

(Po)ethical Indigenous Language Practices:
Redefining Revitalisation and Challenging Epistemic Colonial Violence in Colombia

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the following work is my own:

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ABSTRACT

This research addresses the colonial legacies traversing understandings of indigenous languages and their “revitalisation” in Colombia, arguing that neither language theories nor policies escape power-knowledge relations. It shows how alphabets and grammars have operated as colonial normalising technologies and defined indigenous languages as “illiterate” or “incomplete” languages, forcing them to adjust to foreign models and justifying the intervention of colonisers, missionaries and academic experts (who sought to “transform” indigenous languages into “complete” *grammatical* and *alphabetical* languages). It examines the asymmetrical clashes regarding the validation of “expert knowledge” over indigenous knowledge practices. Additionally, it acknowledges the contributions of postcolonial, decolonial, ecological, critical and cultural theories for decentring alphabetical, grammatical and monolingual normalisations and relocating indigenous languages in complex (non-anthropocentric) relations and community filiations.

This research proposes a comprehensive “(po)ethical” approach that dialogues with indigenous language practices in their poetical, ethical and political dimensions. This has three important effects. Firstly, it challenges reductive models of literacy and grammaticality, consolidated since the colonial encounter. Secondly, it highlights the deep articulation of indigenous language practices with the recreation of traditions and community filiations. Thirdly, it redefines “revitalisation” as a process that goes beyond linguistics insofar as, conceived otherwise, it challenges colonial epistemic violence, rebuilds community filiations, and enables healing.

(Po)ethical practices are agonistic. They emerge from the pain of the conflicts, historical conditions and violent asymmetries that are inscribed in the bodies and the languages we inhabit. In contrast to colonial technologies and policies of multiculturalism, (po)ethical practices do not pursue the elimination or assimilation of difference. Through agonistic translations, they acknowledge and connect creative processes of resistance and healing, allowing dialogue between adversaries instead of “eradicating conflict” by eliminating difference. The research stresses the local and

global potential of agonistic translations of (po)ethical language practices in challenging coloniality and rebuilding communities.

Key words: (po)ethics, indigenous language practices, revitalisation, agonistic translation, colonial epistemic violence, ecology, decoloniality.

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PREFACE

As I walk back over the steps that led to this research journey, I remember my first trip to the Colombian Amazon in June 2009. I boarded a plane in Bogota with Gustavo de la Hoz, Project Manager of the NGO Corporación Horizontes Colombianos (Colombian Horizons Corporation), and arrived in Leticia two hours later.¹ Descending from the plane, we were welcomed by the sweltering sun, the humid air and the unique scent of the jungle. At the exit of the airport, Juvencio Pereira Manduca and Narcisa Bautista Ramos, both leaders of the Tikuna people of Nazareth, were waiting for us.² Alongside other people from Nazareth, we stepped into the community's boat and embarked on a two-hour journey along the widest river in the world, the Amazon River, also known as the "big anaconda".

During the journey, all the passengers shared food and treated us with great hospitality. They took care of us, particularly when we arrived in Nazareth in the middle of the night and had to find our way with torches while our rubber boots sunk repeatedly into the wet coastal mud. After leaving our luggage in one of the houses of the community and hanging our hammocks, we went towards the *Sede*, or meeting room, where more than a hundred members of the community had gathered to discuss the coming activities. The meeting was moderated by the *Curaca* (elected leader of the community); all the discussions were held in Tikuna as well as in Spanish, since not all the participants spoke Tikuna. This is particularly the case of the Cocama people who no longer speak their language and communicate in Spanish with the Tikuna people in the community of Nazareth.

In Nazareth I heard young mothers singing to their children and kids telling stories and jokes in Tikuna. The Tikuna language is kept alive in everyday chants, jokes, healing words and rituals. The people of Magüta – commonly named Tikuna people

¹ Gustavo de la Hoz joined this NGO in 2003, developing projects on education, health care and media in alliance with the indigenous community of Nazareth, in the Colombian Amazon. He is also a filmmaker and cinema professor who has made documentaries on indigenous communities in Colombia since the 1980s (Corporación Horizontes Colombianos 2012a).

² Juvencio Pereira Manduca is the current *Curaca* (main leader and head of the *cabildo*, or indigenous council, of Nazareth, and Narcisa Bautista Ramos is the current *Vicecuraca* (second main leader and member of the *cabildo*).

– dance, paint, draw, carve in wood, and weave. Children learn how to do all this at a very early age.³ They sit on the floor with their parents and grandparents and weave bracelets and shoulder bags (*mochilas*) together.⁴ They carve, paint and ornament their bodies for specific rituals and celebrations. These are meaningful practices that keep their world alive, actualising their past and traditions. In order to understand indigenous languages, it is important to acknowledge their complexity and their deep connection with specific cosmologies and knowledge practices.



The above illustration by Katalina Castro evokes the central role of the elders in the community. In the left bottom corner the *abuela* (grandmother) Alicia Ramos is the core from which emerge the textile-threads and the bonds connecting the members of the community.⁵ In the

³ The Tikuna people, as most academic and governmental authorities call them, prefer to be called the people of Magüta, while they refer to their language as Tikuna. Like many other indigenous groups in Colombia, they have been persistently called by the name the colonisers gave them. In recent years, they have expressed their discontent and even argued the word Tikuna was used pejoratively against the colonisers, who then decided to call them that way because they heard that word quite often.

⁴ These bracelets and shoulder bags are woven with threads made of the natural fibre extracted from the Amazonian palm known as *Astrocaryum chambira*.

⁵ Abuela Alicia Ramos is an important member of the community of Nazareth. She is respected for her knowledge of the stories of origin of the community, their traditional chants, rituals and medicinal remedies. She also known for her expertise in textile weaving. Very often she is invited to the community's school to teach the young children in kindergarten and elementary school about these topics.

background, Katalina has drawn the Amazon River and Forest, which are also connected to the people of the community.

During my visits to Nazareth, I worked with three school teachers from the community, some of whom have been participating in various research projects about the community's stories and traditions. I also worked with the *abuela* (grandmother), Alicia Ramos, one of the most knowledgeable about the traditional chants and stories.⁶ Together we developed workshops for fourth and fifth grade students attending the school of the community. The workshops were focused on developing reading skills and helping students improve their performance at school. At that moment, I was starting a Masters in Applied Linguistics at the Universidad de Jaén (Spain), and wanted my "action-research project" to support some of the projects of the community and the NGO Horizontes Colombianos, with which I have been volunteering as a translator since 2008.⁷

By the time I joined Horizontes Colombianos as a volunteer, I had started to explore the field of Cultural Studies and grown particularly interested on the way power relations affect knowledge production and validation. I had recently finished my undergraduate research on the teaching of languages in nineteenth century Colombia. In particular, my research engaged with French philosopher Michel Foucault's archaeological and genealogical approaches, in order to study the first decades of the Independent Republic's consolidation and the power-knowledge relations that led to the institutionalisation of French language teaching. It also explored the ideologies of race and civilisation that shaped the first universities and higher education institutions in the early nineteenth century. Later, when I enrolled in the MA in Cultural Studies at the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, in Bogota (Colombia), I dedicated my dissertation to an analysis of the politics of representation and enunciations of indigeneity at the Museo del Oro in Bogota, where I had been

⁶ In most indigenous communities, the *abuelos* are not only grandparents in relation to their grandchildren. Elders are valued in the extended community for their practical knowledge and experience as wise leaders, healers and masters of the traditions and languages that hold the community together.

⁷ I joined this NGO as a volunteer in 2008 and have collaborated with them ever since – translating, developing workshops for children in the elementary school and more recently creating didactic content for children for the community's TV channel with the support of Gustavo de la Hoz.

working for more than two years. Both dissertations prepared me to develop this research and made me wonder about the ways in which indigenous languages are defined and understood in Colombia. I have been particularly interested in exploring how this understanding is affected by constructions of otherness and power-knowledge relations that were shaped by colonialism (Said 1995, Todorov 1987), but which continue to exist in the present.

I had this in mind when I heard about the 2010 Ley de Lenguas Nativas (Law of Native Languages) or Law 1381, and I became interested in following the various discussions among language teachers and linguists about the reformulation of language programmes in Colombia in regards not only to foreign language teaching, but also to the linguistic situation of the native languages spoken in Colombia – sixty-five indigenous, two creole and one Romani languages (Landaburu 2009). As a foreign language teacher and a guide in the museum, I witnessed the government's growing interest in the promotion of bilingualism in Colombia (mainly focused on the English language) in the areas of education and culture (MEN 2004, 2008), in order to consolidate a bilingual workforce that could integrate into multinational companies and help increase foreign tourism and international investment.

As an undergraduate student of “modern languages” in the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogota, I was never able to enrol in courses on indigenous languages as they were not offered by this university. There are only a few courses of indigenous languages in Colombia for those who want to study them formally.⁸ The language policies shaping the teaching of languages and the academic programmes motivate the learning of foreign languages such as English or French, while academic production is expected to be done in Spanish or in foreign languages, even when it is carried out by indigenous students. I was also particularly aware of the obstacles and

⁸ These few courses are not open to the general public in the universities in which they are taught. The Universidad Distrital (Bogota) announced it would offer open courses in 2016, but that offer never materialised. The Universidad Nacional (Bogota), which has a large tradition of teaching indigenous languages since the 1970s, only offers these courses to students enrolled in its undergraduate programmes. More recently a few private high schools – such as the Gimnasio Campestre (Bogota)– have offered some indigenous language courses, but these schools cater to a small number of students from privileged families.

challenges faced by indigenous students seeking access to higher education programmes – not only because of the lack of grants and funding, but also because of the difficulties of carrying out their studies entirely in a second language (Spanish), sometimes even being required to pass international examinations in foreign languages such as English and French.

I witnessed the efforts and struggles of various students from Nazareth, so I offered to support them with the foreign language requirements and managed to find volunteers among my friends who became mentors in the area of their studies. It was overwhelming to witness the placement of such absurd restrictions on indigenous people in a country which proudly claims itself as multicultural and plurilingual. Unfortunately, Colombia is widely hostile to those whose first language is not Spanish and to those who are the first in their families, and even in their communities, to enrol in higher education institutions.

This is one of the many reasons why there were so many expectations regarding Law 1381 of 2010. As my interest on the changing linguistic policies increased, I participated in various seminars developed by the Colombian Ministry of Culture, the Instituto Caro y Cuervo and the Masters on Bilingual Education of the Universidad Nacional in Bogota where I contacted indigenous language teachers and important linguists working on the study of indigenous languages in Colombia. As I progressed with my PhD research, my initial focus on Law 1381 and its surrounding legislation moved towards the lived practices of indigenous peoples and particularly the stories they tell one another and share outside their communities. These stories are inspiring and do not portray them as victims of unfair circumstances (though indigenous peoples continue to denounce them adamantly). Instead, these stories refer to indigenous peoples as fighters, inspired by their ancestors and ready to build their present anew and make possible a different future for their people.

Despite the regretful circumstances the indigenous students have to face, their persistence and determination is inspiring. Like these indigenous students, my parents and many of my relatives have faced many challenges to have access to education. This is not surprising since access to education has been and continues to

be a privilege for a few in Colombia. Growing up I heard my father's stories about when he first moved to Bogota leaving his family and the crops where he worked behind. As an eleven-year-old kid from the countryside who was new in the big city, he had to face all sorts of troubles in order to get money and be accepted to a school where he could finish his elementary studies. This is the story of many children and youngsters from peasant and indigenous families in Colombia.

As this research has progressed, my initial focus on policies and programmes for indigenous languages has been reshaped by the constant conversation with indigenous voices. Languages and ways of living integrate in indigenous peoples' narrations in ways that redefine conceptions of indigenous language and defy reductive alphabetical and grammatical models. This is how this research has moved not only towards indigenous language practices, but also towards a more comprehensive practice that I name "(po)ethical". (Po)ethical language practices are poetic, political and ethical. My claim here is that they have a great value for communities around the world dealing with the asymmetries and violence that emerged in the context of colonialism and continue to exist today. This ongoing violence manifests in unequal access to health care, education and other fundamental rights. It also manifests in the undermining knowledge practices and biased criteria that determine the preservation and destruction of territories and populations.

This ongoing violence, which is rooted in asymmetrical colonial power-knowledge relations and produces subjectivities of otherness, is expressed in this research by the term *coloniality*. I understand coloniality as the persistence of violent dehumanisations and asymmetries that were produced in the context of colonialism, but have remained after the dismantling of colonial institutions (Grosfoguel 2003, 2008, 2014; Mignolo 2000, 2002, 2005a, 2009, 2013; Dussel 1999, 2000, 2014; Maldonado-Torres 2007). Coloniality also promotes regimes that govern the validation (and production) of knowledge, language and humanity, and that distinguish between knowledge, language, and humans on one hand, and non-knowledge, non-languages, and non-humans on the other.

Our present cannot be described as post-colonial because one of the pillars of coloniality today is precisely the negation of its existence through myths that proclaim “the end of the colonial era” (Grosfoguel 2014: 386).⁹ Since coloniality remains, it is necessary to develop a decolonial critique of the regimes of knowledge production and validation consolidated in the colonial experience. This is a “critique of Eurocentric forms of knowledge [...] and racial/ethnic hierarchies” (Grosfoguel 2003: 19, 20). This research engages with this task by redefining indigenous language practices and challenging the power-knowledge relations that produced their understanding as incomplete, thereby justifying their violent normalisation according to foreign grammars and alphabets.

Nearing the end of this journey has prompted me to expand this academic work and translate it into a collaborative project with school teachers, elders, youngsters and children of the community of Nazareth, in alliance with the NGO Horizontes Colombianos. In the coming months and with the support of a Public Engagement Grant from Goldsmiths, I will be participating in the creation of TV segments for IBURI TV, the closed-circuit channel of the community of Nazareth.¹⁰ The segments are addressed to the children of Nazareth and focus on the Tikuna language. They include traditional narratives and chants of the community, animated with drawings made by some of the children and youngsters. The segments will be used in the community elementary school as didactic materials. In addition to this community project, I will be collaborating on a translation of poems by the Inga poet and community leader Pedro Ortiz, from Valle de Sibundoy in Putumayo.¹¹

⁹ In 2002, the Argentinian semiologist Walter D. Mignolo referred to post-coloniality as “critical thinking about the different forms of colonialism and coloniality,” just as “postmodernity referred to critical thinking about modernity” (Mignolo 2002: 6, my translation). But he now prefers the term *decoloniality*, as it does not suggest the end of coloniality but a detour from it. I also use the term *decoloniality* in this research to refer to this detour from coloniality.

¹⁰ This TV channel was created more than 10 years ago for and by the community of Nazareth with the support of Corporación Horizontes Colombianos. Since its creation, the TV channel has developed monthly programming that is broadcast in both Tikuna and Spanish languages and which includes a News Report, as well as documentaries and interviews with members of the community (Corporación Horizontes Colombianos 2012b).

¹¹ The poetic work of Pedro Ortiz is available online in Pedro Ortiz’s website (Ortiz 2016).

Although these two projects are not part of this research, they emerged from it and I believe it is worth mentioning them as I retrace the paths that eventually led to me to conduct this academic inquiry. The different positions of enunciation I have occupied in academia and in intermediary spaces such as museums and schools, not to mention my experiences and collaborations with indigenous leaders, have all affected the way I relate to indigenous knowledge and language practices in this research. As academic researchers, we often tend to separate what seems to be scholarly acceptable and valid from what apparently is not, often setting aside our practical knowledge and experiences. It is worth considering the politics of writing, of “what we write” and “what we make visible” in academia (Spivak 2004). This is particularly important if we aim to stretch the boundaries of academic knowledge by repositioning knowledge practices that have been neglected because they are apparently “impossible to translate in the language of academic theory and scholarly research” (Cistelecan 2011: 4).

In this research, I attempt to converse with multiple voices, acknowledging different knowledge subjects and knowledge practices. I also consider different conceptions of language and knowledge derived from indigenous cosmologies. Furthermore, as a Latin American researcher, I am interested in dialoguing with authors who are not widely referenced in the English speaking academic contexts and who have experienced and been motivated to consider particular scenarios of epistemic violence and coloniality in Latin America. In this research, I conceive *epistemic violence* as the undermining and exclusion of knowledge practices that are produced outside a specific circuit, privileged in the production and distribution of knowledge. This circuit results from uncriticised and often naturalised colonial power-knowledge relations that confine academic knowledge to a handful of (European) languages and a smattering of centres and institutions, invariably based in the North (Mignolo 2005a; Grosfoguel 2013a, 2013b, 2014)

This epistemic violence makes it more difficult to hear the voices of other subjects who are producing knowledge outside the circuit. They have become subaltern or subordinated to those whose voice is strengthened by power-knowledge relations rooted in the history of colonialism and imperialism (Spivak 1988). This epistemic

violence can lead as well to *epistemicide* – the suppression and disappearance of invalidated knowledge practices (Grosfoguel 2013a, 2013b, 2014, 2016a). Indigenous knowledge practices within Latin America have long faced epistemological assassination and been violently undermined by predominant regimes of truth and validation. My research aims to defy epistemic violence and epistemicide by acknowledging and embracing the complexities of indigenous knowledge practices. Additionally, it engages with the work of Latin American authors whose work is not yet widely known on account of their subaltern position within the geopolitics of the circulation of knowledge (Mignolo 2000).

