their communities. For many of them, exposure to this international space implies changes to their personal lives, and changes for the lives of their communities. Most of the indigenous delegates I spoke with agreed that it is necessary to participate in the international arena to make their peoples and their situations visible, *'it is a way of showing that we have problems', 'if you do not come, they think everything is fine in your territory', 'we come to put pressure on them'*.⁶ In some cases, their claims could benefit from international attention and international pressure. In some cases, this attention can lead to international tribunals's rulings.

During my ethnographic work, I observed several UN mechanisms, attended their meetings, and their sessions in Geneva and New York, where indigenous people participated. They usually participate by making statements and in describing the circumstances in which they live. In general, it is necessary to be accredited in order to participate in most UN meetings.⁷ This means that indigenous delegates have to be part of, or invited by, an organization that has a consultative status at the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).⁸ Getting this accreditation entails a process of registration, application and acceptance. This is a laborious and time-consuming process. Indigenous individuals come to these meetings by different means, often supported (economically) by their communities, by grassroots organizations, through NGOs (local, national, international) that work in their territory or on a particular related issue (land grabbing, mining, climate change, water, education, etc.), with the government of the nation-state where their territories are located, invited by the UN, invited by universities, as specialists, lawyers, etc.

⁶ These are extracts from informal conversations that I had with indigenous people in Geneva and New York (2016-2019).

⁷ For example, the sessions of the Human Rights Council, the Universal Periodic Reviews (UPR), the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, etc.

⁸ See: <https://csonet.org/index.php?menu=34>

The participation of indigenous representatives in the UN meetings usually consist of presenting data from alternative reports, acting as panelists or making statements (which is the most common way of participating). During a meeting, indigenous representatives make statements on different issues, such as: struggles in their territories, violation of human rights and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, etc. They also organize side events. In addition to this, during their visits to any of the UN headquarters, they organize meetings with the staff of UN committees and conventions and with their countries' official representatives to the UN (permanent missions, embassies, etc.). They also network with other local and international organizations and NGOs.

The Human Rights Council (HRC) offers an example of indigenous peoples' participation in the UN. This intergovernmental human rights body meets regularly in Geneva, three times a year. A panel discussion on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is scheduled during the last of these sessions, which takes place in September. As in many UN sessions, one of the ways in which attendants participate is by making a two to three-minute statement. Clearly, the content of those statements is influenced and delimited by time constraints. We could broadly summarize the structure of a statements as follows (whether the are given by indigenous or non-indigenous participants): Acknowledgments and greetings to the chair of the session and/or the panelists, brief presentation of a situation (preferably) related to the topic addressed during the panel, and conclusions, accompanied by some requests, suggestions, and recommendations to improve the aforementioned situation. A statement is expressed (mainly read) in one of the official languages of the UN (English, French, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Arabic) and it is simultaneously interpreted.

There are some additional logistical procedures that must be completed in order to make a statement during a HRC session. As mentioned above, the organization facilitating the participation of the indigenous delegate needs to be accredited by ECOSOC. This will allow the session participants to acquire UN badges to enter the facilities where the meeting will take place. The person who is going to make a statement should previously register online to the list of speakers, and print and give copies of his/her statement to the HRC secretariat to facilitate the work of the

interpreters, etc. The speaker will only take the floor if time allows. Many times sessions are lengthy, which reduces the time to deliver statements. In those cases the list of speakers will be shortened and only those at the top of the list will participate. From this description I argue that by (trying to) make a statement, an indigenous delegate in the HRC embodies and represents UN practices and knowledges. He or she temporarily incorporates and enacts the codes of the UN.

How are these codes known, incorporated, and enacted by indigenous representatives? According to my observations, indigenous people know how to represent and use these codes. They seem to know them by being there. They understand them without necessarily fully knowing the whole dynamic of a HRC session. Moreover, they have been informed about these codes by their hosts in Geneva or partners in their home country. However, knowing the protocol and putting it into practice are two different things. In my conversations with them, some indigenous people recognized to have felt nervous when they made a statement for the first time at the UN. Those who had had a previous experience delivering statements felt more comfortable when giving a statement for the second or third time. Others felt familiar with the UN dynamics, since they had been participating in these meetings for many years. After participating in a UN session for the first-time things become easier. The practice of giving a statement becomes an acquired and embodied knowledge.

There are various channels through which participants (indigenous and non-indigenous) can learn and become familiar with the protocol of a UN meeting, as well as with indigenous rights issues and mechanisms of participation in the international arena, etc.,. Some examples include the indigenous peoples' fellowship programme (organized by the OHCHR), international human rights training programs, university diplomas in indigenous rights, etc.

After this brief description of how indigenous individuals participate in a HRC session (this format is repeated in many sessions of other UN mechanisms; there are also other forms of participation), we can argue that in such moments and spaces

different (at least more than two) epistemologies converge. For example, Mapuche, indigenous, urban, and international epistemologies. Some Mapuche people know how to be and act in their Mapuche world.⁹ They also know the international indigenous movement and the urban environment of their country of residence. Moreover, they know how to enact the international codes of being and doing in the UN. They know how to be indigenous in the UN. However, they are still Mapuche and they are constantly (re)creating and rethinking their indigeneity internally, in front of other Mapuches, and in front of indigenous and non-indigenous people. In contrast, the UN does not know about the Mapuche ways of being and doing.

Encounters: the expected indigenous people?

As mentioned before, indigenous people encounter and interact with different knowledges in the UN. They (like all people) may not consciously realize that they do so all the time, since encounters occur almost spontaneously. This, however, does not mean that these encounters are not tense, disruptive and conflictive moments. Since the procedures for participating in the UN are quite structured, these encounters involve effort, energy, intuition, the ability to relate quickly with codes, and to understand the some functioning logics.

We can understand a particular type of participation in the UN (such as making a statement) as an embodied enactment of multiple knowledges. Making a declaration in the UN is a representation of the UN discourse and practices intertwined with indigenous practices and knowledges (the use of indigenous languages at the beginning and end of the declaration, practices, logics and ways of describing an event, body language, etc., that belong to indigenous epistemologies).

⁹ Similarly, in a specific Mapuche or indigenous world, one can live in different ways, as a child, a woman, a man, an elder, a shaman, a widow, an indigenous intellectual, etc. It is important to highlight the heterogeneous ways in which indigenous people live their lives in their territories and also to mention that there are many shared codes and others in dispute.

These entangled ways of doing things are also informed by the need to mobilize useful knowledge according to the situation, time, place and context in which the statement is given.

When I address this type of encounters in my observations, I explore what I call 'the expected indigenous' and the meanings that such category has in the UN. I referred earlier to how in the social sciences we use categories to explain and partially describe the sociality of our daily lives. It is worth mentioning again that, in giving meaning to a category, this category becomes delimited. Clearly, we use categories that have already been given a meaning in order to be able to begin any type of analysis about any issue. However, as our analysis advances, we recognize the limits of our categories, we realize that these can be flexible, elastic, and that they usually go beyond the meaning that we had momentarily given to them. We need to acknowledge that categories and meanings are in motion, have nuances, and can potentially challenge knowledge hierarchies.

Often in the UN environment, indigenous people are expected to be indigenous in many ways - in ways that they know and in ways that they do not know *a priori*. There is an expectation of what it means to be indigenous in general, of what it means to be indigenous in the UN, and of how to fit into that category. The fulfillment of these expectations is necessary in order for indigenous delegates to be able to participate in the UN.

The meanings associated with the indigenous category can be related to political positions, to practices, to origins and land, to strategies, to performativity, to being part of the UN, but above all, they are related to self-determination, and to being recognized as a member of a people and community. Generally, the people we call indigenous identify themselves discursively by saying 'I am Quechua', 'I am Awajún', 'I am Mapuche' before identifying themselves as indigenous.¹⁰ The category is, *a priori*, occupied by a plurality of discursive meanings and is enacted in

¹⁰ In this contribution I consciously use the homogenizing and institutionalized character of the 'indigenous' category since I will not develop, in depth, any specific case of an indigenous people or person.

multiple ways. That is to say, it is incessantly recreated by indigenous and non-indigenous people, it is not permanent, and it exists in relation to, or vis-a-vis, its interlocutors.

There have been several attempts to define indigenous peoples in the UN. Today, a working definition is used. It was elaborated as a legal and political category. This definition includes four criteria: indigenous peoples are not dominant in economic, political and socio-cultural terms, although they are not necessarily always a minority in numerical terms; they are the descendants of the inhabitants of a given territory; they have been victims of genocide, conquest, and colonization; and they seek to maintain their identity. This working definition is useful to some extent and can be adapted to most indigenous peoples who have suffered from processes of colonization. However, this definition does not fit all peoples who consider themselves indigenous. Moreover, there are controversies about these definitions, about the indigenous category and about the notion of indigeneity (Schulte-Tenckhoff, 2012). Despite this, mentioning the UN definition is useful here because it allows an (initial) understanding of how indigenous peoples are perceived (as a category) within the UN system.