To be clear, my intention is not to essentialise the scholarship produced in Colombia or Latin America, but rather to “make visible the ‘subaltern forms of thinking, and [the] local and regional modalities [that] configure the world’” (Escobar 2000, cited in Walsh 2008: 516). Nor is it my intention to disregard theoretical and epistemic contributions produced in other regions of the world. In this research I dialogue with authors located in the Global South as well as in the so-called West or Global North. Indeed, it would be naïve to disregard interesting debates in critical theory and postcolonial studies that have helped to question the myth of the universality and neutrality of knowledge, while advocating for multi-vocal and hetero-logical epistemologies. As a matter of fact, the Global North and the Global South are intertwined. They are not opposed to one another, just as modernity and coloniality, knowledge and power are not opposed, forming instead complex articulations. In these preliminary remarks, I have revisited the experiences and motivations that led to this journey while retracing the steps of writing this thesis. In the introduction that follows I discuss my epistemological engagements as well as the theoretical and methodological approaches and articulations that shape this research. Titled *Departure*, it elaborates on the particular ways in which I have attempted to dialogue with indigenous language practices, narrations and epistemologies. I also take into account the problems surrounding their translations, as well as my position as a researcher in a university where I am, myself, a foreign student, writing in a foreign language.

DEPARTURE

(Introduction)

“Language is [...] the site of conflict,
a conflict waged in and among signifiers,
a conflict of voices and discourses,
the result of which is
the stuttering of languages.”
(Lecerle 2002: 138)

There is an underlying conflict in the theorisation and study of every language. For beneath every language lies the body of another: another form of that language, or another language that was undermined in a violent confrontation (Heller-Roazen 2008, Lecerle 1990, Pêcheux 1982). However, this conflict may not end there. It is quite possible that the forgotten or prohibited voices are rearticulated on the surface, reshaping that language and breaking its normalisation (Bakhtin 1935, 1984; Lecerle and Riley 2004; Heller-Roazen 2008). While many Amerindian languages were prohibited and even exterminated during the Spanish conquest and the colonisation of America (Mignolo 1995, Rapport 1994, Triana y Antorveza 1987), the Spanish language of the conquerors and colonisers was also transformed (Patiño Rosselli 1991.¹² Despite the efforts of the Spanish Language Academy to normalise and standardise the Spanish language in the new colonies, this language mutated (Hernández Sacristán 1997, Iriarte 2009, Medina 1979). Vocabularies, pronunciations, syntactic structures and idiomatic expressions from the Amerindian languages were incorporated, producing new Spanish variations (Triana y Antorveza 1993: 173).

There are more than 94 indigenous peoples in Colombia, speaking 65 languages and 300 dialects (ACNUR 2006: 2, Landaburu 2009). A large number of languages are spoken, but these have gained co-official status only recently. The crusade to establish Spanish and Catholicism as icons of monolingualism and unity began with

¹² John Mugne (2005) discusses the correlation between the prohibition of the native languages and the processes of colonisation in the Americas as well as Africa. As he explains, language prohibition was a technique for producing not only the linguistic but also the cultural death of the colonised peoples.

the Spanish conquest and the inauguration of colonial times; and it has persisted, surviving the proclamation of Independence in the nineteenth century and most of the twentieth century relatively intact (González-Stephan 1996). It was only in 1991 that the new Constitution redefined the Colombian nation as multiple and diverse, despite the hostile conditions and the disappearance of at least 70 languages (Landaburu 2009, Pineda Camacho 1997).¹³

With the shift towards multiculturalism and the response to the long-term claims and struggles of indigenous leaders and organisations, linguistic difference became part of the immaterial heritage of the Colombian nation – as stated in the 1991 Constitution and the 2010 Ley de Lenguas Nativas (Law of Native Languages) (Congreso de la República de Colombia 1991: arts. 7, 10; 2010: art. 2). The Catholic and Protestant missionaries considered responsible for the assimilation of indigenous peoples and their learning of Spanish lost financial and official support.¹⁴ The field of linguistics that had been emerging and consolidating in Colombia since the 1950s was assigned, along with anthropology, the double task of studying indigenous peoples and languages, and facilitating the preservation of their immaterial heritage.¹⁵

¹³ According to Landaburu, these sixty-five indigenous languages have about 400,000 speakers and while many of those are not at risk of disappearance, others are (2009). While not all indigenous languages are classified as “endangered”, five have less than thirty active speakers and are considered to be in an eminent risk of disappearance (Landaburu 1999). At least eight languages disappeared since the twentieth century and about seventy languages have disappeared in the last five centuries (Ibid.). The number of languages that were spoken before the Conquest is still incalculable; however, there is evidence in the chronicles of forty- seven languages that are no longer spoken in Colombia (Ibid.).

¹⁴ During Conquest, and even after Independence, indigenous territories were constituted into “missionary territories”, or territories managed by Catholic and Protestant missionaries. These missionaries pursued the conversion of the indigenous peoples and were in charge of their education, as detailed in the reports written by the Iglesia Misionera (Missionary Church) (1966), Canyes (1966), Vanegas (1966) and Ortiz (1966) which are available for consultation as manuscripts in the Archivo General de la Nación (General Archive of the Nation), in Bogota, Colombia. Additionally, Hefley and Hefley have collected a series of reports on the protestant linguists of the Summer Institute of Linguistics and the association known as the Wycliffe Bible Translators (Hefley and Hefley 1974). There are also important studies devoted to indigenous education and indigenous languages in Colombia by Helg (1987) and the shifts on the language policies in Colombia by Pineda Camacho (2000).

¹⁵ There are various reports by Hernández de Alba (1949, 1966) in regards to the work of the anthropologists and the Dirección de Asuntos Indígenas (Centre of Indigenous Affairs) that he coordinated under the Ministry of Government. These reports detail the intention of “facilitating” the assimilation of indigenous peoples in a paternalistic tone that was predominant during the 1950s and 1960s.

Although linguistic anthropology and “rescuing” linguistics are still precariously funded and remain in a subaltern position within their respective fields – as some of their practitioners confess (Gonzales Castaño 2014) – they are at least acknowledged. Their practitioners are also recognised as experts by many of the communities in which they work and have become important allies, particularly for the communities where the languages are at higher risk of disappearance (Pappenheim Murcia 2009).

Linguistic anthropology and “rescuing” linguistics have, along with the protective policies of language diversity, provided indigenous communities with tools and even new languages for defending and recreating their traditions and identities. However, it would be naïve and unrealistic to ignore the intricate power-knowledge relations (Foucault 1994a) and colonial legacies they carry with them (Restrepo 2007a, 2011a; Errington 2001, 2008). Language revitalisation programmes usually aim to “bring back to life” languages that are about to die or are already dying, due to the decreased number of speakers and the wilting motivation of younger generations to communicate in those languages (Crystal 2000, Edwards 1997). These programmes usually start with an initial phase of documentation and study of the languages in which grammars and alphabets are produced (Perry n.d., Tobar Gutiérrez 2001). Alphabets and grammars may seem to be harmless tools that serve the study, learning and revitalisation of languages, but neither they nor language revitalisation are neutral.

Revitalisation is based on a set of premises such as the need to preserve languages threatened with disappearance due to the asymmetrical relation between different languages. From these premises, it becomes desirable to prevent the overpowering influence of one language over another. Within the field of linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics, there have been interesting critiques of the underlying essentialism, paternalism and interventionism of the preservation agenda (see Fabian 1983, Restrepo 2011a). In this regard, the British linguist Peter Ladefoged argued in 1992 that it was “paternalistic of linguists to assume that they know what is best for the community” (1992: 810), and to present themselves as the rescuers of languages from “catastrophic destruction” (Hale *et al.* 1992: 7). This awareness of the violence and conflict underlying language revitalisation is particularly relevant for this

research, since linguistic expert knowledge remains in an asymmetrical relationship to the practical and cosmological knowledge of indigenous speakers.

Power-Knowledge Relations and Colonial Legacies in the Understanding of Indigenous Languages

Despite the good intentions of linguists and other external experts who work in communities, there are asymmetrical power-knowledge relations that shape the interactions between academics and the subjects they encounter in their fieldwork. Traditional research isolates and abstracts its “objects” of study, neglecting the interconnections of these “objects” and their context. Shaped by a logic of extraction, traditional research models end up isolating indigenous languages from ritual and everyday practices, discounting the rich interconnections that exist between bodies, landscapes, rituals, dances, chants, healing practices, cosmologies, knowledge and language practices. Within these asymmetrical power-knowledge relations, indigenous knowledge practices are mainly perceived as objects of study but not as legitimate sources of knowledge. Instead, indigenous knowledge practices are taken as exotic expressions of folklore that can be easily turned into commodities. In this extractive model of knowledge production, or rather appropriation, the experts are external and the local people are merely perceived as passive informants and less often as collaborators.

Indigenous languages and their peoples have continued to be affected by hierarchies of knowledge that not only denigrate the value of their knowledge practices as less “scientific”, but also make possible the constant violent exploitation of their practices and resources. For instance, “[t]he globalization agenda, driven solely by corporate interests [has] attempted to [use] [...] [international agreements] to appropriate the vital biodiversity resources of the poor and to transform seeds, plants and medicines from sources of sustenance for people into sources of limitless

profit for the global corporations” (Shiva 2008: 286).¹⁶ It is naïve to presume that indigenous languages are a pre-existing reality to be studied, described, analysed and compared. On the contrary, those languages have been created as objects of study within the context of colonial relations of power and knowledge (Castro-Gómez 2008). During the colonisation of America, missionaries and Latinists were given the authority to convert indigenous languages into “proper” languages by creating grammars and alphabets based on the Latin language (Rapport 1994, Zimmermann 1997). The definition and construction of indigenous languages according to foreign alphabets and grammars mark the simultaneous invention and colonisation of indigenous languages (Mignolo 1992, 1994a).

Grammaticalisation and alphabetisation operated as colonial technologies that defined indigenous languages as “illiterate” incomplete languages. They constructed a colonised form of indigenous languages based on the latter’s presumed “constitutive lack” and subsequently deemed them failures compared to the “model language” of the colonisers. Since the early sixteenth century, alphabetic transcriptions, vocabulary books and grammars have operated as normalising technologies tasked with making the incomprehensible comprehensible. It is worth noting that the normalisation and colonisation of indigenous peoples and their languages has involved specific knowledge practices, institutions, discourses and technologies, articulated by at least two distinctive rationalities: assimilation and isolation.

The first, assimilation, aims to transform the “mysterious” and “unknown” into something apprehensible and known – for instance, through the nomination, classification and incorporation of indigenous languages into broader language models. The second rationality, isolation, is expressed through the production of borders and boundaries that emphasise the differences between “us” and “them”, “ours” and “theirs”. The isolation of indigenous languages from ritual and everyday practices has mutilated, reduced and decontextualised these languages. Both

¹⁶ Medicinal plants and healing knowledge(s), for example, are patented, claimed and appropriated by private pharmaceutical companies claiming these knowledge(s) belong to no one and are thus fit to be exploited by Western academia and enterprises.

rationalities have participated in the production of indigenous languages and indigenous peoples as the multiple “others” of non-indigenous languages and peoples. They are thus central to the colonial definition of indigenous languages in Colombia.

Considering these complex power-knowledge relations, one may wonder how indigenous languages can be conceptualised in a way that challenges coloniality and the privileged position of Western academic knowledge. It seems impossible to name them as indigenous languages without alluding to colonial constructions of otherness. To a certain extent even using that name – indigenous – is a way of reproducing these colonial constructions that defined the colonised “other” in relation to the coloniser. When European colonisers arrived in America they imposed a set of norms according to their specific paradigms. However, these paradigms were neither neutral nor universal; instead, they were “provincial” as they were specific to the West (Chakrabarty 1998).

It is important to remember that the very idea of the West has been produced in contrast to a non-West, and that the colonisers and colonised have been defined in opposition to one another. This double colonial production of colonising and colonised subjects shaped the definition of both indigenous peoples and languages. This research defends the idea that indigenous languages need to be seen beyond the frames of alphabetical literacy and grammaticality. In order to redefine indigenous languages, it is necessary to denaturalise the assumptions constructed around them and to locate these assumptions within the power-knowledge relations that produced them. The following section examines these power-knowledge relations and their colonial legacies.

From Coloniality towards Decoloniality

The colonial experience transcends colonialism (Maldonado-Torres 2007: 131). It is not restricted to the physical exploitation and subjugation of the bodies of the colonised and their lands by “a metropolitan administrative and military apparatus” (Restrepo 2014: 306, my translation).¹⁷ The colonial experience has established regimes of validation of knowledge, language and humanity that produce distinctions between knowledge, language and humans, on one hand, and non-knowledge, non-languages, and non-humans on the other. *Coloniality* is what has remained after the dismantling of the colonial institutions that sustained colonialism. Not being necessarily concentrated or territorialised in a body or an institution, coloniality is subtle and insidious. It tends to be entangled in ways of living and relating (both locally and globally), in economic exchanges and policy-making processes – and indeed, in the production of knowledge and the construction of subjectivities.

Due to these intimate complexities and the overlapping of global dimensions, coloniality has not been successfully eradicated by rebelling against a King, defeating an army, contesting a set of laws or electing a politician, despite how important these achievements may be. The former centres of colonialism and imperialism have adapted to a certain way of living that is preserved by coloniality. Coloniality sustains the hierarchical privileges granted to new centres and denied to new peripheries. Furthermore, in the former colonies, the imaginations and admiration of some privileged centres of culture, civilisation, knowledge and development continue to direct their own agendas in regards to what culture, civilisation, knowledge and development should be like. As the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano explains, in Latin America “cultural Europeanisation turned into an aspiration that continues to seduce and oppress” (Quijano 1992, cited in Castro-Gómez 2008: 282).

Coloniality is particularly difficult to defy because it constitutes our subjectivities. Defying coloniality implies rethinking who we are and opening ourselves to the possibilities of being otherwise. As the Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-

¹⁷ All translations from the original Spanish documents are by the author of this research unless otherwise indicated.

Gómez explains, coloniality operates on the intimate level of subjectivities, symbols, affects and knowledge practices (Castro-Gómez 2011: 260, 267). From this perspective, colonial knowledge – which is the knowledge that is produced within colonial relations – is not impartial, but inevitably biased. It reproduces these colonial relations and reinforces colonial values. Considering how coloniality has affected knowledge practices, the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos argues that colonial knowledge is framed by “abyssal lines” (Sousa Santos 2010). These abyssal lines not only determine what knowledge is worthy of our approval, but also “separate what is human and subhuman,” creating and negating “the other side of the line” (Ibid.: 19).

Colonial knowledge is to coloniality what defensive walls are to a fortress – a form of protection. As the Argentinian philosopher Enrique Dussel argues, coloniality promotes a way of thinking and producing knowledge that obeys a totalitarian and normative logic that “rejects all that exhausts its identity standards,” and that seeks refuge in a fortress beyond the borders of which everything is defined as barbarian and opposite to sense (Dussel 1996, cited in Rodrigues Selis and Fernandes Maso 2014: 3-4). In order to break this fortress built by coloniality, and more specifically by colonial knowledge, it is necessary to develop a *decolonial* critique. As is discussed in the following pages, this is not simply a critique of the ongoing colonial violence, but also a proposal for detouring from coloniality, finding alternative routes and knowledge practices for understanding the ways in which world asymmetries are produced and maintained by knowledge-power relations and colonial legacies.

In the context of this research, decoloniality is conceived as a critical and visceral exercise that takes place at the level of both *ethos* and *pathos*, because it implies reinventing ourselves, our own humanity, and the ways we relate with one another. Decoloniality presupposes creative resistance and the reinvention of ourselves and the world we inhabit rather than a romantic attempt to go back to a prior, ideal colonial world. This reinvention also implies confronting who we are, how our subjectivities have been produced within colonial power-knowledge relations, and how our subjectivities have reproduced coloniality. More than a return to the past, it implies a detour from coloniality that requires a reinvention of the past and makes

possible a different present and a different future. This research engages with the decolonial project and considers to what extent the definitions and understandings of indigenous languages currently circulating in the language policies and programmes of language revitalisation continue to reinforce colonial power relations, forcing indigenous languages to adjust to foreign models defended as neutral and universal by colonial regimes of knowledge.

Various thinkers from former colonies around the world, including Latin American intellectuals, have denounced the ongoing violence of coloniality and attempted to dismantle the colonial regimes that maintain the degradation and the devaluation of some human beings, along with their language and knowledge practices.¹⁸ Many of these thinkers refer to this project as a “decolonial project”. The decolonial project

¹⁸ These Latin American intellectuals, formed in different academic fields, have produced a great breadth of research that traces the colonial articulations of power in Latin America. The Argentinian semiologist Walter Mignolo, for example, has explored the colonial articulations in alphabets and grammars of indigenous languages produced under Spanish colonialism in the Aztec and Maya territories. In *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* (published in 1995), Mignolo situates these articulations within the broader logics of coloniality and modernity, explaining that the European renaissance would not have been possible without the colonisation of America (Mignolo 1995).

Likewise, in his 2005 *La hybris del punto cero: Ciencia, raza e ilustración en la Nueva Granada (1750–1816)* (*Hubris of the Zero Point*, translation by Mignolo 2009: 162), the Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gómez refers to the continuity of the colonial rationality that produced the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ideal of a White Europe in Nueva Granada (the former colonial name of the territory now known as Colombia) (Castro-Gómez 2005). As Castro-Gómez explains, discourses of race and eugenics, along with medical practices, attempted to eradicate the “racial deviation” from which the majority of the population “suffered”. These practices and discourses arrogantly justified themselves as scientifically universal, locating themselves in the “zero point” of knowledge (Ibid.).

The Colombian anthropologist Arturo Escobar, in *La Invención del Tercer Mundo* (originally published in 1996, and subsequently translated into English in 2011 as *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*), traces the consolidation of the discourse of development that justified a new wave of foreign intervention in Latin America, Africa and Asia, leading to the definition of these former imperial colonies as the “Third World” in the 1970s (Escobar 1996). In his book *Territories of Difference: Place, movements, life, redes* (published in 2008), Escobar also traces the detrimental effects of development policies in the Colombian Pacific region (Escobar 2008).

In addition to Escobar, Eduardo Restrepo and Axel Rojas, two Colombian anthropologists, and Catherine Walsh – an American sociologist and educationist who currently coordinates the Intercultural PhD on Latin American Cultural Studies at the *Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar*, in Bolivia – have traced how multiculturalism has defined and produced minority ethnicities according to folkloric essentialist notions of identity in Colombia (Restrepo and Rojas 2009, 2012; Restrepo 2004b, 2006, 2007b; Uribe and Restrepo 1997) and Bolivia (Walsh 2007).

was consolidated in 2007 as “the decolonial turn”, which embraces some of the central arguments about the ongoing violence of coloniality. In particular, the decolonial turn acknowledges the continuity of colonial violence after the end of imperial occupation and colonialism. It also proposes a critique of the universalist and unlocated epistemes of colonial modernity that cut across the dimensions of power, knowledge and being (Maldonado-Torres 2007: 161). The decolonial turn is a project that neither emerges after nor effaces coloniality (Mignolo 2009). In this sense, the decolonial turn dialogues with the Algerian philosopher Jacques Derrida’s exercise of deconstruction. Refusing to efface what they stand against and what justified their emergence, they make visible the chains and articulations whose very constitution bring the break and the rearticulation into the realm of possibility.

The decolonial turn pursues two central tasks. The first is to challenge “the hierarchies of race, gender, and sexuality that were created and fortified by European modernity in the process of conquest and slavery of countless peoples in the planet” (Ibid., my translation). The second task is to create possible detours, alternative routes for “multiplying the landscape of knowledge production” (Escobar 2008: 306). The possible detours circumvent the hierarchical universal logics of coloniality and point towards heterarchical pluriversal logics (Kontopoulos 1993). Engaging with these tasks not only implies attempting to challenge the colonial knowledge produced within the “Westernised” academy (Grosfoguel 2016a), but rearticulating one’s research practice with other sites of knowledge production such as those of local communities, who are not simple informants, but active producers of knowledge.

Consider, for instance, the decolonial research practices of the US sociologist Catherine Walsh and the Bolivian anthropologist Silvia Rivera Cusicansqui, who work in Bolivia and Equator, respectively. They are intellectuals and activists who do not simply do “studies on” indigenous peoples. Instead, they work and collaborate with them, acknowledging their role as active knowledge producers. While Walsh calls herself a decolonial intellectual activist and Cusicansqui prefers to refer to herself as a subaltern and anarchist theorist, both are interested in articulating their research

with action and practice – a central tenet of the decolonial turn.¹⁹ Both have also been deeply inspired by the militant work of Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda, founder of participant action-research, and the Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire, founder of the movement of liberation pedagogy, also known as *pedagogia do oprimido* (pedagogy of the oppressed) (Freire 2005; Freire and Macedo 1987).

Walsh and Cusicansqui have produced valuable critiques of the ongoing colonial relations that frame subjectivities and non-academic popular knowledge practices in Latin America. Simultaneously, they have worked beyond the academy with community leaders to redefine these subjectivities and knowledge practices, opening spaces where they can be fostered, heard, and known. This linking of theory and practice, of academic and popular knowledge practices, is embraced by the decolonial turn. The Argentinian semiologist Walter D. Mignolo refers to it as “border epistemology”, “border thinking”, or “border gnosis” (Mignolo 2000). Mignolo defines “border gnosis” as what is known from the perspective of an empire's borderlands (Ibid.). The plural local knowledge(s) of the border, he argues, defy the universalist perspectives that limit understanding and knowledge to a local Western episteme (Ibid.).

Border epistemology displaces the universalist rationality that fuelled the “global designs” of Christianity, slavery, mercantile extraction and exploitation (Mignolo 2005a: 12-13), and which continues to sustain capitalist extraction, exploitation and intervention today. Detouring this violent universalist epistemology implies rearticulating the beliefs of those who name themselves as heirs of development, modernity, democracy and those who, in contrast, are said to lack development, modernity and democracy (Ibid.: 13-14). In this sense, border epistemology and decoloniality cannot simply be concerned with the former colonies, or the Global South, but also with the Global North.²⁰ It bears stressing that coloniality is based on

¹⁹ It is more important considering the strategies and motivations of these authors to challenge coloniality than labelling their work as decolonial, postcolonial or subaltern.

²⁰ The Global South is the counterpart of the Global North, which profits from the exploitation of the Global South; the Global South is not a fixed place; it is instead a position that is produced in the different articulations of the global designs of the capitalist world system (Sousa Santos 2014).

the imposition of “Eurocentric modernity”, a term used by many decolonial authors to describe a local epistemology that takes itself as universal. The decolonial turn challenges the self-proclaimed universal logic of coloniality (Grosfoguel 2008: 34) by underlining its provinciality – the historical and geopolitical locatedness of its knowledge practices, rationalities and discourses (Restrepo 2014: 313).²¹

In this way, the decolonial turn breaks the equivalence between Europe and modernity and provincialises Europe and the West, tracing the particular set of articulations that led to the formation of European modernities (Chakrabarty 2008, cited in Restrepo 2014: 313, Restrepo 2011b). Inspired by the work of the Argentinian political theorist Ernesto Laclau and Jamaican cultural theorist Stuart Hall, the Colombian anthropologist Eduardo Restrepo argues that Western essentialist modernity has created its own multiple others – other modernities that are multiple and multidimensional (Restrepo 2014: 316). Restrepo contradicts the French sociologist Bruno Latour’s claim that the project of modernity is incomplete and therefore an invalid focus of critique. While Latour acknowledges that the consolidation of a singular, universal and modern rationality was unsuccessful in Europe, and that multiplicity and difference were never eradicated within Europe or elsewhere, for Restrepo what matters is not whether the West was ever modern, but the consequences of what has been done in the name of modernity – namely, the denigration of the lives of certain peoples and their knowledge practices (Restrepo 2014: 320).²²

Enrique Dussel has, like other authors of the decolonial turn, located this violent Eurocentric modernity in the wider context of colonialism and coloniality. Additionally, Dussel argues that there have been two particular moments of

²¹ In the same vein, Mignolo refers to decoloniality as “the project that defines and motivates the emergence of a global political society delinking from rewesternization and dewesternization” (Mignolo 2013: 146).

²² Bruno Latour argues that “we never were modern” in his eponymously titled book (1993). According to Latour, the project of modernity – which aimed to establish a universal singular rationality and eradicate all hybrid contaminated forms – was unsuccessful and never came to be. In this sense, Europe was never modern because it remained multiple. Restrepo’s view, however, allows us to continue to talk about incomplete modernities and to acknowledge how coloniality is embedded in the project of modernity (Restrepo 2014: 311, 312).

modernity which, despite being interrelated, respond to particular strategies. The first is openly military and more obviously and physically violent, while the second is more refined and subtle, related to regimes of knowledge and validation. The first modernity, Dussel claims, is what made the transatlantic colonial world-system possible in the fifteenth century (1999, 2000). It also made possible the second modernity of Europe, which is often referred as the blossoming of “universal reason” (ibid.). From this perspective it becomes evident that the Cartesian *ego cogito* could only emerge after the deployment of the colonial imperial apparatus of the *ego conquiro* (Dussel 2014, Grosfoguel 2014, Restrepo 2014).

A possible response to this epistemic violence – i.e. to the undermining of knowledge practices produced outside the colonial regimes of knowledge validation (Spivak 1988) – is to pluralise the concept of modernity, acknowledge the existence of “local vernacular modernities” and their “unremitting negotiations [and confrontations] of local groups with modernity” (Restrepo 2014: 314, my translation; see also Chakrabarty 2000). These other modernities have the capacity, as Restrepo suggests, to “translate, divert and rearticulate” Western modernity and produce “new sorts of localities” (2014: 315, my translation). These rearticulations have the potential to challenge hierarchies of race, gender, sexuality, language and knowledge –hierarchies that “were created and fortified by European modernity in the process of conquest and slavery of countless peoples in the planet” (Maldonado-Torres 2007: 161, my translation).

Decoloniality is an alternative, multi-vocal and plural space that must be constructed by challenging coloniality and reinventing the relations among subjectivities and knowledge practices at local and global scales. This research subscribes to the decolonial project and its call against the dehumanisation of peoples, the undermining of their knowledge practices and cosmologies and the destruction of their territories and ways of living. More specifically, this research attempts to challenge the colonial legacies that persist in the understanding of indigenous languages.

Considerations, Multi-Vocal Dialogues and Approaches

While this research explores and dialogues with indigenous knowledge and language practices and discusses their poetical, political and ethical dimensions, it also considers the research procedures carefully. For the development of these dialogues it was fundamental to guarantee that the voices of indigenous leaders and voices were not simply treated as “sources” but as important interlocutors.²³ There is a conscious decision to avoid exposing them through the “ethnographic” gaze of photographs, but rather to let their poetry speak for itself. There is also a conscious acknowledgment of the impossibility of “representing them” adequately and an acceptance that any attempt to represent is already an interpretation. Along with this poetry, there are visual interpretations of their poetics, ethics and politics which were produced in conversation with the Colombia illustrator Katalina Castro.

With regard to these poets and leaders, I refer to their specific communities of origin just as I locate the other theoretical and epistemic interlocutors of this research. This does not mean that their work is reduced to their particular countries or origin; it recognises that the trajectories of these interlocutors have been marked their epistemic and political localities. This is worth considering given the geopolitics of knowledge production that privileges authors from a reduced number of countries and their work written in a reduced number of languages. Additionally, since this research is focused on the Colombian context and the Latin American region it is relevant to consider the work of decolonial authors from the region, while considering their conversations with postcolonial intellectuals who write from other borders of the Global South. In what follows of this section, I provide an introductory survey of the main approaches that shape this research: an archaeological and genealogical approach, critical and cultural theories, ecological perspectives, and multi-vocal dialogues with indigenous poets and activists whose work explores the revitalisation of their languages along with their traditions, ethics and community affiliations.

²³ This is an important concern that is also highlighted by the Maori researcher Tuhiwai Smith when discussing decolonial methodologies (2008).

This research accepts that knowledge is always produced and validated in the framework of regimes of truth and validation (Foucault 1994b: 131), and therefore engages an archaeological and genealogical approach for dismantling the naturalisation of the colonial understandings of indigenous languages. An archaeological and genealogical approach helps to identify the historical conditions and power-knowledge relations that have made possible and still maintain colonial understandings of indigenous languages. Archaeology and genealogy recognise the historical contingency of our ways of existence, producing a possible ontology of our present and the regimes of truth, experiences, power relations and events that have shaped how we understand ourselves as subjects (Foucault 2002, 2004; Rose 1996). In this research, archaeology and genealogy facilitate the mapping of power-knowledge relations, subject positions, institutions, discourses, rationalities and regimes of validation (Foucault 1994a, 1994b) in relation to the policies and programmes of “revitalisation”, “preservation” and “documentation” that are currently shaping understandings of indigenous languages.

Archaeology and genealogy are not only about mapping but also about transformation. Indeed, the two approaches allow us to explore possibilities for transgressing the limits of our current subjectivities and to consider new avenues for being and becoming otherwise (Ibid.). Archaeology and genealogy do not serve to find the origin of the laws of causality, nor do they attempt to reconstruct a pre-existent unidirectional historical linearity according to a static or univocal model. They make visible the existence and permanent tensions between various institutions, subjects, discourses and technologies that constitute a particular rationality. This research examines the clashes and asymmetries that accompany the validation of expert knowledge over indigenous knowledge practices in the context of indigenous language revitalisation.

This research also analyses the alternative conceptualisations of language formulated by critical theory, with the purpose of expanding the understandings of indigenous languages, their writing and oral transmission. Indigenous languages are conceived as practices “in play and at play” (Deleuze, cited in Lecerle 2002: 29), intertwined with indigenous worlds, where dance, movement, and bodies, but also

spirits and ancestors come to life. This research considers languages as historically contingent, dynamic and heterogeneous multiplicities; as forces in movement and constant change which form complex and dynamic articulations of meanings, bodies, movements, desires and struggles (Lecerle 1985, 2002, 2006; Sakai 1991, 1997; Heller-Roazen 2008; Deleuze and Guattari 2008). It also highlights how the bodies of those who inhabit those meanings and languages are equally inscribed by those meanings and languages, as well as by the historical conditions and power-knowledge relations and asymmetries moulding their subjectivities (Lecerle 1985, 2002, 2006; Sakai 1991, 1997).

This research conceives writing and languages as the inscription of bodies and the worlds they inhabit. This understanding challenges the alphabetical normalisations of writing and engages with a wider understanding of writing as the inscription of meaning in the world (Derrida 1997). Ultimately, it adapts an understanding of languages as bodies – of meanings, affects, experiences, desires – articulated with other bodies in (non-anthropocentric) ecological relations (Guattari 2000). Considering the multiple and dynamic nature of languages, this research does not conceive of revitalisation as a form of documenting and preserving what is original or authentic in a language. Instead, it approaches revitalisation from the vantage point of the re-articulation of affects, memories, experiences, filiations and meanings that sustain language practices and the community life of those who inhabit them.

This research engages with an ecological understanding of indigenous languages and considers the contributions of ecolinguistics and ecocriticism. The field of ecolinguistics in particular has brought much-needed attention to the way that environmental, geographic, social and economic factors form the “linguistic landscape” of a language and impact its use and vitality (Haugen 2001, Resinger 2008, Steffensen and Fill 2013, Romero Cruz 2015). Additionally, ecolinguistic research has highlighted how the vocabulary and structure of a language carries specific knowledge of the territory and the social relations of the communities that speak it (Resinger 2008, Romero Cruz 2015). Within literary studies, ecocriticism has brought attention to the ways in which narratives of nature and the authority of those who speak of nature are informed by colonial constructions of race and cultural difference

that justify the destruction of landscapes and their populations (Dreese 2002; Garrard 2004; Wright 2010; Roos and Hunt 2010; El Dessouky 2011; De Loughrey and Handley 2011; Wenzel 2011).

Ecolinguistics and ecocriticism may expand the boundaries of formal linguistics and offer a more complex analysis of language practices, but they still maintain the borders of their respective disciplines and treat the surrounding ecological elements of language as secondary. This research points to the relation between indigenous languages and knowledge practices, traditions and territories, but it also claims that community filiations, affects, knowledge practices, cosmologies and ethics are at the core of indigenous languages. It is from this perspective that this research proposes a redefinition of indigenous languages as poetical, ethical and political language practices.

Understanding indigenous languages by way of their practice brings attention to what is “done” with them – to use John Langshaw Austin’s famous expression ([1955] 1962) – in their daily, ritual and poetical-ethical-political practices. This research traces the performative and ethical dimensions of indigenous language practices such as the complex Uitoto practice of *rafue* and its conjugation of strong words, plants of wisdom and ritual dance, as well as its merging of the Word and knowledge (Candre and Echeverri 2008; Mora Púa 2010; Urbina Rangel 2010b). This research engages in a dialogical approach that converses with indigenous poets and activists who have done important work in their communities in regards to language practices and the revival of community filiations and ethics. Indigenous knowledge practices and leaders therefore figure in this research as vital interlocutors for understanding colonial and epistemic violence.

This research accepts Sousa Santos’s invitation to incorporate knowledge ecologies and post-abysal thinking into our work (2010). Accepting this invitation implies defying abyssal colonial knowledge – that is, knowledge that presents itself as universal and uncontaminated, and that disavows the existence of alternative epistemologies while maintaining coloniality and epistemic violence (Sousa Santos 2010, Grosfoguel 2014). It also involves embracing dialogical and multi-vocal

approaches for conversing with heterogeneous knowledge practices and voices beyond the academy. The encounter with these multiple voices and plural knowledge practices is not meant to lead to a universal totality, but rather to a pluriversal perspective that acknowledges the co-existence of different perceptions (Mignolo 2000). Such multiplicity and heterogeneity has the potential to allow different perspectives to impact on one another to the point of producing double translations (Mignolo and Schiwy 2003). These double translations go beyond the linguistic dimension to which translation is often reduced; they are translations that have the power to permeate and transform knowledge practices, categories, symbolic universes and ways of life (Mignolo and Schiwy 2003; Sousa 2010; Grosfoguel 2014).

Politics and Contingencies of the Construction of the Archive, the Writing Exercise and Its Translations

During the development of this research, an archive was produced from the collection, revision and analysis of language policies, reports on indigenous languages, interviews and conversations with linguists, indigenous poets and leaders. The selection and analysis of these documents and testimonies is the first step towards the consolidation of an archive articulating discourses and practices of indigenous languages in Colombia. However, this archive is not simply the sum of documents or sources. It also reveals how regimes of enunciation and validation govern indigenous languages through the production and validation of knowledge about these languages. Moreover, in accordance with the concept of the *archive* proposed by Michel Foucault in the *Archaeology of Knowledge* (2004), this archive shows the tensions and ruptures regarding these regimes of knowledge production and validation.