In order to broaden our understanding of the 'indigenous' category in the UN environment, it is important to avoid adopting static definitions. However, we do recognize that there is a collective and almost ubiquitous idea of what it means to 'be indigenous' in general (an idea that must be challenged tirelessly). This expectation has been created through many historical processes, research, the media, etc. According to my ethnographic notes, the expected idea of being indigenous in the UN is broader and more ambitious than the working definition mentioned above. Being indigenous in the UN implies, in addition to working definition's criteria, living in an indigenous territory, being recognized by their people, advocating for indigenous and human rights, being recognized as a leader in their communities, speaking a UN language, having participated in other international or regional human rights bodies, among other requirements. These are some of the expected characteristics that an indigenous person should have (or be acquiring) when participating in a UN meeting. In addition to this, it appears to be important

for them to speak an indigenous language, to wear their traditional dress, and to know or perform traditional practices.

Therefore, in order to actively participate in a UN session, an indigenous person is required to meet all of these (and other) expectations. To simultaneously perform and embody all of these discourses and practices is a very difficult task, yet indigenous persons manage to do so. In performing the 'expected indigenous person', indigenous people in the UN carry out practices and discourses that go beyond these expectations. They perform what is expected from them and much more. The unexpected. In a HRC session, indigenous people must be flexible enough to adapt to meeting formats and differentiated ways of doing things. The codes of participation in an indigenous territory may follow different formats, although similar practices and epistemologies might also be found there. However, some practices have been historically more valorized in non-indigenous settings while others are not taken seriously. This situation highlights the challenges that are faced by indigenous leaders when acting between different forms of knowledges, values and epistemic hierarchies, and when enacting what is expected from them by indigenous and non-indigenous interlocutors. It is important to say that there are also expectations among indigenous peoples from the same community, and expectations between peoples from different communities. These encounters often require the embodiment of non-indigenous knowledges in order to protect an expected indigenous identity.

Between the expected and the unexpected: observations of a statement in the Human Rights Council

I will now present some reflections on the observation of a statement made by an indigenous woman during a session of the HRC. Through this observation I attempt to broaden the understanding of the indigenous category, and to challenge its homogenizing limitations, within a specific space of the UN system. That is, I attempt to show how our analytical categories are loaded with (un)expected meanings that we need to make visible.

On the 19th of September 2018, during the twentieth session of the 39th regular session of the Human Rights Council, a panel discussion was held on the inclusion of indigenous peoples in Agenda 2030. Each year the HRC organizes a panel discussion, usually lasting half a day, specifically related to the rights of indigenous peoples. During this particular session, the intervention of an indigenous delegate made me question and reconsider what I consider to be an (un)expected category.

After having observed multiple meetings and sessions related to indigenous issues at the United Nations in Geneva, New York, and at the UN website, I had become used to the 'prefabricated' type of statement described above. I had internalized that format as 'normal', as it is also likely to be internalized by the indigenous and non-indigenous peoples who attend and participate in these spaces. Observing a particular practice repeatedly can be counterproductive. It can become a weakness that we face as researchers when we are exposed to ethnographic experiences that seem to be similar. It is a weakness because it predisposes us not to listen to what is not said, not to look beyond what we see. I had been seeing and hearing what was expected, without allowing myself to perceive what was (un)expected. I had limited my observation sensibility in my own ethnographic experiences.

During the aforementioned panel in Geneva, an indigenous woman representing the Guarani-Kaioiwá people from Matto Grosso do Sul, Brazil, made a statement that was (un)expected for me. The almost three minutes of her statement seemed longer and more complex than usual. If my intuition does not betray me, I believe that this did not go unnoticed for the people who were present in room XX of the Palais des Nations in Geneva.¹¹

Here is a brief description of this participation. The Guarani-Kaioiwá woman began reading her statement in Spanish. She read it slowly and with difficulty. Usually the

¹¹ See this particular intervention in the following link (minute: 1:32:55 - 1:25:39) <http://webtv.un.org/search/panel-discussion-on-inclusion-of-indigenous-people-in-2030-agenda-20th-meeting-39th-regular-session-human-rights-council-5836878420001/?term=indigenous%20panel%20HRC&cat=Human%20Rights%20Council&sort=date&lan=original>

speakers (indigenous and non-indigenous) read their statements quickly because there is not enough time to mention all they want to say. The speakers who preceded and followed this woman's statement read their statements in the expected way. However, when she began her participation, a tension was felt across the room, at least for a couple of minutes. I had heard that reading slowly could be a strategy used to get the full attention of the room. However, this did not seem to be her intention in this case. The woman read her text in Spanish for about two minutes and then she switched from Spanish to Portuguese (for one minute). During this time she didn't read, but spoke.

Spanish was not a language in which the speaker felt comfortable. She did not master this language as a native Spanish-speaking person. Spanish was a foreign language to her. The situation changed when she spoke in Portuguese since this is the official language of her country of residence. Portuguese may be the first, second or third language she speaks. Her mother tongue may be an indigenous language or Portuguese. Let us not forget that Portuguese is not an official language of the United Nations. Therefore, the simultaneous interpretation that accompanied her presentation, and the subtitles that accompany the video recording of this presentation, are not completely faithful to what she said in Portuguese.

As a spectator, I was expecting a quick reading of her statement. This is an institutionalized practice that is recommended and suggested in the United Nations. It is part of the ways of doing in the UN. I was waiting for the expected indigenous person who fits into the category of indigenous in the UN. The Guarani-Kauiwá woman reading the statement was partially performing this category. However, she did not seem comfortable in this language, or at least reading in it. Things changed when she switched to Portuguese. She was able to express her ideas and emotions more fluently. This situation triggered me and made me reflect on the fact that Portuguese is not one of the languages that is interpreted in UN meetings; that reading in Spanish as a skill, and what is involved in accessing

and mastering this skill; and even thinking about the lack of necessity, use, and value of this skill for some persons that do not use it on a daily basis.¹² At this point I thought that the UN system only listens to those who enact its codes and speak its recognized languages. The indigenous person spoke in a UN language when reading the text. Then, when she changed to Portuguese it proved to be a challenge for the UN interpretes. She was no longer speaking one of the UN official languages. However, it was more comfortable for the speaker to say what she had come to say. Broadly speaking she said: *'...that she was bringing her pain and that of her people to the UN... and that she needs help from the UN... because her people are suffering a lot... and she asks the president of the UN to speak to the president of Brazil so that the latter pays more attention to indigenous peoples'* (my translation and interpretation).

Beyond the use of different languages and the headdress that she was wearing, which is distinctive and traditional of her indigenous community, her reading and her speaking reveals many complexities and tensions. The text she read in Spanish mentioned the objectives of the 2030 agenda. It was a text that had been prepared following a 'UN' theme. When she spoke in Portuguese, the tone of her speech was different. It was shaped by statements asking for attention to the particular situation of her people within their national framework. The statement became, perhaps, less loyal to protocol, but it was loaded with emotions and its message was more direct.

The multiplicity and complexity of her statement, and its enactment within the rigidity of a protocolary space, continues to catch my attention. This is not the first time that this has happened, nor will it be the last. The participation of this speaker was in line with the expected category of the indigenous in the UN. However, her participation revealed more than that. She was wearing a traditional headdress, she spoke about Agenda 2030, she spoke in two languages, and she briefly got the attention of the room. I imagine that when her participation ended, she had

¹² Which is related to the limited presence of the 'official' Brazilian state education system in indigenous territories, as well as to discrimination and inequality in access to education, among multiple other structural reasons related to standardized literacy.

meetings and encounters with NGO representatives, with representatives of the Permanent Mission of Brazil to the United Nations, she probably walked around Geneva, returned to her community, saw her participation again on the Internet, continues to fight for her cause, is a mother, and leader in her community, etc.

Openings: expanding (un)expected categories

This contribution is part of a series of observations and reflections on indigenous participations within the UN system. The observation that was described in this contribution is one of them and I would like to make it clear that I have not spoken with the person in this example. However, her participation was crucial to my observations, especially when it comes to problematizing the expected category of an indigenous person in the UN and, in consequence, when it comes to destabilizing our narratives about the people who inhabit (to us) this category. In a certain way, this example points to the need of re-encountering excess - or humanity - within this (un)expected category. We are more than categories and definitions.

The participation of the Guarani-Kaiowá woman sent several messages in various codes and languages. The most explicit ones were the issues related to Agenda 2030 and her request to the UN president. More subtle messages were conveyed by her uncomfortable reading in Spanish and by her speech in Portuguese. She simultaneously fulfilled the expectations of the UN while giving us something unexpected: the obligation to hear to her discomfort while reading in Spanish. This unexpected moment makes visible the indigenous people that we refuse, or perhaps do not want, to see and hear, because they not know all the ways of doing in the UN (the official languages, for example).