The archive corresponds to a set of discourses produced in specific historical conditions of possibility in the frame of particular articulations of power-knowledge relations, regimes of validation and production of truths, as well as institutions and subjects in the position of enunciating and producing these truths (Foucault 2004: 145). An archive, in this sense, is not a set of given sources a researcher could access,

but the map of the regimes of what can be said under a set of historical conditions, discourses and practices (Foucault 2004). It is important to consider that there are certain politics of conservation leading to the preservation of some documents and the destruction of others. The conservation of some documents over others responds to certain power-knowledge relations and politics of memory (Derrida 1995: 4). It would be naïve to think that the past is “already there”, frozen in a time before our own. Instead, it is produced along with its archives.

The production of archives implies a selection. Therefore, what is at “our disposal or not at our disposal” obeys the criteria used by others to preserve some memories over others (or not) (Ibid.). This means that there are ethical consequences to writing about the memories that have been preserved and creating a possible past from their reconstruction. There is a responsibility in regards to what we make *archivable*, what we chose to remember and make memorable. As Foucault observes, the revisiting and recreation of the archive is, in this sense, “a question about the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow” (Ibid.: 36). This research builds upon an archive; it not only maps articulations, but attempts to produce new ones. Producing a possible ontology of the present also implies making another present possible, a possibility of transformation for being and becoming otherwise.

Indigenous voices are hard to find in the manuscripts and publications that national and regional libraries, archives and museums keep. This is why interviewing is important. However, interviews are also contingent upon the levels of trust and empathy that emerge between the person who asks the questions and the person who responds to them. Furthermore, the translation of these conversations into a written text is also affected by regimes of truth and power-knowledge relations. While rewriting these conversations as an academic researcher and author, I am also swayed by the regimes of truth and validation of knowledge that affect my practice. Even when the purpose of this research is to challenge those regimes, the researcher exercises and occupies the function and position of an author within an articulation of power-knowledge relations (Foucault 1987, 1996). Besides, the author-researcher

cannot control and guarantee that the “intention” of what is written remains untouched.²⁴

As a writing exercise this research inhabits and is contingent upon various tensions. Academic writing is subjected to regimes of authorship, ownership and authority; and these regimes clash with the indigenous voices with which this research tries to dialogue. Additionally, important tensions arise from the translation of indigenous voices. First from their languages and community contexts to the Spanish language, for the Latin American and Hispanic audience, and then from Spanish into English, for the English speaking readers of this research. For me and the indigenous poets I am translating, English is a “foreign verb” (Chikangana 2000, cited in Rocha Vivas 2012: 176). The translation of their voices into English, along with their cosmologies, knowledge practices, memories, ethics, affects, filiations, and poetics implies a violent displacement.

The question of translation – the need for translation and often the impossibility of translation – is present throughout this research. Translating indigenous voices in this text – not only into English, but translating them in the sense of displacing them and relocating them – is a violent act. The force of translation breaks indigenous voices into pieces and recomposes them in different shapes, just as writing exerts a violent force over orality, displacing it from its context, away from the speaker’s intentions. In this sense, translations are never satisfactory and the voices that are translated suffer a kind of death; what remains of them is their “life after death” (Derrida 1979: 103, 1985: 205). Translation is impossible and yet necessary (Derrida 1979).

The displacement produced by the translations is inevitably violent, but it is also enriching for the research. First of all, it poses new questions, and demands closer attention to words and the meanings they convey. Secondly, it enables articulations and makes evident new tensions to be considered in this study. As researchers, we

²⁴ As the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Lecercle explains, following the work of French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: “the subject, the speaker, is not the author of her communication (expression reflecting intention) but at best an effect of the operation of collective assemblages of enunciation” (Lecercle 2002: 34).

pose questions to the documents and the collaborators who participate in our interviews and conversations. However, the questions we pose, along with the documents and the conversations we hold, are located in power-knowledge relations, regimes of truth and validation. There is no neutrality nor universality of knowledge. The knowledge we produce is situated in particular geo-historical and bio-graphical locations (Mignolo 2009: 160). In this sense, the construction of the archive is not only an active exercise, but a struggle, a “great battle” even (Nietzsche 2010). During this battle, different questions emerge. They transform, lead to new questions and open new avenues of possibility. Only after going through this journey is it possible to ascertain what the research is pursuing, why it is important and what impact it may have.

Research Question and Objectives

This research has departed from the idea that indigenous languages are not simply factual realities, but have been defined within a contested field of power-knowledge relations marked by the asymmetries produced by ongoing colonial and epistemic violence. Given this panorama, there are two tasks that are fundamental for this research. The first is to make explicit the colonial and epistemic violence within the normalising grammatical and alphabetical models that forced indigenous languages to adapt into a foreign mould. The second, equally important, task of this research is to propose alternative understandings of indigenous languages that rearticulate power-knowledge relations and challenge ongoing colonial and epistemic violence. Bearing this in mind, the central question directing this research can be stated as follows:

How can indigenous languages be understood anew in a way that challenges the epistemic violence and colonial legacies of literacy and grammaticality while also acknowledging their capacity to rebuild community filiations, affects and ways of living?

This question expresses the main objective of this study: to elaborate an understanding of indigenous language practices that goes beyond their linguistic dimensions and considers them in relation to the rebuilding of community filiations, traditions, affects, cosmologies, ethics and knowledge practices. More specifically, this research aims:

1. To assess the current legal multicultural discourses framing programmes that address the revitalisation of indigenous languages in Colombia, while considering their advances from prior models, their challenges and limitations.
2. To question and challenge the reductive models of monolingualism, alphabetisation and grammaticalisation that have operated as colonial normalising technologies in the study and definitions of indigenous languages. In order to understand current revitalisation programmes, it is vital to address these historical technologies. This is particularly important since these colonial technologies have produced and sustained, until now, the belief that indigenous languages are yet to be completed, or to be normalised according to grammars and alphabets, and that they actually require the intervention of external experts (such as missionaries and linguists). In this sense, this second objective is related to, and necessary for, the first one.
3. To redefine indigenous languages within complex articulations of knowledge practices, affects, community filiations and regimes of validation, while dialoguing with indigenous language and knowledge practices, as well as with relevant theoretical and methodological perspectives on the fields of critical theory, cultural, postcolonial and decolonial studies, ecolinguistics and ecocriticism.
4. To propose a comprehensive understanding of indigenous language practices that acknowledges their poetical, ethical and political dimensions, along with their capacity for rebuilding and recreating community filiations and ways of living.

5. To determine the impact of indigenous language practices and their poetical, ethical and political dimensions for resisting and challenging colonial and epistemic violence, both locally and globally.

From Language Revitalisation to a (Po)ethics of Indigenous Languages

In response to the research question and the objectives outlined above, this study proposes a (po)ethical approach that offers a comprehensive understanding of indigenous languages practices in relation to the rebuilding of communities and the recreation of filiations, affects and ways of living. From a (po)ethical perspective, language revitalisation becomes more than a linguistic activity. It involves language practices and ways of living, as well as the recreation of traditions and community filiations. In (po)ethical practices, knowledge and affects, filiations and ethics are not segregated from one another, nor are they abstracted from the bodies they inhabit. In this sense, (po)ethical practices are diverse, multi-vocal, material, and corporeal; and they are connected not only to different generations, but also to different times (see Chapter 4).

Understanding indigenous languages as (po)ethical practices implies going beyond the reductive models of alphabetic literacy and grammaticality and acknowledging that indigenous language practices carry complex systems of ethics in which “speaking beautifully” is related to “thinking and living beautifully,” as the Camëntsá poet Hugo Jamioy Juagibioy recites (2010: 59). In order to understand and redefine indigenous languages from this (po)ethical perspective, this research dialogues with the (po)ethical work of Hugo Jamioy Juagibioy (Camëntsá), Fredy Chikangana (Yanakuna), Vito Apüshana (Wayuu), Francelina Muchavisoy (Inga), Pedro Ortiz (Inga), and Edgar Velasco (Misak), who were raised and currently live and work with different indigenous communities in Colombia. This research also acknowledges the poetical, ethical and political dimensions of their (po)ethical work. This constant conversation with these poets, researchers and activists recognises the deep articulations between (po)ethical language practices and a territory, a community, a

shared history and, very often, a project aimed at transforming current inequalities and violent experiences.

(Po)ethical language practices involve the bodies of the practitioners and the experiences, memories and meanings engraved in them. (Po)ethical language practices imply living and feeling language and its historical and political contingencies through the body. This means experiencing the violence and asymmetries of the world and finding ways for creative resistance. It is work that involves healing and rebuilding communities along with their traditions, filiations and affects. This research considers how (po)ethical practices challenge epistemic violence and coloniality, not only in indigenous communities in Colombia, but in relation to other communities facing similar colonial and epistemic violence. Therefore, this research not only embraces the locality, but also the universality of these (po)ethics for speaking through “strong words” which have the potential to fight against the dehumanisation and destruction of ways of living and larger communities of affect (Gandhi 2006), motivated to transform this world of death into a world of life, where many worlds are possible. The following section discusses the singular-plurality (Nancy 2000) of (po)ethical practices and their capacity to be translated beyond geographical borders.

(Po)ethics and Agonistic Translations for Healing, Rebuilding and Creating New Communities

Along the journey of this research, while walking and dialoguing with the (po)ethical practices of various indigenous poets and activists in Colombia, it has become clear that (po)ethical practices do not only convey experiences of violence in powerful words, but also enable healing, as well as the rebuilding of community filiations and the creation of new communities. The experiences of violence that these (po)ethical practices narrate are located, but not isolated from the many experiences of violence taking place around the world. This is why they can dialogue with other calls against violence and the dehumanisation and destruction of ways of living. Local (po)ethical practices can form a multi-vocal and plural *(po)ethics*. These (po)ethics embrace and

carry singular experiences and particular contexts, and yet go beyond particularisms. In this sense, these (po)ethics are both *singular* and *plural* (Nancy 2000) in regards to the poets and their communities and in regards to their communities and other communities around the world (see Chapter 5 and 6).

Since (po)ethics are both personal and communitarian, local and global, they demand to be translated. Translation here means letting their fluxes and intensities gravitate towards new localities so they can articulate with other (po)ethical practices and enable collective healing through the dialogue of shared experiences, traumas and engagements to create a world that is affirmative of life and humanity. Rather than being obstacles to translation, their *singular-plural* embodiment, and their bordering between the plural and universal – their concrete universality (Castro-Gómez: 2015), or *pluriversality* (Mignolo 2000) – calls for it. However, this translation is not an easy task; it is, on the contrary, agonistic and demanding.

This translation cannot simply be linguistic. It needs to carry their poetical, ethical and political dimensions. It needs to communicate their pain, their healing and rebuilding of community filiations and traditions. It also needs to set the conditions for the creation of larger communities of affect across the globe. This translation cannot have the pretension of merging these communities and erasing their differences, nor of eluding the conflictive relations that abide in them and in their relation to one another. Instead, (po)ethics demand an *agonistic translation*, faithful to their pains, aware of their conflicts, and capable of collective healing.

An agonistic perspective goes beyond the simplistic opposition between local and global, specific and general, yet does not attempt to dilute locality, specificity and singularity in an over-comprehensive totality. An agonistic perspective acknowledges the struggles, tensions and disagreements between adversaries; it does not promote the elimination of enemies for the resolution of conflict (Mouffe 2013: 14). (Po)ethics and their agonistic translation can dialogue with many experiences of violence perpetrated in the name of civilisation, modernity, progress, profit and so on. They produce a singular and plural space of *ethos* and *pathos*, where epistemic violence and coloniality can be challenged.

Navigation Coordinates for Mapping the Conversation

Having outlined the locations, motivations and perspectives of departure for this research, it is time to concentrate on the navigation coordinates orientating the conversation that will be developed in three circles, each of which contains two complementary chapters. Each circle maps a specific dimension of (po)ethical indigenous language practices and their ways of challenging epistemic and colonial violence. The three circles are connected. However, their circularity is not productive of repetition but of variation (Deleuze 1994). Feeding into and out of each other, they point towards a detour. This detour is from the colonial legacies and normalisations that have made certain knowledge-power relations appear as natural. Thus, each circle searches for a break, a rupture from colonial normalised definitions of indigenous language and indigeneity that maintain today's violent asymmetries.

The three circles express three moments of the query that drives this research. These three moments are an ***overture (circle I)***, an ***interlude (circle II)***, and a ***ritornello (circle III)***.²⁵ Like the moments of a cyclical musical composition, these circles are supposed to remind us of the vibrant sonority and orality of indigenous languages. Each circle marks and segments the flux of arguments and conversations of this thesis. The pause each circle creates in the dialogical and argumentative flux aims to awaken us from the presupposition of the dominance of writing over orality that the act of quietly reading a document might lead us to make.²⁶ This misleading presupposition is characteristic of a particular way of relating to writing and language that we have learnt in Westernised schools and academies (Grosfoguel 2016a).

²⁵ This circularity follows the principle of Deleuze's *ritournelle*, which is "the sheer repetitiveness [...] which idiomatically is not a refrain coming between verses of musical passages but a form of repetition and variation governing an entire composition" (Abrioux 2009: 254). The *ritournelle* "jumps out of chaos," it starts a circularity heading in a direction that attempts to bring the chaotic forces into "a specific tempo, which can be speeded up or slowed down as required and is perpetually in danger of breaking apart" (Ibid.: 256). The *ritournelle* articulates these forces, "(territorialises) them", in "*un mur du son*" or "sound barrier" (Deleuze 1994).

²⁶ Colonial knowledge and historiography has served to delute the particularity of the authors' voices vaguely present in their signature (Derrida 1982). The universal pretention of Western knowledge effaces their locations to the extent to make the written texts appear universal and omnipresent, simply marke.

However, this is not the particular way in which indigenous peoples conceive and experience their relation to language, reading and writing, as we will discuss in further detail throughout this research.

The **Overture, Circle I**, is entitled “**The Revitalisation of Indigenous Languages, Multicultural Policies and Colonial Legacies in Colombia.**” This first circle introduces a set of reflections on the revitalisation of indigenous languages in Colombia while analysing the current linguistic policies and multicultural discourses defining indigenous languages and indigeneity. This circle also discusses the colonial legacies at play in understandings of indigenous languages, particularly in regards to alphabetical and grammatical normalisations. This circle comprises two chapters: **Chapter 1**, entitled “**Language Policies and Indigenous Language Revitalisation in Colombia within the Multicultural Model: Achievements, Challenges and Limitations,**” and **Chapter 2**, entitled “**Ongoing Violence: Alphabetical and Grammatical Normalisations, Epistemic Violence and Coloniality.**”

Chapter 1 evaluates the achievements, challenges and limitations of the multicultural model and the current linguistic policies and programmes for the revitalisation of indigenous languages in Colombia. It considers the struggles and claims that made possible the emergence of the multicultural shift in Colombia, while also examining its problems. This chapter debates how the incorporation of a multicultural language has redefined indigenous identities according to foreign imaginations and expectations, and conditioned their rights to autonomy and self-governance to the fulfilment of those imaginations and expectations. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the limitations and violent presuppositions of recent linguistic policies and the need for a redefinition of indigenous languages beyond the multicultural preservationist model.

Chapter 2 questions and challenges the reductive models of monolingualism, alphabetical and grammatical normalisation that have operated as colonial technologies in the study and definitions of indigenous languages. It elaborates on the ongoing colonial and epistemic violence and the asymmetries between the expert knowledge of academic linguists and indigenous knowledge practices in the

understanding and revitalisation of indigenous languages. Additionally, this chapter explores the conflicts, tensions and ruptures that have taken place in the normalisation of indigenous languages and that have led to new hybrid forms.

The **Interlude, Circle II**, is entitled “**Decentring Colonial Normalisations of Indigenous Languages and Detouring onto (Po)ethical Paths.**” This second circle acknowledges the contributions of postcolonial, decolonial, ecological, deconstructive, poststructuralist, critical and cultural theories to the project of decentring alphabetical, grammatical and monolingual normalisations and relocating indigenous languages in complex (non-anthropocentric) relations of affects and community filiations (see also Savory 2011). Moreover, it proposes a (po)ethical approach that offers a comprehensive understanding of indigenous language practices, and dialogues with their poetical, ethical and political dimensions. This approach redefines indigenous languages and their revitalisation in regards to their capacity to enable creative resistance and healing from epistemic and colonial violence, by rebuilding community and ways of living. This circle comprises two chapters: **Chapter 3**, entitled “**Redefining Indigenous Languages: Alternative Language Conceptualisations, Ecological and Decolonial Perspectives,**” and **Chapter 4**, entitled “**(Po)ethical Paths towards Language Revitalisation and the Rebuilding of Community Filiations.**”

Chapter 3 elaborates on the understanding of languages in regards to conflict and the clash of shifting forces of normalisation and rupture that enable language vitality and transformation. It also lays out a broader understanding of writing as the corporeal inscription of meanings, memories, experiences and ethics. Additionally, this chapter explores possible decolonial detours from epistemic violence and language normalisations. It considers ecological articulations of indigenous languages, converses with ecolinguistics and ecocriticism, and engages with the construction of knowledge ecologies and double translations of the (po)ethical language practices of indigenous poets and activists in Colombia.

Chapter 4 elaborates on the implications of a (po)ethical approach to indigenous languages and revitalisation, particularly in regards to the rebuilding of community

filiations, affects and ethics. The chapter discusses the singular and plural, as well as the local and global inflections of (po)ethics and their intricate poetical, ethical and political dimensions. It also elaborates on the ways that (po)ethical practices rebuild communities fragmented by coloniality, epistemic violence, cultural appropriation and dehumanisation. In addition, the chapter refers to (po)ethics as contested spaces, as marked by conflict as they are by creative and agonistic resistance to colonial epistemic violence.