I have reflected and thought about the UN meetings as hegemonic, colonial, and inflexible spaces of imposition and protocols. However, these are also idealized spaces that generate expectations in those who freely determined themselves as indigenous. This is because in these spaces indigenous peoples can make specific demands and requests. There, indigenous peoples can also continue to ask for

official recognition from their states. Although it is unfortunate that they still have to do so. The UN embodies an ideal of an institution that defends human rights. Moreover, as mentioned at the beginning of this contribution, participating in the UN can shed light on urgent, and not so urgent, situations that indigenous peoples around the world have to face. Unfortunately, indigenous expectations and indigenous ways of doing things do not permeate the UN system, as do the practices and codes of the UN to the lives of those who participate in it. There have been improvements in the UN human rights bureaucracy, but these changes are not as rapid as the indigenous delegates' learning of the UN codes and ways of doing things.

Therefore, the use of fixed categories is useful, although just as a starting point to explain and analyze events and interactions, as well as the ordinary and the extraordinary within everyday life. Participating in a UN meeting involves multiple encounters of knowledges and epistemologies; encounters where a plurality of ways of doing and being, that characterize both the UN and indigenous people, are interrelated and coexist. These ways of doing and being are heterogeneous and should be understood as such. This diversity is performed through adaptation and contestation of what is expected (e.g. to comply with the UN protocols, to meet the community's expectations, etc.).

As it has been shown in this contribution through an ethnographic example, when a statement is made by an indigenous delegate it is possible to see them push at the boundaries of the (expected)indigenous category. This is a moment where different knowledges are enacted. The expected indigenous category is surpassed in practice and meaning. The indigenous participants in the UN adapt, appropriate, translate codes, interpret, embody, change and still remain indigenous (in their own way and to themselves). In addition to intertwining different types of knowledges in this process, they continuously co-constitute their identity. This process is rational, emotional, non-permanent, and contextual.

Indigenous people have a long history of involvement in the UN. This history must be read considering different perspectives, such as processes of colonization and decolonization, power relations, and political tensions, within and between member states, and the history of indigenous peoples' engagement and active participation

in the UN, to name just a few. A thorough analysis of these complex processes will help us to better understand how heterogeneous the participation of indigenous peoples in the UN really is. This type of participation is relational, it considers the interconnectedness of different types of knowledges, and it can help to complexify the binary, hierarchical, and expected categorization of what it means to be 'indigenous and non-indigenous'.

The need to go beyond and to expand the meaning of different categories is evident and it is not a new debate. The argument presented in this contribution seeks to recognize how rich, diverse and fluid is the enactment of the (un)expected indigenous category, and how its expected meanings are exceeded. From this recognition, we can begin to expand the analysis and understanding of indigenous people's participation and enactment of indigeneity in international spaces, through ethnographic concepts (De la Cadena 2015) and ethnographic categories. This type of approach does not seek to create new categories or delimit existing ones, but rather, to contribute to improving our understanding of what it means to be indigenous in and for the UN today. In broadening our understandings of existing categories, we engage in a theoretical-political decolonizing project, and in the de-hierarchization of meanings, knowledges and categories. This project involves provincializing (Chakrabarty, 2008) dominant epistemologies and moving towards a reconfiguration, at least in academia, of knowledge hierarchies, as well as moving towards epistemic justice (Santos, 2018). Moreover, this project demands a debate that goes beyond static definitions, that incorporates strategic essentialism (Spivak 1984), performativity (Conklin, 1997; Graham, 2002; Warren & Jackson, 2002), and other concepts; concepts that allow us to continue expanding the discussion on indigeneities, on open definitions of indigenous identities and on constant processes of co-constitution of identity.

Finally, I would like this analysis to contribute to two sets of questions: how do we broaden the meaning of what it is to be indigenous for and in the UN system, and outside it as well; and how can we collectively rethink our methodologies, positionalities and reflexivities when we conduct research with indigenous peoples. I look forward to working with self-identify indigenous persons in types of research that are collaborative and non-extractivist, yet this contribution is still a limited

academic exercise. However, I hope to have at least provoked dialogue, openings and disagreements.

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Semillas de Resistencia: El Grupo Pijao, un Proceso Juvenil por la Descolonización y Unidad del Pueblo Pijao²

Y fue un 09 de abril, el 09 de abril de 2012, el día que, en el hall de sociología de la Universidad Nacional de Colombia en Bogotá, se logran encontrar inicialmente los pensamientos y sentires de cinco jóvenes. Se juntaron estas hijas e hijos del gran territorio de Natagaimas y Coyaimas, para dar nombre y fuerza a la semilla del proceso del Grupo Pijao; semilla que aún hoy seguimos cultivando y cosechando desde diferentes territorios y estrategias.

A medida que empezó el andar de esta semilla, ha sido grande la riqueza de ideas, fuerzas y sentires que fortalecen su cultivar como cosecha del Grupo Pijao. Es grato ver en su recorrido la gestación de un proceso que en sus inicios se asemeja a la escena de un grupo de adolescentes queriendo construir y elevar su propia cometa al viento. También es grato encontrar en este proceso, la manera como desde el caminar se ha logrado crecer y transitar en las representaciones de la vida desde la adolescencia, la juventud y la adultez para cada una de nosotros y nosotras. Metafóricamente siguiendo aquella escena de elevar la cometa construida, seguimos impulsando el vuelo de nuestro proceso a diferentes distancias y espacios de la vida

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política, cultural y territorial desde nuestra identidad como Pueblo Originario en resistencia por la pervivencia.

Entre sonrisas, caminares y palabras como nuestra acostumbrada manera de tejer pensamiento propio, recordamos y asociamos la excusa de nuestro primer encuentro. Tal vez para algunas y algunos de nosotros de manera fortuita, para otros intencionada, recordamos la fuerza de atracción que trae para el Grupo encontrarnos al rededor del sabor y la espiritualidad de compartir una chicha de nuestros territorios. La oportunidad de una “*totumada de chicha*” se convierte en la tentación mayor para convocar y llegar a nuestros encuentros al crecer individual desde lo colectivo.

Los temas y motivos de nuestros encuentros han crecido tanto como cada uno de nosotros, por eso, recordar aquella vieja frase “*el todo es más que la suma de sus partes*”, nos permite reconocer hoy el crecimiento, no solo desde nosotros mismos, sino también desde amigos y aliados. Aquellos que nos han visto crecer en la fuerza e importancia del Grupo Pijao para la juventud, nuestras comunidades y territorios principalmente.

Por lo anterior, hacer un recuento de los momentos en el proceso del Grupo Pijao, es sin duda un ejercicio de introspección. Tanto para cada una de las personas que hemos estado ahí, de quienes hemos trascendido junto con este reto compartido, como para quienes nos conocerán desde estas letras. Esto llena el presente relato de emociones y memoria, no solo para quienes lo escriben, sino también para aquellos que los seguiremos leyendo y re-leyendo en nuestro devenir individual y colectivo.

Es importante decir que ese primer grupo de cofundadores y cofundadoras, que en 2012 decidieron dar nombre y empezar a formar este proceso (proceso reafirmado posteriormente por tantos cuerpos y visiones que se han ido sumando) se caracterizaba principalmente por jóvenes universitarios. La mayoría estudiantes de la Universidad Nacional de Colombia, cuyas edades no superaban los 25 años. Sus condiciones de vida, especialmente de carácter académico, los motivó a creer en este reto. Eran estudiantes que llegaban a la ciudad, de las comunidades que resistían en el gran territorio de Natagaimas y Coyaimas, junto con el gran resguardo de Ortega y Chaparral. Llegaban con la apuesta y esperanza de familias enteras por superar

desde la educación institucionalizada en un título profesional, las limitaciones socioeconómicas que un sistema económico explotador, subordinante y discriminatorio les llevaba subsistiendo por generaciones.

A su vez, dicha brecha se acentuaba al momento de llegar a la universidad más importante y reconocida del país. Al estar inmersa en las condiciones de vida de la gran ciudad, en su acelerado ritmo y alta competitividad diaria, la riqueza multiétnica y pluricultural del país, y lo que ello significaba en las oportunidades diferenciales de la población, se pierden al momento de compartir el conocimiento institucionalizado en las aulas de clase. Por lo tanto, necesidades de refuerzo académico, apoyo financiero para la alimentación y el costo de la vida estudiantil, al igual que estrategias para la superación de situaciones de discriminación y aislamiento social en la vida universitaria y cotidiana, sobresalen en lo suficiente para tejer un acompañamiento entre paisanas y paisanos. El compartir de la experiencia y las oportunidades que unos y otras sumaban, hacían posible el sentimiento de pertenencia e identidad empoderada para seguir afrontando y avanzando en la tarea que cada uno junto con sus familias llevaban.

Así surge la primera estrategia con la que como Grupo Pijao llegamos a nuestros territorios y empezamos a abrazarnos en el lenguaje y cotidianidad de nuestras comunidades. ‘Pre-Icfes y Pre-Universitarios’, fue ese el nombre inicial de la primera iniciativa con la que compartimos la necesidad y la importancia de ser consecuentes y solidarios con nuestras familias, nuestra comunidad y nuestras amistades en los territorios originarios. Los talleres Pre-Icfes preparaban a los estudiantes de los últimos 3 años de bachillerato para los exámenes estatales nacionales de educación secundaria en Colombia. Los talleres Pre-Universitarios preparaban a los bachilleres para los exámenes de admisión de algunas universidades públicas en el país. Comenzamos esta iniciativa siendo conscientes de la oportunidad de privilegio que puede traer el acceso a la educación institucionalizada, no solo a nuestras vidas como profesionales, sino también como herramienta para los procesos con los que nuestras comunidades luchan y resisten día a día en los territorios.

Al retomar en nuestros diálogos de los primeros encuentros como cofundadores y cofundadoras del Grupo Pijao, alrededor de la chicha coincidimos en la reflexión

crítica frente al modelo de educación y desarrollo que se acentuaba en nuestros territorios. Se trata de modelos de recolonización, en los que desde la escuela se nos enseñan como únicos referentes de crecimiento y desarrollo de capacidades, el sueño de ser soldados o policías al servicio de la patria, principalmente para los hombres. Y, en algunos casos, las destrezas financieras en los negocios para seguir generando riqueza desde la comercialización de las cosechas del campesino productor cada vez más empobrecido. Por su parte a las mujeres se les insiste en la importancia del protocolo y las destrezas en la belleza y las tareas domésticas para encontrar un hombre solvente, capaz de darles su reconocimiento como “señoras” y satisfacer sus necesidades familiares. Para eso nos cultivaba la escuela.

Por eso, por más que en los planes de caminatas, fogatas, de echar baño en la quebrada, el río o el pozo, sacáramos como insurgencia otros anhelos para nuestras vidas entre amigas y amigos, nuestras condiciones no eran ajenas a las limitaciones que el sistema nos quería imponer. Decidimos actuar, por amor y fuerza con nuestros amigos y familiares que quedaban en el territorio, algunos de los cuales sabíamos estaban resignados a cumplir sus 18 años para ingresar a las filas del ejército, o poder entrar a trabajar en las labores de apoyo que en el pueblo o la ciudad se requirieran. Proyectamos así en la estrategia de talleres Pre-Icfes y Pre-Universitarios una oportunidad para seguir caminando con nuestros paisanos y paisanas alrededor de otros mundos posibles. Los talleres se iniciaron en Natagaima, con 5 grupos, gracias al voluntariado de cada uno y el de otros amigos y aliados que empezaron a sumarse. Nos encontrábamos de 7 a 12 los días domingos en las instalaciones del colegio municipal y el aporte por parte de quienes orientaban y quienes asistían a los talleres era voluntario. La riqueza de saberes y conocimientos que confluían en esas aulas, llevo rápidamente a superar metodologías de enseñanza magistral alrededor de guías de enseñanza. En su lugar, se empezaron a tejer discusiones y reflexiones temáticas a partir de las realidades propias. Encontramos otras formas de aprender y enseñar geografía, ciencias sociales, español, y hasta matemáticas.

Ese fue nuestro primer retoño. Así como en la cosecha de maíz, la alegría y vitalidad que trae ver el momento en que un grano sale a saludar el sol en una nueva forma, ya no de grano sino de hojas, así fue la emoción que nos trajo el balance de esta

experiencia. Efectivamente no es el conocimiento por el conocimiento, por más que se quiera generalizar un adoctrinamiento en la comprensión del mundo que nos rodea. El encuentro desde lo propio, con lo propio, genera sin duda una capacidad que desborda las limitaciones aprendidas. Se trazaba una nueva forma de trabajo, a partir del lenguaje, a partir de lo que nos representa y nos identifica. Decidimos entonces cambiar no solo el nombre de los talleres, sino que quisimos resignificar todos los campos en los que trabajábamos. Empezamos con ello a hablar y trabajar sobre el sentido y significado de esta primera estrategia de talleres ahora fortalecida bajo el nombre de ‘Tejiendo Saberes para la Vida’. Queríamos ir mucho más allá de un ejercicio de reforzamiento académico conforme a las demandas de la institucionalidad, para trabajar desde otras formas de construir saberes y conocimientos. El objetivo no era solo el cumulo individual de distinción en el reconocimiento social de “quien sabe y quien no”, sino en la horizontalidad de los roles entre quien aprende y quien enseña, además de la producción de conocimientos y la funcionalidad que estos tienen para la vida.

Hablando Pijadamente: descolonizando el pensamiento y el lenguaje

El diálogo se abre así en la voz que permite palpar una suave textura de la realización que brinda sembrar una semilla que te saluda en su abrirse al mundo con sus hojas. Así mismo han transcurrido estas líneas donde contamos el proceso que nos condujo a entender que ser alguien en la vida no significa ser profesional como lo plantea la educación ‘formal’, o el sistema de producción de ciudadanías. Por el contrario, ser alguien como lo educan en la escuela conlleva al aniquilamiento cultural de nuestro pueblo, más aún si ser alguien se construye desde la negación de lo propio. De ahí la importancia de entender que ser alguien en la vida nos teje a quienes ya son alguien, como nuestras madres y padres, nuestros ancestros, nuestro territorio, en el que se ha cultivado un legado que no podemos negar ni olvidar. Por eso tomamos un momento para recordar que mientras hablamos no hemos parado de respirar, que las letras han hecho latir este texto de sentires mientras crecen sus hojas, y que sin darnos cuenta sus raíces se van extendiendo por un gran fluido de sentires que irrigan el territorio en el que se enraizó el propósito de estos jóvenes soñadores.

Ya el mundo universitario se había descentralizado con ‘tejiendo saberes’. Los tiempos se deslizaban como relojes de Dalí que hacían puentes con el territorio. Las semanas preparaban nuestro retorno desde la capital a nuestros orígenes. Nos motivaba la increíble sed de construir conocimiento desde lo que viven los jóvenes en las realidades diversas de la ruralidad abatida por el abandono estatal, por las afectaciones del conflicto social y armado, y por la estandarización del aprendizaje. Creamos un espacio de trabajo en la ‘Casa Semillas’, una casa de tres pisos dispuesta por la Corporación Grupo Semillas para el trabajo organizativo, comunitario en el municipio de Natagaima. Allí fue el punto de encuentro para iniciar las caminatas por el territorio que tiene impreso mensajes en los lugares sagrados. Cada comunidad, cerro, lago, salto -cascada-, abría la posibilidad de entender el mundo para poderlo explicar. Fue así como se nombró una nueva estrategia del Grupo Pijao, y quizá la más esperada en cada espacio de trabajo, ‘Caminos Pijaos’: un proceso para conocer, reconocer, y apropiarse el territorio para así defenderlo.

Los ‘Caminos Pijaos’ marcaron la pauta para recorrer el territorio con la firme intención de leerlo con detenimiento. Así sucedió con el Cerro Ancestral de Pacandé, el cual tiene gran afluencia de feligreses en “Semana Santa” y que el grupo decidió subir guiados por el Mohán³ y por los líderes de los Resguardo de Yacó Molana, y Pacandé. Mientras en un viacrucis el pueblo subía por la cara norte del cerro, jóvenes del grupo conocían el camino antiguo por la cara sur, uno que conectaba con las quebradas y con la ruta que buscaban los mineros para explotar la mina de oro que protege el cerro a su alrededor. Esta práctica permitió que al llegar a la cumbre del cerro luego de varias horas de caminata, reflexión y trabajo en equipo, se tomara aire con un ritual de armonización acompañados del serpenteante río Magdalena. A la llegada se podía divisar la gran laguna seca de la que proviene el origen de Coyaimas y Natagaimas, quienes hoy constituimos el gran Pueblo Pijao. Este gran paso nos permitió llevar a los jóvenes que participaban de los talleres de ‘Tejiendo Saberes para la Vida’ a ejercicios prácticos para el reconocimiento del

³ Médico ancestral, autoridad Pijao

territorio; una forma de enlazar a jóvenes rurales y urbanos en un mismo sentir territorial.

Transcurrieron entonces los años de 2013 y 2014 en los que varios jóvenes de los talleres presentaron sus exámenes de estado Icfes, y exámenes de admisión a la Universidad Nacional de Colombia. Hubo grandes resultados en la principal cosecha: jóvenes construyendo su plan de vida. Pero también hubo resultados positivos en los puntajes y las pruebas: algunos jóvenes ingresaron a las carreras de Medicina, Física, Química, Ingenierías, y Ciencias humanas, y no sólo en la Universidad Nacional, sino también en varias universidades regionales. Al llegar a este punto el proceso se constituyó en un gran andamiaje con una fuerza arrolladora de jóvenes reconociendo su caminar y la importancia de su actuar en la realidad territorial y nacional.