The **Ritornello, Circle III**, is entitled “**(Po)ethics for Agonistic Healing and Building a World of Many in a World of Conflict.**” This third circle highlights how (po)ethical practices embrace difference, but not in the celebratory tone of multiculturalism nor in the idealistic illusion of non-conflict imagination. This circle elaborates on how (po)ethics emerge from the pain of the conflicts, historical conditions and violent asymmetries that are imprinted in the bodies and the languages we inhabit. It argues that (po)ethics are agonistic, acknowledging conflict among adversaries, without aiming to eliminate conflict through the elimination of adversaries. This final circle also proposes agonistic translations of (po)ethics capable of fostering creative and collective resistance to and healing from colonial epistemic violence, both locally and globally.

Here, a certain resistance emerges from the articulation of affects (see Zibechi 2006), and the shared experiences of trauma and healing that unite against the world of death and dehumanisation that is at the core of coloniality (Mmembe 2001, 2003). It searches for collective healing through shared experiences and knowledges of different peoples in Colombia and in the Global South that ultimately serve to rebuild and create communities of affect beyond the limitations of laws and official frameworks for reparation and justice that might be evaded and bent in response to private interests and social, economic and political asymmetries. This last circle considers the capacity of (po)ethical practices to denounce the violence of ongoing coloniality. As is discussed in this circle, this denunciation requires not only making explicit this violent but also mobilising affects that make this violence viscerally unacceptable. This circle comprises two chapters: **Chapter 5**, entitled “**(Po)ethical**

Responses to Violence in Colombia,” and Chapter 6, entitled “(Po)ethics and Agonistic Translations for Healing and Rebuilding a World of the ‘You’.”

Chapter 5 considers the (po)ethical responses that indigenous poets, activists, leaders and organisations have developed in regards to the multi-layered violence in Colombia. Here, the chapter argues that languages are not only contingent on historical power-knowledge relations, colonial legacies and epistemic violence (chapter 2), but they can also, as (po)ethical language practices, enable creative resistance to these historical conditions of violence. This creative resistance materialises in the possibility of rebuilding and creating community filiations, affects and ethics. Additionally, the chapter discusses the complexities of the multi-layered violence in Colombia and the ways in which indigenous peoples have resisted and even created conditions for the construction of peace and the rebuilding of communities affected by this violence.

The chapter also analyses some of the major aspects of the peace negotiations that have taken place between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP guerrilla in Havana, Cuba and the Peace Agreement released in August 2016.²⁷ This chapter discusses the civilian mobilisations and the articulations of different social sectors in response to the delays in the implementation of the Peace Agreement due to the failed endorsement that emerged from the results of the Plebiscite of October 2016.²⁸ It highlights the participation of the Comisión Étnica para la Paz y la Defensa de los Derechos Territoriales (Ethnic Commission for Peace and the Defence of Territorial Rights) and its (po)ethical practices through encounters, rituals and collective walks for the construction of peace and the rebuilding of communities. It acknowledges the tensions between transitional justice and indigenous justice, and considers the

²⁷ FARC-EP stands for Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército Popular, in Spanish (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – Popular Army).

²⁸ There was a second peace agreement released on 12 November 2016 and signed on 26 November 2016. At the time of finalising this thesis, this agreement is still under revision in the Colombian Congress. The panorama regarding the implementation of this agreement is still uncertain, and there are major concerns regarding the maintenance of the ceasefire and the suspicious assassination of various leaders from civilian movements (El País 2016, El Heraldo 2016).

conflictive definition of indigenous territories in regards to the Peace Agreement's proposal for the restitution of lands and agrarian development.

Chapter 6 considers the creative and active role of agonistic (po)ethics in the acknowledgement of one another's existence and the tension that emerges between the plural and singular voices of leaders and community members (including those recently returned from active involvement in the internecine war). This chapter elaborates on the collective creation of a (po)ethical world of the "you" through agonistic translations of (po)ethical practices, both locally and globally.

Rejecting problematic idealisations and expectations of homogeneity, harmony and consensus, this final chapter proposes instead an agonistic understanding of community. It also challenges the opposition between local and global, singular and plural, particular and universal. The chapter discusses the role of agonistic translation in the production of a local, global, singular and plural (po)ethics – a lingua franca for connecting and sharing experiences of colonial violence and for producing collective networks of creative resistance.

CIRCLE I – OVERTURE

The Revitalisation of Indigenous Languages, Multicultural Policies and Colonial Legacies in Colombia

This first circle, **Overture**, is the first turn on the route of this research. Its purpose is to analyse the current situation of indigenous languages in Colombia, and the linguistic policies that frame the programmes tasked with their revitalisation. This circle maps the landscape of conceptualisations and understandings that have defined indigenous languages within power-knowledge relations and colonial legacies. This circle also discusses how these colonial legacies and power-knowledge relations have informed colonial normalisations and wrought epistemic violence upon indigenous languages, despite the breaks and ruptures that have taken place since Independence and the development of different agendas regarding the “indigenous question”.

This opening circle introduces a set of reflections on the revitalisation of indigenous languages in Colombia in regards to the current linguistic policies and the prevailing multicultural model. It also quarrels with the alphabetical and grammatical normalisations of indigenous languages within the programmes of revitalisation. This circle comprises two chapters: **Chapter 1**, entitled “**Language Policies and Indigenous Language Revitalisation in Colombia within the Multicultural Model: Achievements, Challenges and Limitations,**” and **Chapter 2**, entitled “**Ongoing Violence: Alphabetical and Grammatical Normalisations, Epistemic Violence and Coloniality.**”

Chapter 1 analyses how indigenous subjectivities and languages are being defined by the current linguistic policies and programmes tasked with the revitalisation of indigenous languages in Colombia. It also considers how these policies and programmes have been framed by multicultural discourses, and discusses the implications of this framing. Additionally, this chapter questions how the multicultural model produces particular projections and imaginaries of indigenous peoples and their languages. It also analyses the impact of these projections and imaginaries. This is particularly important since indigenous peoples have adopted a

multicultural language and adapted to a series of external demands and expectations in order to justify, defend, and exercise their specific rights.

While discussing the trajectories, advances and limitations of the multicultural model, the chapter makes a case for an alternative framework for understanding the link between indigenous peoples and revitalisation. It also elaborates on the need to develop a new language for defining and framing linguistic policies and programmes that address indigenous languages and their revitalisation. As the chapter progresses, it sketches the main differences between multicultural linguistic policies and revitalisation programmes, on one hand, and the *(po)ethical redefinition* of indigenous language practices and their revitalisation on the other.

Chapter 2 discusses the colonial legacies that circulate in understandings of indigenous languages, particularly in regards to alphabetical and grammatical normalisations. The chapter elaborates on the operation of alphabets and grammars as colonial technologies, and teases out their relation to colonial aspirations of monolingualism and the undermining of indigenous languages. It discusses the way indigenous languages were defined as incomplete, illiterate and ungrammatical deviations from the colonial norm, and highlights the need to elaborate critical analyses of alphabets and grammars in view of indigenous languages and their revitalisation. Additionally, this chapter discusses the colonial and epistemic violence that persists alongside asymmetries between the expert and academic knowledge of linguists and indigenous knowledge practices.

This chapter discusses the necessity of challenging these asymmetries between the academic and indigenous knowledge practices, as well as colonial and epistemic violence in regards to the understanding and revitalisation of indigenous languages in Colombia. It also discusses the conflicts, tensions and ruptures that have been created by the normalisation of indigenous languages and led to new hybrid forms. Considering these breaks, the chapter emphasises the need to redefine indigenous languages in ways that challenge monolingualism, alphabeticality and grammaticality.

This first circle presents a diagnosis of the current situation of indigenous languages in Colombia. **Chapter 1** evaluates the advances, challenges and limitations of the multicultural model, linguistic policies and revitalisation programmes. **Chapter 2** analyses the problematic role of alphabets and grammars and discusses their colonial legacies, as well as the colonial epistemic violence traversing the definitions, studies and programmes of indigenous language revitalisation in Colombia. The diagnosis made by these two chapters exposes the problematic understandings of indigenous languages and their revitalisation in Colombia. On the basis of this diagnosis, these chapters make a case for the importance and necessity of producing alternative definitions and understandings of indigenous languages that challenge coloniality, epistemic violence, and the destructive imaginaries that sustain the dominant multicultural model. In this sense, this first circle anticipates the second circle, which lays out a proposal for a (po)ethical understanding of indigenous language practices.

Chapter 1. Language Policies and Indigenous Language Revitalisation in Colombia within the Multicultural Model: Achievements, Challenges and Limitations

Multiculturalism requires to a certain extent
some kind of ‘not-wanting-to-see’
which is some kind of ‘not-wanting-to-see’
the devastating effects of violence [...],
the violent effect on the constitution
of indigenous subjectivity,
or accepting violence
as defining of the dominant society
(Lemaitre Ripoll 2009: 302-303, my translation).

Indigenous subjectivity and indigenous languages are currently defined in Colombia within the framework of the multicultural model. Multiculturalism celebrates indigeneity as the expression of difference and demands that indigenous peoples perform their difference as a “particularity”, within a presumably tolerant national society and an interconnected global world. However, multiculturalism discourages indigenous peoples and all “particularities” from defying the anonymous (omnipresent) “majority”. As far as multicultural heritage policies are concerned, the 1991 Constitution defines indigenous languages as part of the immaterial heritage of Colombia and grants them co-official status in the regions where they are spoken (Congreso de la República de Colombia 1991: arts. 7, 8, 10, 70). “Language and education policies – once used to ‘unify’ the country through enforced linguistic homogeneity – are now used to cultivate [...] ethnic languages having withstood ‘unification’” (Patthey-Chavez 1994: 201).

This first chapter examines the Ley de Lenguas Nativas (Law of Native Languages), enacted by the Congress of Colombia in 2010. It considers the particular way in which this law articulates the discourse of multiculturalism with respect to the recognition, promotion, protection, preservation and reinforcement of what this law names “native languages” (Congreso de la República de Colombia 2010: art. 1).²⁹

²⁹ In this law, “native languages” comprises 65 indigenous languages, two creole languages (one produced in the encounter of African languages with English and another with Spanish) and one Romani language (Congreso de la República de Colombia 2010: art. 1).

Additionally, through an archaeological exercise, this chapter maps the conditions of possibility for the emergence of this law. It also proposes a genealogy of the main discourses and policies regarding indigenous languages and the construction of indigenous subjectivities in Colombia, considering both their continuities and discontinuities.

This first chapter discusses how indigenous peoples' struggles and demands were key in the transformation of their legal relation to the state. Additionally, it refers to the ways in which indigenous peoples have not only expanded the legal framework in Colombia, but also helped to redefine colonial categories in political and legal scenarios. In regards to these contributions, this chapter considers the achievements and challenges of language policies and practices in the current era of multiculturalism, and discusses some of the ambivalences and tensions that haunt processes of revitalisation and definitions of indigenous languages and subjectivities. Furthermore, the chapter reprises important debates surrounding the definition of indigenous rights to territory, autonomy, and self-governance. This chapter also discusses the legal requirements for accessing those collective rights and the expectations of national and global spectators of the "indigenous question".

The chapter analyses the *pharmakon's* effect – doubly "curative and poisonous" (Derrida: 1981) – on the legal discourse, which not only serves indigenous peoples but also restrains their relation to the state. It also highlights what is problematic about the romantic environmental and multicultural discourses that dominate the perception and enunciation of indigeneity in Colombia. It analyses the ways in which the violent expectations and idealisations of indigenous peoples have renewed myths of the "noble savage" in the present. Finally, the chapter calls for the necessity of an alternative understanding of indigenous peoples and languages, arguing that such an understanding must challenge the violent idealisations and expectations that lead to the unfair judgement of indigenous peoples.

Indigenous Languages and their Reformulation in the Legal Frameworks in Colombia

From Colombia's Independence in 1810 until the 1970s, the main objective of the policies addressed to the indigenous population was to promote their assimilation with the assistance of missionary orders, both catholic and protestant. Along with the assimilation agenda, the national government created legal mechanisms and institutions to ensure the dissolution of indigenous territories, known as *resguardos*. This mission was assigned to two main entities: The Departamento General de Asuntos Indígenas (General Department of Indigenous Affairs), or DGA, and the Instituto Colombiano de Reforma Agraria (Colombian Institute of Agrarian Reform), or INCORA (Ibid.: 331).³⁰ However, the indigenous movement and the emergence of many indigenous organisations during the 1970s forced the national government to modify its policies (Cleary 2000, Martí I Puig 2010). Currently, 81 different ethnic groups are recognised in the country and 2 percent of the overall national population identifies as "indigenous" (Gros 2002: 324; 2010: 17).³¹

Indigenous languages are currently defined in Colombia within a discursive constellation that includes discourses on multiculturalism, immaterial heritage protection, and revitalisation. In the 1990s, indigenous languages and ethnic languages were redefined as expressions of ethnic and cultural diversity deserving protection by the Colombian nation. The 1991 Constitution annulled Law 89, which since 1890 had defined indigenous people as minors and non-citizens of the Republic (Gros 2002: 326-327, Peñaranda 2012b: 45, 46). This Constitution acknowledged, for the first time, indigenous peoples as citizens with the right to vote, participate in political parties, and occupy official posts.³² It also gave them special rights in regards

³⁰ The General Department of Indigenous Affairs was affiliated to the Ministry of Interior (formerly the Ministry of Government).

³¹ According to the Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (National Administrative Department of Statistics), or DANE, the projected population of Colombia as of 4 November 2016 was 48,936,869 (DANE 2016).

to their territory (Congreso de la República de Colombia 1991: arts. 63, 329), autonomy (Ibid.: arts. 329, 330) and cultural and linguistic rights (Ibid.: art. 10).

The 1991 Constitution redefined Colombia as a multicultural and pluri-lingual nation. This marked an important rupture from the former Constitution, proclaimed in 1886, which defined it as “a nation” of “one language”, “one religion” and “one people”. In opposition to this Catholic and Unitarian Constitution, the new Constitution enshrines freedom of speech, diversity and cultural expression; it also condemns discrimination according to gender, race, kinship, origin, religion, and political views (Helg 2004: 37, Rojas Curieux 1999: 47; Patiño Rosselli 2000: 159). The consideration of racial discrimination as a violation of fundamental rights had been unthinkable a few decades earlier, when the national government had instituted a massive hygienic crusade that pretended to counteract the “biological” failure of the national population.³³

By means of the 1991 Constitution, the state acknowledged diversity and legitimised the social organisations of the ethnic groups; it also recognised the rights to self-government within indigenous communities and their collective territories. Since 1991, then, cultural and linguistic diversity, indigenous communities and their organisations have been officially acknowledged (Castillo and Rojas 2005: 14). Additionally, the new Constitution states that indigenous languages are co-official in the indigenous territories and outlines the transition of indigenous education from interventionism and paternalism to indigenous autonomy and self-determination (Castillo and Rojas 2005: 14; Landaburu 2004: 31).

In 1887, the Colombian government signed a *Concordat* with the Catholic Church. Three years later, in 1890, Law 89 granted the Catholic Church control over the

³³In the 1930s and 40s, words such as *evolution*, *adaptation*, *pathologies*, and *species* appeared in the medical discourses and gradually expanded to the field of education, which henceforth became responsible not only for the improvement of individual skills, but for the reshaping of the biological heritage of the population (Saldarriaga and Sáenz 2001: 88). Luis López de Mesa, Minister of Education in 1934, claimed national education had the duty to develop the intellectual and physical capacities of all citizens, including those whose skills were diminished by the “catastrophic genetic heritage of the black and indigenous race” (Helg 1987: 152, my translation).

conversion and assimilation of the indigenous peoples (Landaburu 1998: 307; Triana y Antorveza 1972: 1253, Rojas Curieux 1999: 47). Then, in 1902, the government renewed the Convention of Missions, which entrusted the Catholic Church with the education and “civilisation” of the indigenous peoples (Cardona and Echeverri 1999: 219-220). Later, in 1904, Act 491 specified how education was to be organised in indigenous territories and decreed that an annual report had to be sent to the Vatican and the national government (Helg 1987: 186). For most of the century that followed, indigenous education was in the hands of religious missionaries whose task was to prepare indigenous children to be productive in the domains of agriculture and handicraft, their “contribution” to the economic development of the country (Ibid.: 193).

Indigenous children were separated from their families and forced to attend schools where they were instructed in Spanish, and taught to speak, dress and behave like “good Christians” who hardly remembered their indigenous languages and traditions (Díaz 1990: 105). Traditional family structures and organisations were displaced by the boarding school, while foreign religious models effaced cosmological values and rituals, replacing them with vague references to patriotism and Christianity (Helg 1987: 191, Diaz 1990: 106). The discipline was strict and physical punishment was frequent, driving some frightened children to escape. Local authorities forced these children to go back to school and fined parents who did not encourage them to return (Helg 1987: 191).

In many ways the 1970s mark an important turning point in the history of indigenous education in Colombia. In 1974, the Catholic Church lost the privilege given by the *Concordat* to direct and design indigenous education (Law 20 of 1974, cited in Gros 2002: 331). Later, in 1978, Decree 1142 established indigenous peoples’ right to a bilingual education and their autonomy to choose their teachers and design their curricula (Gros 2002: 332). In the 1980s and 1990s, indigenous peoples were redefined as citizens responsible for their own destiny and allowed to participate in politics. Indigenous representatives were elected to the Constituent Assembly and the new Constitution granted indigenous peoples special rights in regards to their territory (Congreso de la República de Colombia 1991: arts. 63, 329), autonomy (Ibid.:

arts. 329, 330) and cultural and linguistic rights (*Ibid.*: art. 10). The recognition of indigenous peoples as citizens with the right to vote has strengthened their voice in territories where they are the majority of the population, leading to the election of more indigenous people to gubernatorial and mayoral positions in departments and municipalities, respectively (Gros 2002: 338-339).