Esta gran responsabilidad conllevó a tomar un nuevo aire en el caminar del Grupo Pijao. Entendíamos que se requería tejer nuestro proceso con el proceso recorrido por nuestros mayores y mayores, en la resistencia como pueblo Pijao por la garantía de derechos. Dentro del lenguaje usado por los integrantes del grupo, valoramos la forma rápida de entendernos al hablarnos Pijadamente: una carga de lenguaje territorial y ancestral que podíamos usar para este nuevo tejido. Fue así como surgió la tercera estrategia ‘Hablando Pijadamente’: nuestro congreso de proyección política, un espacio para dialogar y organizar lo que se ha soñado con lo que hemos vivido. Su primer escenario fue un salón del edificio de sociología de la Universidad Nacional de Colombia, contando con docentes como Adolfo Triana Antorveza y Germán Pachón Gantiva, quienes habían trabajado en el territorio y más por la lucha de los derechos de las comunidades. Así mismo, se contó con la participación de los integrantes del Grupo Pijao que ya había pasado de 5 a 15 jóvenes de diferentes carreras, universidades y comunidades. Grandes conclusiones nos llevaron a ampliar los objetivos del grupo y a llevarlos al Resguardo Tinajas en Natagaima, en su conmemoración por la recuperación del territorio. Una conmemoración que se lleva a cabo cada 4 de diciembre desde hace 40 años y un escenario que entreteje la sabiduría ancestral, la experiencia organizativa, y los sueños del grupo.

Algunos de los objetivos ahora determinados para el caminar del Grupo Pijao contemplaban no sólo el apoyo entre estudiantes de la Universidad Nacional, el

apoyo para jóvenes de nuestras comunidades y territorios, o el intercambiar con diferentes procesos. Ahora se ampliaba nuestro trabajo desde un enfoque territorial al apoyo a procesos comunitarios y organizativos del Pueblo Pijao, a poner a disposición y prueba nuestros saberes y conocimientos para el amanecer Pijao, a la escritura de nuestra historia desde el territorio sobre lo que nuestras generaciones han vivido y recuerdan, a caminar con gran emoción el territorio para defenderlo ante las múltiples amenazas. Estos fueron los Objetivos que dieron entrada al año 2015 con una gran corriente en el fluir del proceso. Habíamos afrontando algunos remolinos, pero estos solo nos dieron más fuerzas para tomar la decisión de cumplir lo acordado con nuevas chichas, tabacos y aguardientes soplados como sucede cada 4 de diciembre en el territorio ancestral de Tinajas con sus mayores y las mayores.

‘Tejiendo Saberes para la Vida’ como sumatoria de voluntades se institucionalizó en el territorio. Se iniciaba nuevamente por solicitud de los jóvenes, las instituciones y las comunidades. Una bella apuesta que no determinaba su poder de acción por un contrato o la ferrea decisión de un altruismo franciscano. Fue una respuesta del territorio, de un lenguaje claro de formación, desde quienes nos estábamos formando. Una posibilidad de seguir engranando el proceso de resistencia de un pueblo golpeado por la historia que ha desconocido nuestra Historia. Para 2015, la casa del Grupo Semillas dejó de ser pero el Grupo se resistió a dejar de tener un espacio. Gracias a la sumatoria de estrategias de rifas, actividades y aportes económicos, se creó la Casa en el Aire: un apartamento en un segundo piso allí en Natagaima. Un nuevo escenario para tejer los sueños de nuevas generaciones aún más diversas y con perspectivas que entrecruzaban el mundo político, cultural, musical, social y juvenil.

La exploración en nuevas formas de aprendizaje nos permitió profundizar nuestros esfuerzos en brindar elementos para fortalecer el plan de vida de los jóvenes que participaban en los talleres. Estos talleres además de los recorridos a los territorios y las actividades conjuntas nos permitieron tejer ‘Lazos Pijaos’ como principio de hermandad y de apoyo a las iniciativas de quienes caminan la vida. De esa manera el Grupo Pijao participó del Diplomado en Gestión Ambiental y Territorial que lidera la Universidad del Tolima y el Comité Ambiental. También se sumaron jóvenes a la Escuela Agroecológica Manuel Quintín Lame que lidera el Grupo Semillas. Así se

empezó a fortalecer las capacidades de nuevos liderazgos de jóvenes con ansias de un sentir Pijao en cada compartir.

El tallo de nuestra planta cada vez se hacía más fuerte, sus hojas más plenas con la fina pelusa que les caracteriza, con una pequeña aparición de los cabellos de la espiga. Se iba fortaleciendo la semilla, la misma que decidió salir con una fuerza arrolladora a la Marcha Carnaval en Ibagué. Esta fue una primera experiencia como colectivo sobre las vías y las carreteras exigiendo el respeto a los territorios, a la protección del agua, a la unidad en lo común de nuestro ser. Todo ello iba dando elementos a nuestros jóvenes para construir un pensamiento con capacidad de cuestionar su existencia en un territorio que entrega una herencia al nacer: la ancestralidad que comarca el ser Coyaima y Natagaima del Gran Pueblo Pijao.

Éramos la fuerza de un proceso que permite leer la realidad desde un lenguaje territorial. ¿Cómo responderíamos a las fiestas tradicionales del territorio? Bastó una totumada de Chicha y Poporoy -guarapo- para que la ‘Casa en el Aire’ eligiera una reina indígena representante de los jóvenes del Grupo Pijao. Esta fue una apuesta participativa que permitiría dar el debate en cuanto al papel de la mujer, su cuerpo y lo que implica estar en un reinado. Una transgresión al ser la candidata indígena frente a las demás muchachas del pueblo. Sin imaginarlo, esta apuesta movilizó al grupo con carteleras para las carrozas de las reinas con mensajes contra la minería que había llegado al pueblo y con elementos propios de la cultura. El recorrido de las carrozas movilizó en toda la población, un sentir de conexión con lo propio, con aquello que se nos ha querido arrebatar por lo socialmente aceptado. Se ganó corona y no cómo reina, sino cómo la comunidad, con el anhelo de unas fiestas en las que reine la cultura, la chicha y el sentido de lo que implican nuestras tradiciones.

Ya la ‘Casa en el Aire’ tenía tantas iniciativas, que llegó el momento de tener un espacio más amplio para seguir construyendo las lunadas que convocaban a participar cada vez más jóvenes. Se tomó una gran decisión, una que agrupa el sentido del Grupo Pijao. Aquella tarde que se construyó el logo del grupo, y con él una larga, muy larga discusión que concluyó en el acuerdo que somos: ‘Grupo Pijao, Jóvenes caminando por la unidad de nuestro pueblo’.

El segundo determinante fue encontrar una casa con árboles para construir comunidad. Fue así que luego de un semestre con la ‘Casa en el Aire,’ el Grupo Semillas logró contar con respaldo para una casa de apoyo. Ya no sería llamada la ‘Casa Semillas’, ahora tendría que expresar el sentir de unidad de los jóvenes ante organizaciones indígenas con gran trayectoria. Durante un buen asado y con el gran compartir de los jóvenes del grupo se definió un nombre para este nuevo espacio, ‘El Tambuche’: una traducción que lleva implícito el afianciamento cultural y que permitiera nuestra proyección política a quienes pasaran por la cuadra y vieran un gran mural con el nombre. El tambo es un lingüismo que refiere ancestralmente a casa, una palabra que comparte raíces con otros pueblos originarios y que tenemos en nuestro legado cultural. El otro sentido explica lo que son las nuevas trincheras para descolonizar el pensamiento, un Tambuche en el que la diversidad permite sembrar semillas de resistencia.

No sólo aquella semilla se enraizaba cada día en su crecimiento, ya había echado espiga y los cabellos avisaban de una buena cosecha. Así mismo las texturas de nuevos liderazgos preparaban la tierra para un gran semillero: aquel huerto que permitió tener en la arena política a varios de nuestros integrantes como candidatos a cargos de elección popular, a varios dentro de las organizaciones indígenas y sociales, y a varios en cargos de responsabilidad comunitaria en sus cabildos, resguardos, veredas, y familias. Tal grado de conciencia de aquella chicha que iba tomando su picantes, permitió al Grupo Pijao en 2016 participar de las viglias por la Paz. Allí presentamos la declaración como jóvenes en apoyo a la paz con justicia social, que aún es vigente en la exigencia de la implementación del Acuerdo Final de Paz. Esta es una tarea de conectar los territorios que han visto cómo se desvanecen sus sueños por la desigualdad social que ha marginalizado las resistencias pero que ello mismo ha permitido crecer las luchas de los pueblos desde la conquista de sí mismos en él territorio.

Cultivando Cosechas: El convite Nacional del Pueblo Pijao por la Unidad, la Resistencia y la Pervivencia

Hacer de la política una práctica de la vida social y cotidiana, desde diferentes formas de expresión, posicionamiento e intercambio, es tal vez una de las principales enseñanzas que el Grupo Pijao ha logrado llevar a cada una de las personas que lo conforman y con quienes ha venido caminando. Resignificando ideas tradicionales de la política desde la identidad como jóvenes Pijaos es un legado que se fortalece en cada actividad y desde cada estrategia a partir del reconocimiento de lo propio, de lo cercano, de lo originario.

El arte, la música, la oralidad, los juegos, los encuentros, los recorridos, los festivales y la formación colectiva, son herramientas fundamentales con la que el Grupo Pijao ha logrado mostrar las diferentes formas de organización y de hacer política para la lucha y la defensa de nuestros territorios y comunidades. Junto a esto, el relacionamiento estratégico que algunos jóvenes empezaron a realizar en el acercamiento y apoyo con sus comunidades, pueden ser uno de los principales cimientos que llevaron a que más adelante, las organizaciones territoriales y regionales como la Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Tolima -ACIT-, el Consejo Regional Indígena del Tolima -CRIT- la Asociación de Cabildos Autónomos del Tolima -FICAT- y la Asociación de Resguardos Indígenas del Tolima -ARIT-, reconocieran el proceso del Grupo Pijao y a sus integrantes como parte de los actores estratégicos para vincular en el trabajar por la unidad, la resistencia y pervivencia del Pueblo Pijao.

Es así como en el 2018, se vincula el Grupo Pijao al proceso de discusión y construcción del Plan Salvaguarda del Pueblo Pijao. Los planes de salvaguarda responden a una orden de la Corte Constitucional (a través de la sentencia T-025 de 2004 y el Auto 004), por la cual el Gobierno debe efectuar planes integrales para evitar la extinción física y cultural de 34 pueblos indígenas de Colombia. En el contexto de creación de este plan para el Pueblo Pijao, gran parte de las reflexiones y discusiones realizadas al interior del Grupo Pijao acerca de la identidad, la cultura, la legitimidad en las autoridades, la descolonización del pensamiento y la comunicación para la pervivencia del pueblo, ganan mayor fuerza. Ahora estas discusiones se dan desde un escenario de negociación y de poder institucionalizado a partir de la representación del gobierno en sus entidades correspondientes y las comunidades en las organizaciones regionales.

De este momento, es importante decir que como Grupo Pijao el ejercicio que se realiza en este proceso tiene un alcance de apoyo técnico y logístico, lo que en determinados momentos generó tensiones desde el establecimiento de la ‘autoridad’ para la participación e intervención de las discusiones; situación que desde las comunidades se viene trabajando acerca de cómo se construye y reconoce la autoridad a partir de quien habla, quien sabe, quien decide. El apoyo y la participación del Grupo Pijao en las diferentes actividades que conforman aun hoy este proceso, no sería posible sin el relacionamiento que previamente como proceso juvenil se realizó con las comunidades representadas hoy en este escenario. Lo que poco a poco fue abriendo este espacio para involucrar nuestra voz mas allá de lo logístico, fue sin duda la confianza y el reconocimiento, la cercanía y la experiencia vivida con quienes se sumaban a nuestra estrategia.

Con esa paciencia y atención de quien sabe tejer, de quien teje con un propósito y con una finalidad compartida, fue posible empezar a reforzar las puntadas o nudos para la construcción de la propuesta del Plan Salvaguarda del pueblo Pijao. Esta capacidad cultivada es ahora el escenario que permite como Pueblo Pijao plasmar nuestra voz, nuestro sentir y nuestras reivindicaciones en la responsabilidad que el Estado y la sociedad adquieren para nuestra pervivencia en el marco de los derechos resaltados en el Auto 004 de 2009 y la Sentencia T-025 de 2004, como parte de los 34 pueblos originarios en riesgo de exterminio físico y cultural.

En esta discusión, fue posible trascender la estructura y metodologías propuestas por el Estado hacia la construcción de espacios propios. Espacios que nos permitan reivindicar los elementos de nuestra identidad y cultura desde nuestras formas de encontrarnos, alimentarnos, conversar y comunicar. De tal manera que a medida que nos fortalecemos, seguimos resistiendo y perviviendo en la unidad como Pueblo. Fue así como se logró ‘El convite Nacional del Pueblo Pijao por la Unidad, la Resistencia y la Pervivencia’, llevado a cabo el 14 de junio de 2018 en el Resguardo Meche San Cayetano de Coyaima, para mandar como pueblo los puntales que guiaran el tejido del Chile para la pervivencia física, cultural y territorial.

Algunas puntadas a forma de conclusiones para seguir fortaleciendo la plomada

Parte del ejercicio de compartir algunos momentos del caminar del Grupo Pijao desde este artículo, se convierte en sí, en una oportunidad de reflexión y auto reconocimiento del proceso. Ver el trascender de una semilla en una nueva forma de vida, abrazar la memoria y el recorrido desde cada una de las pequeñas, medianas y grandes victorias que hoy atesoramos como estandartes para seguirnos tejiendo y fortaleciendo.

La capacidad de creatividad, fuerza y crítica, es una de las principales apuestas para seguir cultivando desde el pensamiento y diálogo consciente con nuestras comunidades y territorios. Para seguir insistiendo en la importancia del rol y la voz de la juventud en los procesos de organización y trabajo territorial. Nuestro estandarte para el relacionamiento entre generaciones y autoridades.

La descolonización del pensamiento, de la identidad, del lenguaje y aún desde las formas de vida consumistas y explotadoras, representa la alerta más recurrente de tener en cuenta en el caminar cotidiano, por esto, llevar la política a los diferentes campos y espacios de la vida sigue siendo uno de los legados más importantes para guiar nuestra forma de cultivar y cosechar.

Este artículo lo ofrecemos a la memoria de Juan Manuel Ortíz Palomá y Luis Albert Tovar Tapiero, quienes siguen guiando el caminar a través de la gran capacidad que nos enseñaron de amor a la humanidad, al territorio, a sus comunidades, a sus familias, y al Grupo Pijao. Gracias.

Escrito por cada paso dado en el proceso, y tejido por un solo sentir como Pueblo.

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Pala que ha unido la intención con la materialización: Diego Silva.

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VIVIANA LOZANO DUCUARA, EDWIN ALEXANDER HENAO CONDE¹

Seeds of Resistance: The Pijao Group, a Youth Process of Decolonisation and the Unity of the Pijao People²

April 9th 2012 was the day that, in the Sociology Department of the National University of Colombia in Bogotá, the thoughts and feelings of five young people started to grow into something bigger. As sons and daughters of the large Natagaimas and Coyaimas territories we came together to name our nascent group as Grupo Pijao. This group is a seed that we continue to sow and harvest today in our territories through different strategies.

As the seed of our group grows, the ideas, forces and feelings that have been invested in this process have enriched the meaning and importance of our harvest. It is pleasing for us to witness the journey of this seed, which has accompanied our growth and help us transit from youth to adulthood. The emergence of this project can also be pictured as a group of adolescents wanting to build and fly their own kite. Following the trajectory of this metaphorical kite through the invisible currents of the wind, we continue propelling the flight of our own process as

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Indigenous People struggling for survival, to different distances and spaces of political, cultural and territorial life.

Between smiles, walks and words, as it is usually the case when we gather to weave knowledge together, we meet once again to remember our first encounter. For some of us it was a chance encounter, for others it was an intentional one, but we all remembered the spiritual forces of attraction that brought us to share a chicha [corn beer]. The act of sharing a totumada de chicha [bowl of chicha] from our territories is always a tempting call to reunite to seek individual growth from a collective gathering.

The themes and motives of our meetings have grown as much as each one of us. Recalling the old phrase “everything is more than the sum of its parts” allows us to recognise this fact today. This is a recognition that comes, not only from our perspective, but also from that of our friends and allies; those who have witness our growth in strength and importance for our youth, our communities and our territories.

The act of recounting some moments of our process as Grupo Pijao is without doubt an exercise of introspection for many of us: for those of us who have been present from the beginning, for those of us who have joined this shared challenge along the way, and we hope that it will be too, for those who will get to know us through this text. These words are filled with emotion and memory as we write them, and they will be when we read them and re-read them in the future, in our process of individual and collective transformation.

It is important to say that the first group of co-founders who decided, in 2012, to shape and give a name to this process (subsequently reaffirmed by so many bodies and visions that have been since added) was mainly composed of university students. The majority of us were students of the National University of Colombia under the age of 25. Our living conditions as students motivated us to reflect and believe in this challenge. We were students arriving to the city from our communities in the Natagaimas and Coyaimas territories, as well as the Ortega and Chaparral territories, where we struggle for our survival as a people. We arrived to the city laden with the hopes of our families to overcome, through our education

and gaining a professional title, the socioeconomic limitations of a discriminatory, exploitative and subordinating economic system, endured by our communities for generations.

However, the gap between our places of origin and our new surroundings was accentuated from the moment of arrival at the most important and recognised university in the country, a place immersed in the living conditions of the big city, in its accelerated rhythm and high daily competitiveness. Here, the multi-ethnic and pluricultural wealth of the country and the different opportunities it could offer to its students, were lost in the university's institutionalized settings and in the standardized knowledge that it offered in the classroom. So evident was the need for an academic refuge, financial support for food and the cost of student living, as well as the need for strategies to overcome the situations of discrimination and social isolation in our everyday life, that the *paisanas* and *paisanos* began to weave their own space. This common weaving gave us a sense of belonging, empowering us to continue facing and advancing on the journey that every one of us, together with their families, had begun.