The new Constitution marks an important departure from the older assimilationist model. Religious communities stopped being in charge of indigenous education and lost the government's backing in their mission to convert indigenous peoples to their religion. This is particularly important because it signals the Colombian government's about-turn over a 1962 agreement signed with the protestant missionaries and linguists of the Summer Institute of Linguists (SIL). For more than forty years, SIL members not only studied indigenous languages but translated the Bible into indigenous languages. They produced teaching materials that promoted literacy in Spanish and indigenous languages, and ultimately aimed to facilitate indigenous peoples' assimilation and conversion to Protestantism.³⁴

The new Constitution refers explicitly to indigenous languages and indigenous peoples as part of the nation's cultural-immaterial heritage. In 1991, with the release of the new Constitution, the ratification of Convention 169 with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), and the release of Law 21 (Muyuy 1999: 5, Chaparro 2012: 644), the state engaged to promote indigenous languages in indigenous schools (Chaparro 2012: 644, Trillós Amaya 1998a: 357). Moreover, the new Law of General Education – Law 115, enacted in 1994 – indicates that indigenous education has to

³⁴The SIL produced a considerable number of phonetic, grammatical and morphological studies of the indigenous languages, trained bilingual teachers, and designed didactic material for teaching Spanish to the indigenous people, which made continuous reference to their religious beliefs (Rodríguez 1982:195). The SIL members, self-proclaimed linguists and translators of the Bible who defined themselves as “true believers [in] Jesus Christ” and benefactors of “primitive Indian tribes” (Hefley and Hefley 1974: 180), settled in the indigenous territories occupied before by the Capuchins and other Catholic missionaries (Le Bot 1985: 301; Landaburu 1998a: 308). In only two decades, between the 1960s and 1980s, the SIL settled in the territory of 38 indigenous groups (Pineda Camacho 2000: 148). In May 2000, the SIL left the country after being accused of committing “genocide” of the indigenous peoples by effacing their memory and helping multinationals and other corporations, such as Texaco in Putumayo, to penetrate, violate and destroy the indigenous territories and cause harm and disintegration to the indigenous inhabitants (Colby and Dennett 1976: 685).

be flexible and coherent with the culture, environment, beliefs, and cosmologies of indigenous groups (Cardona and Echeverri 1999: 222; Trillós Amaya 1999: 14, 15).

The redefinition of indigenous education as autonomous, intercultural and bilingual can be traced back to the decade of the 1970s and the consolidation of indigenous movements and organisations in Colombia (ONIC, ANUC, CUT 1990). Their demands and claims in regards to the reformulation of their education were first acknowledged by Law 88 in 1976, Act 088 in 1977, and Act 1142 in 1978. These enactments by the national government laid the groundwork for some important transformations, including the reformulation of indigenous languages as the languages of instruction and the authorisation of indigenous teachers to participate in the selection of course contents and the development of didactic materials (Landabudru 1998a: 308, 309; Trillós Amaya 1998b: 73, 359; Cardona and Echeverri 1999: 221).

For the first time in the history of the country, indigenous languages were acknowledged as co-official (Jiménez 1998: 38, Monje Cardozo 1998: 160). The 1970s also witnessed the emergence of important discussions surrounding the need for bilingual education and for the training of bilingual indigenous teachers (Muyuy 1999: 4; Castillo and Rojas 2005: 78). Unfortunately, during this decade and the one following, indigenous languages were only promoted as a “means of transition, allowing indigenous students to get used to the Spanish language which would later be their language of communication” (Trillós Amaya 1999: 25, my translation). Nevertheless, in the 1990s, the recognition of indigenous languages as co-official and the creation of projects supporting bilingual and intercultural education significantly undercut this kind of assimilation. The decade of the 1990s signalled a transformation of indigenous education based on the principles of indigenous autonomy and self-determination (Aguilar Muñoz and Rodríguez 1998, Aguirre 1998).

The 1994 Ley General de Educación (General Law of Education), or Law 115, legislates the active participation of indigenous communities in the schools and programmes of education. It no longer expects indigenous teachers to facilitate assimilation; instead, the presence of indigenous teachers is supposed to respect and

promote cultural and linguistic difference (Cardona and Echeverri 1999: 223; Castillo and Rojas 2005: 57). The Programa Nacional de Etnodesarrollo (National Programme of Ethno-Development) has, for its part, gradually reduced the participation of religious orders in indigenous education and highlighted the importance of training bilingual indigenous teachers. The training offered by the Ministry of National Education must now address areas such as curriculum design, textbook production, tuition and assessment (Trillós Amaya 1999: 16-17; Castillo and Rojas 2005: 82; Cardona and Echeverri 1999: 223-224; Agreda 1999: 260). Additionally, Act 804, issued in 1995, states that indigenous people have the right to sue the state when their languages are excluded or discriminated against (Castillo and Rojas 2005: 82).

Despite these major changes in the policies surrounding indigenous languages and education, there is still great uncertainty regarding their implementation. Gabriel Muyuy Jacanamejoy, a former indigenous Senator, claims that the boldness of the legislation contrasts with the insufficient efforts by the government and its officials to apply it in ways that improve the daily life of indigenous peoples and other ethnic groups (Muyuy 1999: 5). Although this claim is valid, there is no doubt that the new policies have facilitated the transformation of indigenous education and the creation of bilingual and intercultural schools.

After considering the reformulation of the legal frameworks in regards to indigenous education and indigenous languages in the 1990s, it is important to analyse the effects of 2010 Ley de Lenguas Nativas (Law of Native Languages), or Law 1381. This law is more explicit than any prior law regarding the responsibilities of the state towards the recognition, promotion, protection, preservation, and reinforcement of indigenous, creole and Romani languages in Colombia (Congreso de la República de Colombia 2010: art. 1). According to this law, the state is responsible for guaranteeing basic linguistic rights. These rights include access to bilingual education, assistance by interpreters – in medical centres, hospitals, trials and governmental institutions – and the right to name and rename their children, territories and communities according to their languages and traditions (Congreso de la República de Colombia 2010: arts. 4-7, 9, 20). Just like the 1991 Constitution, this law states the right of indigenous peoples to communicate in their languages in

private and public spaces in the regions where these languages are spoken (Chaparro 2012: 644-645).

Law 1381 grants special rights to indigenous, creole and Afro-descendant peoples that protect their cultural difference. This protectionism goes hand in hand with the participation of external experts such as anthropologists and linguists, and makes the state responsible for financing research and programmes that reinforce and revitalise languages in precarious conditions, at risk of disappearance or already extinct (Ministerio de Cultura 2003, 2014; Congreso de la República de Colombia 2010: arts. 10-14, 21-22). The products of this research – transcriptions, audio-visual archives, descriptions, and analyses, as well as phonetic alphabets and grammars – are expected to facilitate the production of school textbooks and digital materials for teaching indigenous languages in local schools (Ibid.: arts. 16-19). Additionally, Law 1381 entrusts the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education with the stimulation of indigenous language use in schools and the training of indigenous teachers and linguists.

Overall, Law 1381 positions indigenous languages as the “immaterial cultural heritage” of a nation that defines itself as multi-ethnic and pluri-cultural (Ibid.: art. 2). It engages with the promotion of their use in indigenous territories and their incorporation in local schools; it fosters state investment in linguistic research and revitalisation programmes, and enshrines “the expression of ‘cultural and ethnic diversity’” throughout the country (Ibid.: art. 1, 2). Undoubtedly, the new Constitution, the new Law of Education and the Law of Native Languages have responded to the struggles and claims of indigenous peoples for the acknowledgment and promotion of their languages, as well as their right to make important decisions pertaining to their schools and teaching programmes (Trillós Amaya 1998a: 360; 1999: 13, 73, 2003: 124; Rojas Curieux 1999: 48; Giraldo 1997: 110). However, indigenous peoples struggle for defending their rights to continue to this date.

The following section discusses in more detail the struggles and claims of indigenous peoples and their organisations, particularly in regards to the redefinition of indigenous people as “subjects of rights” within legal frameworks. As the

discussion progresses, the multicultural discourse that has shaped the legislation of the last three decades is carefully analysed in light of its implications, as well as the possibilities and restrictions it creates for indigenous peoples today in Colombia.

Struggles, Claims and Achievements

After comparing the legislation of the last three decades concerning indigenous peoples and their languages, it is noticeable that new expressions such as self-determination, autonomy and self-governance have been incorporated. The Constitution of 1886 and Law 89 of 1890 had defined indigenous people as minors, legally guarded by the state. While this paternalistic view encouraged their integration and assimilation to a Catholic and Hispanic tradition, other cultural and linguistic expressions were legally curbed and violently suppressed (Jimeno Santoyo, Correa Hernán and Vásquez Luna 1998: 174). The Constitution of 1991, as well as the laws, decrees and acts released in its wake, no longer pursue an agenda of assimilation. Instead, they engage with certain rights, specifically addressed to indigenous peoples, that recognise their autonomy and self-determination.

Law 21 of 1991 – which ratifies the signing of Convention 169 issued in 1989 by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) – establishes the Colombian government's commitment to Convention 169, which guarantees the social, economic and cultural rights of indigenous peoples, as well as safeguarding their institutions and traditions (Law 21 of 1991: art. 2, cited in Jimeno Santoyo, Correa Hernán and Vásquez Luna 1998: 294). This law grants indigenous peoples special rights regarding the protection and exercise of their identity, and the occupation and use of their ancestral territories for economic and cultural activities (Law 21 of 1991: art. 14, cited in Jimeno Santoyo, Correa Hernán and Vásquez Luna 1998: 294). Furthermore, this law is designed to protect three particular rights: indigenous peoples' right to actively participate in programmes devoted to their own social, economic and cultural development; their right to design their own justice systems; and their right to accept or reject projects taking place in or near their territories (ILO 1989: art 9, 15).

One of the main commitments of the national government regarding indigenous peoples' autonomy can be found in the mechanism of prior consultation concerning the approval of licences and permits for exploiting natural resources in their territories (Law 21 of 1991: art. 6; Decree 1320 of 1998, cited in Jimeno Santoyo, Correa Hernán and Vásquez Luna 1998: 184, 320). Another important advance is the legal recognition of indigenous authorities and their procedures for guaranteeing justice within their communities. The Constitution of 1991 recognises the Special Indigenous Jurisdiction and the authority of traditional authorities and Indigenous Councils (also known as *cabildos*, in Spanish) (Congreso de la República de Colombia 1991: art. 246). This means that indigenous peoples have the autonomy to resolve, according to "their own norms and procedures," conflicts taking place within their territories (Jimeno Santoyo, Correa Hernán and Vásquez Luna 1998: 191). The only condition is that they must not contradict the national Constitution or the International Declaration of Human Rights (*Ibid.*).

In regards to the new legislation for indigenous education, Law 21 of 1991 and Law 115 of 1994 have set the framework for the development of bilingual education programmes and curricula by indigenous peoples. Within this framework, indigenous organisations have developed their own system of education (Sistema Educativo Propio, SEP) and their own programmes of bilingual and intercultural education (Programas de Educación Bilingüe intercultural, PEIB).³⁵ Unfortunately, however, many public schools continue to teach indigenous children in Spanish without acknowledging their languages and cosmologies. This is the case, for instance, in the Colombian departments of Amazonas, Vaupés, Guajira and Cesar, where a large number of indigenous languages are spoken (Trillós Amaya 2003: 119-20). Moreover, various linguists involved in language revitalisation argue that linguistic policy in

³⁵ In the last year in Colombia, most of the impact of the linguistic planning for indigenous languages can be seen in the Proyectos Educativos Comunitarios (Community Educational Projects), "in which the so-called ethnic groups [...] express their aspirations in regards to the content and orientation of the programmes of education for elementary and high schools in their territories" (Gonzales Castaño 2013: 103, my translation). As González Castaño goes on to explain, these community educational projects are the counter-proposal of the ethnic communities to the Proyecto Educativo Institucional (Institutional Educational Project), that Law 115 requests from all institutions of education in Colombia (*Ibid.*).

Colombia needs to go beyond the inclusion of indigenous languages in the educational system and to promote their use in all aspects of social life (Pineda Camacho, cited in Montes Rodríguez 1998: 316).

The legal transformations and radical ruptures of the 1990s were mainly possible by the consolidation of local, regional, national and transnational indigenous movements that challenged the open agenda of persecution and annihilation (Cleary 2000). Indigenous communities have joined regional organisations and councils, as well as national organisations such as Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia (National Indigenous Organisation of Colombia), ONIC. The initially defensive agenda of this organisation has been transformed by its young leaders, many of whom have obtained academic degrees and have become more adept at handling the language of difference, which has allowed them to find new ways of demanding affirmative action and special rights in light of the historical situation (Gros 2002: 328).

The “progressive legislation” in Colombia responds to the demands “expressed by organised indigenous peoples, but also to the adaptation and the re-reading of these demands within wider global policy frameworks” (Montes Rodríguez 1998a: 316, my translation). Indigenous organisations have struggled continuously to transform legislation and to make their differential inclusion a reality. Regrettably, “the notoriety of the indigenous movement as a local and national political force” is reflected in the violence that has been exerted against its members (Villa, Houghton 2005, cited in Ariza 2009: 242, my translation). This violence has been constant, from the moment of the consolidation of indigenous organisations in the 1970s to recent times. Between 1974 and 2004, approximately 1,869 indigenous leaders were murdered. In the same period, an estimated 6,726 human rights violations were committed against indigenous peoples in Colombia (Ibid., see also CECOIN 2007).

One of the first and strongest indigenous organisations in Colombia and Latin America is the Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca (Indigenous Council of Cauca Region), or CRIC, which was founded in 1971. During the 1970s and 1980s, this organisation made possible the recovery of thousands of hectares of communitarian lands that had been appropriated by private landowners (Lemaitre Ripoll 2009: 314).

It also created agricultural cooperatives and established the basis for indigenous bilingual education (Ibid.). The leaders of the CRIC have made public their concerns about the lack of indigenous teachers in the school system, and defended the essential right of indigenous children to be educated by well-prepared bilingual indigenous teachers, according to their traditions and their Proyecto Educativo Comunitario (Community Educational Project), or PEC (Castillo and Rojas 2005: 73). As a result of their activism, various CRIC leaders have been captured, tortured and murdered. Nonetheless, their struggle, along with the struggle of other indigenous organisations around the world, has made indigenous peoples and their claims to differential rights visible.

International organisations have offered their official support to indigenous peoples and their demands, especially since the 1980s. In 1982, the UN released the Declaration of Indigenous Peoples' Rights, and in 1989, the ILO drafted Convention 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. There is no doubt about the advances that have been made in the extension of collective and differential rights to indigenous peoples, both within national and international legal frameworks. To this day, however, indigenous peoples continue to deal with the impacts of the foreign religious missionary colonies that have settled in their territories, along with the appearance of drug cartels, legal and illegal armies, and multinational corporations – not to mention other peasant families who arrive in search of land for cultivation (Lemaitre Ripoll 2009: 277).

Along with these obvious challenges, indigenous peoples are often trapped by the same legislation that protects their rights. While the current legislation recognises the differential rights of indigenous peoples, it also defines indigeneity and the conditions for accessing those rights. In other words, indigenous peoples are expected to embody a particular image or idea of indigeneity in order to be recognised as legitimately indigenous peoples with differential rights. This is precisely what happens in hearings, trials and other legal proceedings when juridical anthropologists are asked to confirm whether an individual is or is not indigenous. In order to have access to differential rights, indigenous peoples need to prove that they are “different” according to a particular conception of their difference. Consequently,

in Colombia, indigenous communities and their members have been adopting languages, behaviours and attitudes that are more faithful to this image of traditional indigeneity than to their daily life.

Although it is true that the multicultural model recognises indigenous peoples' right to autonomy and self-governance, indigenous people continue to be constrained by an external legal framework that defines them and conditions their rights, thus guaranteeing the state's absolute authority.³⁶ In this sense, cultural difference may be seen as a double-edged mechanism, which neither extends to the vast "majority" in Colombia nor fosters the constitution of independent nations or states.

Problematics behind the Multicultural Model

The multicultural model – as it appears in the reformulation of the national Constitution and in the educational and linguistic policies that have been adopted since the 1990s – not only promotes and celebrates difference, but also defines it; and it does so in a simultaneously normative, protective, romantic and marketable manner. This section discusses the attendant complexities and problems of the multicultural model. It also analyses some particular cases that show the normative, protective, romantic and marketable aspects of multiculturalism and their intense yet hidden violence. This careful examination shows how the multicultural model silences the indigenous peoples its praises, undermines their demands (arguing they are already implemented), and creates particular conditions for the appropriation and exploitation of their practices and even their subjectivities.

On the bright side, the multicultural model marks an important shift away from the colonial agenda – which sought the submission and conversion of indigenous peoples in the name of Christian civilisation – and the agenda of assimilation that

³⁶ The recognition and constraint of indigenous peoples' rights to autonomy and self-governance is further exposed in Decree 2164 of 1995, through which the national government has endorsed and committed to respect the ILO's Convention 169 for Indigenous and Tribal Peoples.

followed it – which sought to transform indigenous peoples into peasants and cheap labour in the name of development and progress. However, on a darker note, the multicultural project still seeks integration and does not permit indigenous peoples' independence. In fact, when indigenous peoples are defined as “part of the nation” (Lemaitre Ripoll 2009: 344, my translation, see also Kymlicka 2001), they are not simply included, but placed in a differential position in which they are treated as a folkloric expression of cultural heritage that needs to be preserved.

The multicultural model supports the “conservation of an already existent” cultural difference and requires communities that identify as indigenous to “suspend the present time and transform it into a permanent future” (Ariza 2009: 310). This is particularly problematic considering that indigenous peoples and communities are already hemmed in by an essentialist conception of indigeneity, which they are expected to reproduce and perform in order to access collective rights to territory, self-governance and autonomy. Furthermore, this means that in order to exercise these rights, they have to constitute themselves as subjects of special rights by proving the “authenticity” of their indigeneity, learning a foreign legal language, and translating their cultural practices and demands into the jargon of “indigenous rights” (Muldoon 2008: 70-72, Short 2007: 859, cited in Ariza 2009: 53; Lemaitre Ripoll 2009: 299). This creates a situation in which indigeneity must be performed according to a juridical framework devised by the state to govern and limit the claims of minorities (Gros 2000). Convention 169, the 1991 Constitution, Law 21, and Decrees 2164 and 1320 are some of the most salient agents of this dynamic. The indigenous organisations that perform and master the legal language stand a better chance of getting the tolerant approval of the juridical anthropologists who scrutinise them. Ultimately, it is these external experts who hold the right to verify the authenticity of people's indigeneity and to distinguish between “authentic” and “apparent” indigenous people (Lemaitre Ripoll 2009 :19, 22, 53, 335).

Speaking a distinctive indigenous language is an important factor in being considered a distinctive indigenous group; however, the Constitutional Court does not reduce *indigeneity* to this criterion. More important than speaking a recognised indigenous language or having a distinctive appearance is being able to demonstrate

affiliation to a well-defined indigenous community. Such communities need to demonstrate the election of their own authorities, the collective use of the land, and a “common purpose” shared by all its members: i.e. identifying an aboriginal past, maintaining the traits and values of their own culture, and preserving forms of governance and social constructs that distinguish them as an indigenous community (Corte Constitucional 1994, cited in Ariza 2009: 304).

The indigeneity of some indigenous peoples is unquestioningly recognised by the state; however, there are many other peoples that have to prove it. This involves demonstrating that they are part or have been part of a recognised *resguardo*.³⁷ *Resguardos* were colonial institutions that facilitated the exploitation of indigenous populations as a free workforce by concentrating them in a predefined territory. During the colonial times, the *resguardo* was situated in an enclosed territory owned by the Spanish Crown and managed by an *encomendero*.³⁸ After Independence, many of these territories were incorporated into *haciendas* or farms privately owned by wealthy landowners. It is fair to say, with Ariza, that the *resguardo* operated as a “dispositif of control” and a “technology of space” which “defined indigenous people as savages” and aimed to transform them into cheap labour (2009: 199, 206, 209). The more assimilated indigenous peoples became, the less rights they had to their “ancestral lands”. Ironically, the only way they could resist the expropriation of their lands was by presenting themselves as subjects external to the nation – for instance, by embodying the imaginary of the “savage” (Ibid.: 213).

Before the 1991 Constitution, indigenous territories were not considered to be owned or ruled by indigenous peoples. Instead, they were referred to as missionary territories where religious missions would exercise programmes of religious conversion. Or they were defined as *reserves*, where indigenous peoples were

³⁷ While the constitution of 1991 validates the self-recognition and recognition by a constituted indigenous *resguardo*, Law 21 of 1991, Convention 169, and the Decree 2164 of 1995 all entrust the Ministry of the Interior with the certification of indigenous identity (Jimeno Santoyo, Correa Hernán and Vásquez Luna 1998: 41, 63).

³⁸ An *encomendero* was a Spanish coloniser entrusted with surveilling the extraction of gold, emeralds and other native products. The *encomendero* was also responsible for the conversion to Christianity of the enslaved native and African peoples who constituted the workforce sustaining this colonial extractive system.

considered to be simply part of the environment. Even though the *resguardo* has an evident colonial legacy, it functions today as a legal figure that protects the communitarian lands of indigenous peoples, serves them as proof of their indigeneity, and guarantees their rights to autonomy and self-governance.

After 1991, the *resguardo* became a decentralised political and administrative entity that comprises collective lands and has its own social and political figures and institutions. According to article 2 of Decree 2164 from 1995, each *resguardo* must have an indigenous council, whose members are chosen and recognised by the community as its legal representatives (Jimeno Santoyo, Correa Hernán and Vásquez Luna 1998: 42). It is only under these conditions that the state recognises the authority and autonomy of the *resguardos* and their indigenous peoples (Gros 2010: 241). Since the legislation was reformulated in 1991, more and more indigenous communities have followed the guidelines and restrictions of the state, adopting political models of “traditional organisation” in order to claim their right to autonomy and self-governance.³⁹

As part of this trend, indigenous peoples have created indigenous councils and democratically elected their members, often choosing those who are better versed in the legal jargon, while leaving aside traditional authorities and elders. The schism is such that conflicts of interest arise between traditional leaders and the members of the indigenous councils from time to time, particularly regarding the exercise of their right to autonomy and prior consultation. As a matter of fact, when multinational companies and government officials visit indigenous communities to

³⁹ Article 2 of Decree 2164 from 1995 defines indigenous communities as the ensemble of families who have indigenous ancestry, identify themselves as indigenous, share distinctive values and traditions, and have particular norms and rules, as well as institutions and figures of social control (Jimeno Santoyo, Correa Hernán and Vásquez Luna 1998: 61, 219). It is not mandatory for a community to claim its indigenous identity in order to have title over a particular land, nor do they need proof of the legal constitution or dissolution of their *resguardos* (Ibid.: 219). What is most relevant for determining whether an individual or a group of people belong to an indigenous community is the evocation of a common past, a common territory, the presence of an indigenous consciousness or identity in each of the members of the community, its expression in present practices and routines, as well as a collective interest in preserving existent traditions, despite devastating external circumstances such as those created by forced displacement (Ibid.: 304, 305, 307, 310).

conduct processes of prior consultation, they usually negotiate directly with the council and ignore the traditional authorities. When indigenous peoples have parallel institutions that can be translated to the institutions of the indigenous council, the new legal framework requires the consolidation of those institutions before rights of territory, autonomy, self-governance, special jurisdiction and bilingual education can be exercised.⁴⁰

Overall, it is fair to argue that the multicultural model is violent despite its mobilisation of an “inclusive” language of recognition and protection. Indigenous peoples’ autonomy is not only granted by external institutions and according to external criteria; it is also “controlled by the dominant culture” (Lemaitre Ripoll 2009: 294, my translation). In the multicultural model, the “state produces, reproduces, establishes and legitimises an ethnic border when it is apparently recognising indigenous [peoples] and their autonomy” (Gros 2000: 105, my translation). Generally speaking, the multicultural discourse and its legal tools do not simply protect or celebrate difference, but produce it according to a framework that promotes the state’s interests. It is in this context that indigenous peoples and ethnic groups are multiculturally re-indigenised and re-ethnicised (Restrepo 2004b, 2007b).

New Indigenities of the Multicultural Imagination

It is certainly not surprising that many indigenous groups have emerged after 1991. The multicultural shift that embraced difference, revalued the role of indigenous peoples and granted them special rights has fuelled processes of re-indigenisation in the same rural and urban areas where anthropologists had previously declared the

⁴⁰ The more *indigeneity* a community performs according to the legal frameworks, the more opportunities it has to demand and exercise autonomy and self-governance. Sentence T-349 of 1996, sanctioned by the Constitutional Court, is exemplary in this regard, as it makes a correlation between the right to autonomy and the structuring of the communities in ways that demonstrate their difference from “majoritarian society” (Lemaitre Ripoll 2009: 301). This sentence seems to presume indigeneity can be measured in ways that distinguish between peoples that preserve their customs and those who no longer do and who, for this reason, must “comply with the laws of the Republic in higher degree” (Ariza 2009: 290, my translation).

total disappearance of indigenous populations. Since the 1990s, peasant communities have been redefining themselves according to the discourse of ethnicity (Wade 2014). This discourse accentuates their difference by reviving and integrating previously banned traditions, breaking their subordinated relation to private landowners, and claiming their right to communal lands (Ariza 2009: 262-263).

Prior to the endorsement of the ILO's Convention 169 and the enactment of the 1991 Constitution, Law 21, and Decrees 2164 and 1320, indigenous peoples were defined as peasants in relation to their rural location and their dedication to the cultivation of lands.⁴¹ Some of these peoples, who were previously identified as peasants, have claimed their indigenous identity and defended their collective ownership of lands with archival proof dating from before or after Independence in the nineteenth century. Others have turned to their oral traditions and history to find connections to ancestral territories and their identities, while yet others have defied presumptions of the disappearance of certain indigenous groups and claimed to be their cultural heirs and direct descendants.⁴²

In these cases, as stated in Decree 0372 of 1996, anthropologists are called upon to verify the indigeneity of these peoples, who receive a formal certification from the Ministry of Interior if they pass this examination (Ariza 2009: 307). In this context, new communities have been able to rebuild their identity after years of being culturally oppressed and now express their indigeneity proudly, within a supportive legal context. The ethnic community that is ratified and regulated by state now has

⁴¹ A salient example of this situation is the recent "constitution of a *cabildo* by the members of a family from the borough of Suba in (the capital city of) Bogota, who assert they are descendants of the original Muisca inhabitants of the urban areas in which they live today" (Gros 1998: 181-185, cited in Ariza 2009: 265, my translation). In some cases, communities that live in previously considered peasant (assimilated) areas have defended their membership to already recognised indigenous peoples including Pijao, Zenu, Tama, Mwiska, Nasa and Yanakuna peoples (Jimeno Santoyo, Correa Hernán and Vásquez Luna 1998: 35). Other peoples have claimed they are part of peoples who had been declared extinct in previous decades. This is the case of Kankuamo, Andaquí, Totoy, Pakabuy, Pubenese and Mokaná groups (Ariza 2009: 262-263).

⁴² In these cases, indigeneity "is mobilised, instrumentalised, according to particular circumstances and objectives, developing within other latent identities, other possible identities" (Gros 1998, cited in Ariza 2009: 262, my translation).

“more possibilities of being, [and] from now on being ‘imagined’ with those interested” (Gros 2010: 243).

Given that the *resguardos* operated as mixed concentrations, many of them present the co-existence of “pan-communitarian”, multicultural ethnic groups in which traditions from different groups are mixed and the border within one and the other is diluted (Ibid.). In the same *resguardo*, it is possible that different families who speak different languages and identify as members of different communities live together. Often a majoritarian group will have more political presence causing the other group’s segregation. In any case, government officials, NGOs and multinationals tend to consider the indigenous councils as the valid representatives, following the legal framework in place at the present time. Who is indigenous and who speaks as an indigenous person or people is one of the most problematic issues in the multicultural model, obliging communities to dialogue with external figures under numerous presuppositions and a legal language that, despite its specificities, remains ambiguous and unsuited to the translation of communities’ dynamics and organisation.

Imaginations and Expectations of Indigeneity

While the multicultural model was expected to be much more inclusive, participative and fair to social and cultural diversity, its shortcomings undermine the equal participation and autonomy of the many indigenous peoples that live in the country. As mentioned before, one of the most problematic aspects of the multicultural model is its accommodation of indigenous peoples to ideals of indigeneity, which has shaped expectations regarding not only the organisation of their communities, but also the manifestation or rather construction of their subjectivity. As the “indigenous question” transcends the borders of Latin American countries and intersects with global concerns, more imaginations and expectations have emerged, such as those linked to the environmental preservation and climate change.

The end of the 1990s and the beginning of the new millennium were marked by these two concerns and indigenous peoples were redefined accordingly as guardians of natural reserves and biodiversity (Ariza 2009: 267, 269). In 1991, Colombia agreed to designate as indigenous territories those areas which were less inhabited and those in which the ecosystem was at high risk, considering “the conservative capacity” of their peoples (Gaceta Constitucional 1991, cited in Ariza 2009: 258). Indigenous peoples often foreground their conservative capacity in order to gain recognition from international organisations and NGOs and reduce the intervention and appropriation of their lands by extractive multinational companies that pollute the rivers and increase the deforestation of their lands.

Indigenous peoples all over the world have and continue to struggle in the defence of their territories, defending the “rights of nature” or “nonhuman rights” (Tavares 2014). Recently, the native peoples of Standing Rock, in North Dakota, in the United States, have stood against the construction of an oil pipeline that would pass nearby their reservation, menacing the ecological equilibrium and their health (Tesfaye 2016). In Colombia, Wayuu people have systematically protested against the carbon mines in Cerrejón that have led to an environmental catastrophe and reduced their access to drinking water in an already dry region, the desert of Guajira (Caracol Radio Barranquilla 2016). Similarly, the indigenous peoples from the Chocó, Cauca, Caquetá and Amazonas are at high risk of exposure to mercury and already many communities have been found to be intoxicated with this chemical, as many of the rivers in these areas have been populated due to the uncontrolled exploitation of gold mines (Cuevas Guarnizo 2015, CLAES Ambiental 2016, Valenzuela 2016).

All around the world indigenous peoples are aware that their life also depends on the defence of the environment and the ecological equilibrium of their territories. In 2010, there was an explosion in the Gulf of Mexico caused by a spill of hydrocarbons in the sea water (Tavares 2014: 553). Already in 1989, the population of the Gulf of Mexico has been victim of a similar ecological catastrophe due to the spread of toxics and gasses produced by an oil spill (Ibid.: 554). Similarly, in that same year, the population of Alaska had been victim of leaks and of crude (Ibid.). In Ecuador, environmental activists have fought for the acknowledgment of the rights of nature

and continue to this date to monitor and demand that these rights be respected through campaigns and lawsuits against national and multinational extractive companies such as Chevron/Texaco (Ibid.: 566). One of the main accomplishments of these activists in Ecuador was the inclusion of the rights of nature into the Constitution 2008 and the release of specific laws for their defence in 2010 (Ibid.: 558)

The correlation between indigenous peoples' rights and the rights of the earth is not new. As mentioned earlier, indigenous peoples were segregated for decades in reserves and referred to as natural resources and part of the environmental heritage of the nation (Ariza 2009: 295). Now that indigenous peoples have been redefined and redefined themselves as subjects of rights, they are expected to defend not only their traditions, but show by example their global ecological mission (Ulloa 2007: 392). Conceptions of indigenous peoples as "noble savages" are frequent nowadays; they even serve to judge indigenous peoples' use or abuse of natural resources and to argue for their responsibility in the extinction of fauna and flora from their territories (see Escobar 1999, Ulloa 2007). Similarly, indigenous peoples are expected to be advocates of peace and harmony and any rupture of these ideals might become a risk for the validity of their claims and demands. Another problematic myth about indigenous peoples is that they constitute a wide global community, diverse in regards to the nation state, yet undifferentiated from community to community (Gros 1991, 2002). It is thus often presumed that agreement and general consensus reign within indigenous communities.

These imaginaries and expectations do not only come from the outside. In fact, indigenous leaders and representatives often appeal to them when they refer to their communities. This tendency is informed by their need to validate their demands (see Ariza 2009). Yet these imaginaries and expectations can be violent. When they clash with real practices, for instance, they can paint a less paradisiac picture that can in turn be used to invalidate indigenous claims. However, we must not forget that these claims were compelled by an invented legal language that was partially produced by these same imaginaries and expectations. Despite this dangerous route, some of these ideals of community have also served to unite peoples, defend their value, and

promote genuine ways of living and ethics (see Chikangana 1995; Kidd 2000; Overing and Passes 2000).

The Market of Difference and the Circulation of Indigenous Productions

In Colombia, the multicultural model normalises and celebrates difference in a way that does not necessarily guarantee claimants' access to differential rights. It praises difference as national heritage. It also normalises difference according to an idealist and restrictive imaginary that is practically impossible to emulate in daily life. In this way, multiculturalism restrains and even overpowers the peoples whose difference it is meant to protect and celebrate. Moreover, multiculturalism relocates indigenous identities as weakened subjectivities that need to be protected by the same state that limits their autonomy and authorises the exploitation and expropriation of their territories. These territories, which are repositories of gold, emeralds, oil, seeds, water and wildlife, have become subject to privatisation and commercialisation by pharmaceutical corporations and extractive industries.

The multicultural celebration of difference is usually restricted to a handful of dates in the calendar, such as the "Day of Native Peoples" (12 October) or the "Day of Native Languages" (21 February) (Congreso de la República de Colombia 2010: art. 25). This celebration is also controlled and reduced through designated "cultural events", in which indigenous peoples and ethnic groups are "showcased" for tourists and romantic consumers of their marketable "difference". This marketable difference takes the form of exotic "products" such as handicrafts, traditional remedies, music records, films and books, as well as distorted versions of their spiritualities and ritual practices. In this regard, it is particularly worth considering Povinelli's analysis of the commodification of the indigenous identity in Australia, which also takes place in Colombia (Povinelli 2000: 501-502). Over the last decades, there has been a wide expansion of ecotourism in indigenous territories and communities, much of which includes participation in the communal drinking of *yagé* and the chewing of coca leaves. Many indigenous leaders and communities perceive the commercialisation of their traditions as a major insult to their culture. As Rocha Vivas argues "diversity is a

business [...], tourism focuses on nature and the indigenous” (Rocha Vivas 2015: min. 30, my translation).