Thus emerged the first strategy with which we arrived to our territories as Grupo Pijao, embracing the language and customs of our communities. Through this initiative, which we called Pre-Icfes and Pre-Universitarios, we sought to recognize the importance of supporting our families, our community and our friends. The Pre-Icfes workshops helped students in their last 3 years of high school to prepare for the national standard exam that all students must take before graduation. The Pre-Universitarios workshops helped high school graduates prepare for the tests of admission held by some public universities. We began this initiative aware of the privilege position that we had as university students, not only to advance our personal lives as professionals, but also to use our education as a tool to assist with our communities' struggles and daily resistance in our territories.

From the first meetings around a bowl of *chicha*, the co-founders of the Pijao Group opened a critical reflection on the model of education and development that has been imposed in our territories. We saw this type of education as a recolonization model, where the only road for men's personal growth and capacity development is to become a soldier or policemen at the service of the country. In

some cases, men are also taught business skills that can help them generate wealth through agricultural activities. For women, the pathway to self-fulfilment was related to their beauty and their housework skills, which can help them find a wealthy man, who treats them as “ladies” and who satisfies their family needs. This is what the school was teaching our youth.

No matter how much we drew insurgency discussing our dreams with friends in the group’s hikes, bonfires, and bathing days in the creek, the river or the well, our conditions of possibility to fulfil these dreams were limited by an education system imposed upon us. We decided to do something about it out of strength and love for our families and friends, some of whom had resigned to join the ranks of the army as soon as they turn eighteen, or to carry out help work in the town or the city. We thus created the Pre-Icfes and Pre-Universitarios workshops as a strategy to guide and accompany our paisanas and paisanos through alternative worlds. We began the workshops in Natagaima with five groups of students and thanks to the voluntary work of our members and that of friends and allies who later joined us in the process. We met on Sundays from seven to twelve in the municipal school. The knowledge that came together in those classrooms motivated us to go beyond dominant teaching methodologies drawn from teaching guides and used by schoolteachers. Instead, we began to weave discussions and thematic reflections that were connected to our own realities. We found alternative ways to learn and teach geography, social sciences, Spanish, and even mathematics.

That was our first green shoot. Similar to the corn harvest, when a grain comes out to greet the sun in a new form (no longer as a grain but as a leaf), in the same way the first results of the workshops brought us joy and vitality. We understood the workshops not as producing knowledge for knowledge sake, despite the efforts of institutionalised education to indoctrinate us with a generalized understanding of the world. Instead, our encounters with and from our own ways of knowing, gave us the capacity to overcome our learned limitations. We began to draft a new way of working based on our own language, based on what represents and identifies us. At this point we decided to change the name of the workshops and to redefine all the areas of our work. After discussing the meaning and sense of the workshops, a strategy that had significantly grown from its beginnings, we decided to change its

name to *Tejiendo saberes para la vida* (Weaving knowledge for life). We wanted to take the strategy beyond a mere academic exercise that adhered to the demands of institutionalized education, to work from alternative ways of producing knowledge. Our objective was not to promote the individual accumulation of knowledge and prestige that comes from institutional markers of “who knows and who does not know”. Our goal was rather to build a horizontal field between those who teach and those who learn, in addition to the production of knowledge that could have a lived functionality.

Speaking Pijaolly: Decolonising Thought and Language

We use a voice that allows the reader to feel the soft texture of our accomplishments. We hope that these accomplishments greet the reader as seeds that open up revealing their first leaves to the world.. The lines in this text seek to communicate our understanding that to become someone valuable in life does not mean to become “a professional” – the proposition of “formal” education in a system driven by the production of citizens. On the contrary, becoming the subject that is promoted by the school system means for us the cultural annihilation of our people, as it implies the denial of who we are and what is ours. That is why our understanding of becoming someone valuable in life cannot be separated from those who already are valuable to us: our mothers and fathers, our ancestors, our territory, those who have created our legacy and who should not be forgotten. We take a moment to recognize that as we write this text we have not stopped breathing passionately, that the words in each line beat to the sound of our emotion as they bloom into the pages that make this text, that this text is rooted in a rhizomatic network of feelings that irrigates the land where we planted our dreams.

Through the “weaving knowledge” project we managed to decentralize the university. As the clocks of Dali melt through new territories, our time in the university became interlinked to our time back home, bridging the capital to our territories. We had a thirst for building knowledge from the diverse rural realities of our youth, depressed by state abandonment, the effects of social and armed conflict, and the standardization of education. We were able to build a workspace in the

Casa Semillas, a three-story house set up by the NGO Grupo Semillas for organizational and community work in the municipality of Natagaima. This became our meeting point for a series of hikes that we organized throughout our territories seeking to read the messages that are etched in our sacred places. Each community, hill, lake, and waterfall that we visited opened the possibility of understanding our world so that we could explain it. The hikes became the activity that we most looked forward to. It was an additional strategy in our process to know, recognize, and appropriate our territory so that we could defend it. We called this strategy Caminos Pijao (Pijao Pathways).

Caminos Pijao set the standard for our touring of the territory with the firm intention of reading it carefully. For example, the group decided to hike the Pacandé Ancestral Mountain. We did this during Easter when there is a large influx of parishioners. While parishioners hiked the main path on the north face of the mountain, we took the old path on the south face, guided by the Mohán³ and the leaders of the Yacó Molana and Pacandé reservations. This path connects the ravines of the mountain with a route that was taken in the past by miners searching for gold. After several hours of hiking, reflection and teamwork, our group arrived at the summit of the mountain. We stopped to recover our breath through a harmonization ritual performed in front of the backdrop provided by the meandering Magdalena River. From that point, we could also see the dry lagoon from where the Coyaimas and Natagaimas peoples, according to our story of origin, emerged. These hikes were a big step in our process as we were able to invite the youth that participated in our workshops to take part in this practical exercise of self-recognition. It was a way of bringing together rural and urban youth through a shared territorial sentiment.

The years of 2013 and 2014 went by and the first workshop participants took their state exams. Many of them also took the admission exam to the National University of Colombia and other public universities. We had great results in the main harvest, which cultivated young people with their own life plans. Our youth also had very

³ Ancestral doctor and Pijao authority

good results in the exams, with many of them advancing to study Medicine, Physics, Chemistry, Engineering, and Human Sciences, at the National University and in other public universities of the country. At this point, the workshops were constituted as a framework fuelled by the overwhelming force of our youth and who had begun to recognize their value and the importance of their actions at the regional and national context.

The great responsibility that we acquired with our peoples revitalized us. It helped us to understand that it was necessary to weave our process with that of our elders, who had also struggle for our rights as people. We also begun to notice that the type of language we used to talk with each other made our communication more rapid and efficient. We begun to value the process of *Hablar Pijadamente* (Speaking Pijaolly): a way of speaking that mixes Spanish with ancestral and local vocabulary, and that we could include as part of our process. This is how our third strategy was born – *Hablando Pijadamente*: a congress to project us politically, to discuss and link our dreams with our experiences.

The first congress took place in a classroom of the sociology department of the National University of Colombia. Our professors Adolfo Triana Antorveza and Germán Pachón Gantiva attended this meeting. They had worked in our territory and fought for the rights of our communities. We were also joined by the members of the Grupo Pijao, which had grown from 5 to 15 students from different careers, universities and communities. The far-reaching conclusions of this space led to expansion of the group's objectives. These conclusions were communicated to the Pijao people at the commemoration for the recovery of the territory. For the past 40 years, this commemoration has been carried out at the Tinajas Reservation in Natagaima on the 4th of December. It provides our group with a setting to interweave our experience and dreams with our peoples' ancestral wisdom.

The objectives of the Grupo Pijao were no longer limited to providing academic support to our youth, or collaborating with other local organizations. Our objectives took on a territorial perspective seeking to support process of social organization, offering our knowledge, writing the history of our territory on the basis of what the Pijao elders have lived and remember, and walking our territories so that we can defend it from multiple threats. The group entered into the year

2015 with these objectives. At the congress in Natagaima we remembered the setbacks we had experienced. However, as we drunk chicha, smoke tobacco and spat aguardiente, as part of a ritual, we also thought that these setbacks had only given us more strength to fulfill our agreed commitments and responsibilities.

“Weaving knowledge for life” had become institutionalized in our territories. The workshops continued at the request of our youth, institutions and communities. The workshops had become a beautiful initiative that did not rely on contracts or Franciscan altruism. Rather, it was an initiative born in our territory, and formulated with a clear objective by those of us studying in the capital. It represented the possibility of cultivating a grassroots process of resistance of a people whose history had been silenced. By 2015, the house of the Grupo Semillas no longer existed but the group refused to give up on having a space to meet and conspire. Thus, thanks to combined efforts that led to the organization of various activities to raise money, the Casa en el Aire was created: a second-floor apartment located in Natagaima. This space would allow the writing of a new page in our process, now populated by increasingly diverse members with interests that crossed the political, cultural, musical, social and youth sectors. The Case en el Aire was a new page where the new generation of the Group could write their dreams.

Through the exploration of alternative ways of learning we focused our efforts on helping our workshops’ participants to create their own life projects. Together with the likes of Caminos Pijao and other activities, the workshops helped us to create Lazos Pijao (Pijao Ties): a way of working together with other local initiatives that targeted the youth. For example, some of our members attended the program on Environmental and Territorial Management offered by the University of Tolima with the help of the local Environmental Committee. Other of our members joined the Manuel Quintín Lame Agroecology School led by the NGO Grupo Semillas. In this way, our members developed and strengthened their leadership skills while supporting local initiatives that shared their yearning to cultivate a collective Pijao identity.

With each new step we took, our group became stronger: from a single, simple stem it developed into a more complex, fully-grown plant as the seeds we were sowing began to grow. An expression of this growth was our participation in the Marcha

Carnaval in Ibagué. This was our first experience as a collective taking to the streets and demanding that our territories be respected, our water protected and the common good of our peoples not divided. All of these actions were giving young people the tools that they needed to develop their own critical thinking and to interrogate their existence as heirs to the ancestral territories of Coyaima and Natagaima from the Gran Pueblo Pijao.

We were the expression of a process created to read reality from a territorial lens. How would we participate as a group in the traditional festivals of the territory? We came up with an idea while sharing a Totumada de Chicha y Poporoy – or Guarapo in the Casa en el Aire. We were going to choose an indigenous Queen to represent the young people of the Grupo Pijao in the local beauty pageant. With this event, a dialogue started around the role of women, their body and what it means to participate in a beauty pageant. This was, after all, an act of transgression: a beauty queen self identifying as indigenous. Unexpectedly, this initiative was enthusiastically supported by the members of our group, who decorated the candidate's float with symbols of our culture and with posters against mineral mining in the region. The float sparked a feeling of belonging in the local population, a feeling of belonging to our culture, to what social convention of the ideal and desirable has tried to steal from our people. Our candidate was not crown as beauty queen that day, but our entire community was crowned with the right to celebrate our culture, to drink our chicha and to redefine the sense of our traditions.

As our activities grew in number, launching many initiatives from the Casa en el Aire, the time had come to find a bigger space to continue weaving, and attracting more and more young people, to our process. One afternoon, we made the decision to design a logo that would summarize the identity and goal of our group. Moreover, after a very long discussion we redefined our group as the Grupo Pijao, Jóvenes caminando por la unidad de nuestro pueblo (Pijao Group, young people marching together for the unity of our people).

We decided we wanted to find a house with trees where we could continue building our community. Thus, six months after meeting at the Casa en el Aire, we were able to find another location thanks to the NGO Grupo Semillas. We decided not

to call it Casa Semillas, as the first meeting place that this NGO had previously helped us establish. The name of our new meeting place would need to represent the unity of our youth, before indigenous organizations with a longer trajectory. A mural with that name would also need to project us politically to those who passed by and looked at our new meeting place. We decided to call it El Tambuche, a word that reflects the idea of cultural rooting. The word Tambo refers to the idea of home. Our people have used this word for a long time. It is part of our cultural legacy but it is a word that we share with other indigenous peoples too. The word Tambo can also mean a trench. Thus, we also use Tambuche to refer to the new trenches that we need to dig up to further decolonize our way of thinking. El Tambuche is the very place where we sow the seeds of diversity and resistance.

Not only was that seed of our process anchoring its roots, its growth promised an abundant harvest. New leaders emerged from our ranks and prepared the soil for the planting of new crops. Some of our members became involved in politics as candidates for local offices, others became involved in the work of social and indigenous organizations in the region, and (yet) others assumed important roles in local cabildos, reservations, villages and families. We felt like the chicha when it ferments and is almost ready to drink. Aware of our growth we decided to participate in the '2016 vigils for peace', where we communicated our support to a peace process with social justice in Colombia. This declaration is still valid today, as we demand the implementation of the Peace process that was signed by the State and FARC in 2016. This will have to be an effort to connect the peoples in our territories, whose dreams have been affected by social inequality and marginalization, but whose struggle is finding strength in the recognition of our cultures and territories.

Cultivating the Harvest: The National Meeting of the Pijao People for Unity, Resistance and Survival

One of the main teachings that the Pijao Group has been able to bring to its members and allies, is to make of politics an everyday life practice rooted in different forms of expression, positioning and exchange. We aim to cultivate a

legacy that redefines traditional ideas of what politics means through each one of the activities and strategies that we promote from a place of recognition of what is ours, what is local and native. We use the arts, music, story telling, games, gatherings, walks, festivals and collective learning as tools for the cultivation of social organization and carrying out political work for the defense of our territories and communities. Moreover, the strategic network carried out by some of our youth to approach and accompany our communities, has been one of the basis allowing our Group to be recognized by other regional organizations, such as the Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Tolima – ACIT (Association of Indigenous Councils of Tolima), the Consejo Regional Indígena del Tolima – CRIT (Regional Indigenous Council of Tolima), the Asociación de Cabildos Autónomos del Tolima (Association of Autonomous Indigenous Councils of Tolima) – FICAT, and the Asociación de Resguardos Indígenas del Tolima – ARIT (Association of Indigenous Reservations of Tolima). These organizations are beginning to recognize the Grupo Pijao and its members as strategic actors to work with for the unity resistance and survival of the Pijao people.

Thus, in 2018 the Grupo Pijao was invited to the process of discussion and creation of the Plan Salvaguarda del Pueblo Pijao (Plan for the Protection of the Pijao People). The Salvaguarda plans respond to an order of the Constitutional court (through decision T-025 of 2004 and the Auto 004), by which the government must design and implement a series of plans to prevent the physical and cultural extinction of 34 indigenous communities in Colombia. Creating the plan for the Pijao People significantly nourished the discussions and reflections held within the Grupo Pijao about our identity, culture, the legitimacy of local authorities, the decolonization of thought and communication for the survival of our peoples. Since the plan was a state initiative, these discussions were taking place in an institutionalized setting of negotiation between the executive, represented by the ministry of interior and local communities, represented by indigenous regional organizations.

It is important to highlight that, whilst as members of the Grupo Pijao we have collaborated in this process with technical and logistical support, this in some cases has created internal tensions around the concept and understanding of ‘authority’.

In fact, in our communities we have been debating how local authority is created and recognized through a reflection on who speaks, who knows, and who decides for us. The support and participation of the Grupo Pijao in the different activities that have defined its process, would have not be possible without the previous work and relations that we have carried out with the youth in the communities that are today represented in the Salvaguarda process. The recognition and trust created by this work and the relations with those who joined our activities gradually opened the door to our participation in the Salvaguarda process beyond the technical and logistical.

With the patience and attention of those who know how to knit with a purpose and with a common goal, it was possible for us to help reinforce the stitches that were behind the creation of the Pijao People Salvaguarda Plan proposal. Therefore, our cultivated capacities allowed us to include our voice, our feelings and our claims in the commitments that the State and the Colombia society acquire for the protection of our communities through this plan.

In this process, it was possible to transcend the structure and methodologies that were proposed by the State. We created of our own spaces and methods claiming our identity and culture through our own ways of gathering, nourishing, talking and communicating. As we are strengthening our ways, we continue to resist and to survive in unity as a People. This work materialized in the Convite Nacional del Pueblo Pijao por la Unidad, la Resistencia y la Pervivencia (National Meeting of the Pijao People for Unity, Resistance and Survival) carried out the 14th of June 2018 in the Meche Reservation in San Cayetano, Coyaima, where we mandated as a People the stitches that would guide the chile knitting⁴ for our physical, cultural, and territorial survival.

⁴ Chile is a fishing net. The authors refer to the knitting of a fishing net as a metaphor for community building.

Some Conclusive Stitches to Continue Establishing the Pomada⁵

The act of sharing some of the steps in the path of the Grupo Pijao is in itself an opportunity for self-reflection and self-knowledge. It is like witnessing the transformation of a seed into a new form of life. It represents the embracing of our memory and our path through small, medium and large victories, which today we treasure as the standards for our future knitting and growth.

Our main objective for the future is the cultivation of creative capacity, strength and critical thought, through reflexive dialogue and reflection with our communities and territories. We also want to continue emphasizing the central role of our youth, and the importance of taking their voices into account in regional processes of social organization. This is our contribution to the challenge of relating the different generations of our communities and local authorities.

The decolonization of thought, identity and language in the midst of consumerism and exploitation must be remembered and promoted in our daily lives. Thus, one of the most important lessons guiding our sowing and harvesting is to bring politics into every aspect and field of life.

We offer this article to the memory of Juan Manuel Ortíz Palomá and Luis Albert Tovar Tapiero, who continue guiding our work through their love for humanity, our territory, communities, families and the Grupo Pijao. Thank you.

Writing by the steps of our process and knitted through one common feeling as People.

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⁵ Pomada refers to the weights that are sowed into the fishing net so that it sinks into the water. The authors are building on the metaphor of knitting a fishing net as the process of community building.

Ally that brought together the intention with the materialization: Diego Silva.

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