In 2009, the Ministry of Culture organised the first Fiesta de las Lenguas (Celebration of Languages). This celebration called indigenous and Afro-descendant poets and writers to a public stage to read their writings aloud, as well as sing and dance their traditional music (Ministerio de Cultura 2009). Also in 2009, after a long series of conversations, filmmakers and supporters of indigenous visual projects who had been working with the Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia (National Indigenous Organisation of Colombia), Cine Minga, and other regional and local organisations launched the Independent Festival for Indigenous Films, *Daupará* (Mora 2015).⁴³ In a similar vein, in 2010 the Ministry of Culture and the Banco de la República published the collection on indigenous literature, “Biblioteca Básica de los Pueblos Indígenas de Colombia,” simultaneously with the “Biblioteca de Literatura Afrocolombiana”.

These new platforms have facilitated indigenous peoples’ direct communication with Hispanic Colombian society, as well as placed them in charge of their “own representations”, allowing them to “rediscover” themselves (Rocha Vivas 2015: min. 15, my translation). There are more and more literary and film works being made by indigenous communities, and their audiences are growing beyond the communities in which these works originate. Nonetheless, it would be naïve to think that there is not also a superficial and convenient spectacle of “diversity” taking place. Indigenous peoples have been invited to participate in the most recent editions of the Feria del Libro, an international book fair founded in Bogota in 1987. Yet their participation remains secondary to the central events. Rocha Vivas recalls the fair’s 2015 edition, in which the host singled out a few indigenous guests and nervously passed the microphone to them so they could simply “speak in their language” and “show the linguistic diversity” of the country (Vivas Rocha 2015: min. 40, my translation). This particular anecdote exemplifies the problematic integration of difference in the multicultural model.

⁴³ *Daupará* is a word from the Embera language that means “seeing beyond” (Mora 2015).

The exploitation of “cultural” and “natural” diversity is also increasing in the “ethnic tourism” market, which showcases indigenous peoples and their territories according to the beauty and appeal of their landscapes and handicrafts. The emergence of new consumers and markets of difference has also stimulated the offer of what one might call “products of difference” – records, books, films, handicrafts, art pieces and installations that feature and are sometimes made by ethnic groups, but sometimes also made by others in their name. This dynamic has made indigenous peoples visible, though not necessarily in their terms. More recently, indigenous peoples have been able to circulate their products more directly; not only traditional remedies and handicrafts, but also music records, books and films. At least at first glance, the increasing interest in indigenous peoples and the emergence of new audiences willing to listen to their music and read books or watch films about their “difference” seems to be a positive turn, if only to a degree.

Since the consolidation of indigenous organisations in the 1970s, indigenous peoples have attempted to make themselves more visible, both nationally and internationally. Most indigenous organisations now have their own websites, where they regularly post about their activities, assemblies, and their negotiations with the government. Indigenous artists, writers and filmmakers circulate their work; some of them are well known outside and inside the country, while others prefer to be away from the spotlight. This has given rise to debates within the communities on whether to allow others to have access to their traditions and knowledge practices through sound recordings, videos and books, regardless of whether they are produced by members of the community or not.

As members of indigenous communities go to the cities and gain access to the Internet and audio-visual technologies, the production and open circulation of audio-visual materials has increased along with the interest of indigenous leaders and youngsters, many of whom wish to learn these practices and become more involved. This is true for the leaders of Nazareth, in the Colombian Amazon, who have been working for more than a decade with the filmmaker Gustavo de la Hoz. The indigenous leaders attended his seminars at the Universidad Nacional in Leticia, and formed a strong alliance with him that led to the creation of the NGO Horizontes

Colombianos. As active members of the NGO's board, and with the support of Gustavo de la Hoz and Dorothea Wolf-Nuernberg, these leaders have made two films, which they have screened both in Colombia and overseas.

Indigenous independent filmmakers such as Luz Adriana Quinoa, a graduate from the film school at Universidad Nacional in Bogota, have been able to circulate their work in independent film festivals such as *Daupará*. Founded in the 1980s by an alliance of independent film directors and indigenous associations, *Daupará* has had an important impact, supporting the circulation of more than 200 independent films, mainly produced by indigenous, peasant and Afro-descendent communities (Mora 2015). According to Pablo Mora, one of the founding members of *Daupará*, it is possible to trace indigenous productions back to the 1980s (Ibid.). Unfortunately, the circulation of such films is practically inexistent outside *Daupará*. Very few indigenous films have had commercial distribution, such as in the movie theatres of Cine Colombia. The independent Arhuaco film *La Boa (The Snake)*, which narrates the ancestral understandings of water, was exhibited and distributed by Cine Colombia with the approval of the indigenous community (Ibid.). This is an exceptional case, Mora explains, because most of the indigenous films do not circulate outside specialised festivals and they are hardly ever seen by a Colombian audience (Ibid.).

Big productions such as *Apaporis* (named after the river), directed by Antonio Dorado Zúñiga, *La eterna noche de las 12 lunas (The Eternal Night of 12 Moons)*, directed by Priscila Padilla, and *El Abrazo de la Serpiente (The Embrace of the Serpent)*, directed by Ciro Guerra, received a lot of attention in the mainstream press and became blockbusters in Colombia. These three films were written, directed, produced and circulated by outsiders to the indigenous peoples they feature. While the three films received considerable amount of press, there is no doubt that Guerra's film was ultimately the most exposed nationally and internationally. This film received an Oscar nomination in February 2016 (in the category of foreign language films) and was the winner of several awards including the Art Cinema Award at Cannes, a Macondo Award and the Alfred Sloan Prize from the Sundance Film Festival.

The indigenous peoples who participate in these three films are reduced to playing a few roles as “natural” actors. For the most part, they have little say in regards to the narratives and the overall project, and once the project is finished their exposure also ends. One of the main actors of Guerra’s film, Antonio Bolivar, is one of the last descendants of the practically extinct Okáina people from the Colombian Amazon. He portrays the elder and wise healer Karamakate and was present in various press conferences during the promotion of the film in Colombia and overseas. After having his picture taken by the media and appearing on the front pages of newspapers in Colombia and around the world, 71-year-old Bolivar is back in his humble house – almost in ruins – in Leticia. He is still alone and “embraced by poverty”.⁴⁴

The buzz generated by the national and international success of the film, produced by Caracol and directed by the already well-known and now internationally famous director Ciro Guerra, was well received by the Ministry of Culture, and the Presidency of the Colombian Republic proudly promoted the film.⁴⁵ In contrast, other independent films, made entirely by indigenous peoples or with the collaboration of a supportive director, have not received the same treatment. Equally troublesome is how Colombian audiences have responded more positively to these mega productions, often describing them proudly as part of the “national heritage” (Colombia.co 2016, Pulso 2016). According to Mora, these films made by non-indigenous people have success and generate a “strong connection with non-indigenous audiences” mainly because they respond to their feelings of “exoticism, curiosity and amazement” (Mora 2015, min. 15, my translation).⁴⁶

These films have also produced a lot of reactions among indigenous peoples who disapprove of the “exhibition” of their private rituals and sacred territories. In *La*

⁴⁴ This has been the headline used by various newspapers who have reported on Bolivar’s return to oblivion after being thrust into the public eye (Mutillo Mojica: 2016, Nieto Morantes 2016).

⁴⁵ Caracol is one of the biggest media conglomerates in Colombia. It is owned by what many presume to be the wealthiest family in the country, which also – along with Caracol’s competitor, RCN –has monopoly control of radio and television in Colombia.

⁴⁶ As in the case of Australia, analysed by Povinelli, where the intention of the nation to embrace the “ancient aboriginal” results in demanding that the indigenous subjects “perform a complex set of sign functions in exchange for the good feelings of the nation and the reparative legislation of the state” (Povinelli 2001: 36).

eterna noche de las 12 lunas (The Eternal Night of 12 Moons), for example, Padilla's camera exposes the Wayuu girl who, according to the tradition, is to remain concealed in the ritual of transition into womanhood (Ibid.). Similarly, Ciro's presentation of the traditional "baile del muñeco" (puppet dance) and the "rage of the indigenous warrior" amounted, in Mora's view, to a "simplification and caricaturing" of indigenous people (Ibid.). In any case, the main problem is that making films about indigenous peoples is not as meaningful as working with them and supporting them in their own creative processes. This is especially worth considering, since indigenous communities have been producing their own films and visual materials for more than two decades, despite the unawareness of the mainstream press and the followers of the blockbusters featuring indigenous peoples.

It is certainly regretful but not entirely surprising that the existence of indigenous films, books and music records continues to be ignored in a country that proclaims itself as multicultural and pluri-lingual and even profits from the veneer of cultural diversity and difference. Meanwhile, indigenous language and knowledge practices are being cast aside in the educational system. As Vivas Hurtado unapologetically claims: "the ignorance of indigenous languages has a racist foundation of long duration that is seconded by an economic model, and consequently produces a cognitive-moral model" (Vivas Hurtado 2015: 83). It is also undeniable that the celebration of indigenous cultures is for the most part selective, even in cases when the scenario responds to a need to "rescue a way of thinking [...] which is present and continues to exist among populations of mixed background" (Kush 2000b: 259, my translation).

The celebration of diversity is mostly deaf to "the voices and political and social proposals of the historically marginalised sectors" (Uzendoski 2015: 6), which is why "recognition politics" tend so often to "subtly reproduce non-mutual and unfree relations rather than free and mutual ones", as Coulthard has identified in his analysis of the Canadian context, but which is also true for the Colombian context (Coulthard 2014: 17). Overall, multicultural and recognition politics are deeply problematic (Gutmann 1994), and most likely founded in racism because they permit the

commodification and exploitation of “minority” groups, not by chance called minorities in an undermining language. The presumed “majoritarian” society not only portrays itself as a “majoritarian” but also as “universal” and “tolerant” culture that accepts other “minorities”. As Castro-Gómez argues, this amounts to a politically correct brand of tolerance which is in fact “intolerant and repressive” because the Other is required “to continue to be tied to its particular identity and not to move from the place it was given [...], to happily accept to live in a society that gives it *rights* to be ‘what it is’” (Castro-Gómez 2015: 165, my translation). Generally speaking, recognition is fragmentary because it is given – as if it was some kind of gift or donation – by one who has no need to be recognised in return. As Coulthard openly denounces:

In relations of domination that exist between nation-states and the sub-state national groups that they “incorporate” into their territorial and jurisdictional boundaries, there is no mutual dependency in terms of a need or desire for recognition. In these contexts, the “master” – that is, the colonial state and state society – does not require recognition from the previously self-determining communities upon which its territorial, economic, and social infrastructure is constituted. What it needs is land, labour, and resources (Coulthard 2014: 40).

This kind of relation to indigenous languages and traditions prevails within the multicultural model in Colombia, a country that Vivas Hurtado richly describes as multi-excluding and pluri-racist (Vivas Hurtado 2013b: 89, 90). More than 104 different peoples and their 65 languages are simultaneously celebrated and made invisible in most public spheres. Yet Colombia, like many other countries, is “illiterate” regarding the knowledge practices of indigenous peoples (Rocha Vivas 2012:63). Vivas Hurtado bluntly denounces the fallacy of the multicultural nation fantasised with “good intentions” in the 1991 Constitution (Vivas Hurtado 2011).⁴⁷ A pluri-cultural nation, he explains, is nothing but an oxymoron because being pluri-cultural requires acknowledging various independent nations: sixty-five indigenous nations, two Afro-descendent nations, one Romani and another nation of Hispanic

⁴⁷ The 1991 Constitution defined Colombia as a multicultural and pluri-lingual country. The Constitution was translated to a few indigenous languages and ratified certain places for indigenous representatives in the Congress. However, the repression of their peoples and the expropriation of their lands continues to this date.

tradition, each with a language and a territory, as well as its own government, educational and economic systems (Ibid.).

In Colombia indigenous knowledge practices and traditions are pushed into “folkloric displays”. The multicultural and pluri-linguistic discourse has served to create new platforms for the marketing and consumption of folkloric difference, and one of the main beneficiaries has been the tourism sector. Simultaneously, as discussed in Chapter 2, indigenous university students have to adapt to a presupposed national and even “universal” model of learning and producing knowledge that is openly and even proudly ignorant of the knowledge practices produced by other traditions (Alcoff 2007). This contradictory exploitation, celebration and exclusion of difference is at the core of multiculturalism – “the celebration of exclusion and racism,” as Vivas Hurtado bluntly claims (2015: 22).

Limitations and Challenges for the Multicultural Model and its Linguistic Policies

The multicultural model embraces difference in a restrictive, normalising and marketable fashion. It is driven by the exploitation of difference as a profitable good that attracts tourism and international investment. The advances made towards the recognition of indigenous rights under this model are certainly important, and without a doubt the product of indigenous peoples struggles and persistence. This, however, does not make the paternalistic and condescending acceptance of a different “minority” by a supposedly tolerant and omnipresent “majority” any less violent. Despite the acknowledgement of indigenous languages as co-official by the ruling Constitution (Congreso de la República de Colombia 1991: art. 10), they still remain in a marginal position. With the exception of a few local elementary schools in indigenous *resguardos*, Spanish remains the official language of instruction in most schools. What is more, the recognition of the co-existence of diverse cultural and linguistic expressions in the country has left no room for the co-existence of multiple states or multiple nations.

The official stamp of diversity notwithstanding, language and education policies remain deeply attached to ideals of homogeneity and unification. This occurs even at the level of indigenous communities, where certain variants of a language may start to gain acceptance over others, with programmes of standardisation, literacy and schooling promoted by the new laws serving to relegate the latter to an ever more silent position (Patthey-Chavez 1994). Even more worrying is the fact that, most of the time, indigenous peoples who are directly affected by the linguistic policies are not the ones who design them; instead, they have to adjust to unfamiliar bureaucratic tools such as grills, surveys, and statistics that suit the needs of “state rationality” and the knowledge practices of academic “experts” (Restrepo 2010: 118).

The landscape of language planning and linguistic policies towards indigenous languages seems stark, since it is circumscribed by forms of interventionism and patronisation that basically reproduce colonial power relations, now incorporated also by the indigenous communities and their leaders. One should not ignore the fact that the bilingualism of indigenous communities takes place under conditions of linguistic inequality. Nor should one ignore the fact that the policies aimed at intercultural and bilingual education are part of a historical conflict between ethnic societies and their languages, on the one hand, and the official culture and language of the ruling class and the state on the other (Truscott de Mejía 2007: 34-35). Previously, indigenous languages were only promoted as transitory means for learning Spanish. Today, there is major interest in encouraging indigenous language use, but Spanish and indigenous languages remain in a relation of inequality. This is why it is highly problematic that indigenous languages still do not have any real place in the higher levels of instruction – for instance in secondary schools, professional colleges and universities (Ibid.; Benavides 2008: 245).

Indigenous people are referred to as a “minority” even though they constitute an important part of and play a central role in the labour force, as do their territories in the economy of the country (Castillo and Rojas 2005: 140). Recognition has not reduced their dispossession, nor the exploitation of their labour. The “majoritarian” sector arrogates to itself the ability to prescribe to the “minority” what is best suited

for it, based on the “majoritarian” sector’s supposedly universal knowledge, laws and policies. In doing so, it denies the so-called “minority” the right to redefine its own position and status, since it has already been “given” (ibid.). This is also the case for the programmes promoting the revitalisation of indigenous languages and the protection of indigenous material and immaterial heritage, in which the knowledge of external experts is privileged over the will of the communities involved.

The idea that indigenous languages are at constant risk of disappearing has been around for a while, along with the myth of the “disappearing savage” – as close to the core of anthropology and linguistic anthropology’s origins (Burton 1999: 199, Diamon 1974, cited in García Botero 2010: 131) as the fascination with finding the last “primitive society”, fitting the imagery of the “untouched”, “authentic”, “aboriginal” (Hulme 1986: 83). Both ideas have motivated researchers interested in indigenous peoples and indigenous languages to develop various methods to register and archive their presumed “endangered” objects of study, and to believe that their disciplines are not only relevant in academia but necessary for the indigenous peoples they want to “protect” (Ladefoged 1992).

One of the mechanisms to counteract the disappearance of indigenous languages has been the production of written and audio-visual registers, which are later catalogued and archived so other anthropologists and linguists can consult them. In 1977, when the register of indigenous languages started to gain popularity among researchers in Colombia, the anthropologist Manuel Alvar denounced the inaccessibility of these archives for the indigenous communities involved and anyone else who was not a member of the academy (Alvar 1977: 235). More recently, in an attempt to render these archives more popular and accessible to the general public, interactive virtual platforms have been created. In April 2015, the Instituto Caro y Cuervo in Colombia announced the launch of an app that can be downloaded from Google Play to the mobile phone of anyone who fancies listening to some excerpts of indigenous and creole languages, “locating” the speakers on the map of Colombia (El Tiempo 2015).

There are relevant critiques to the discourse of endangered languages and the essentialisation of indigenous identities. The idea that indigenous people are supposed to have certain characteristics, including speaking an indigenous language, motivates the linguist and anthropologist Gonzales Castaño to pose herself a set of questions, such as: “Can I consider myself an indigenous person if I do not speak an indigenous language?”, “Why do we want to revitalise our language and what for?” and even “Why do we need a language?” (Gonzales Castaño 2012: 197, my translation). These questions show how problematic the correlation between one language and one people can be. They also lead us to consider that indigenous peoples may not necessarily speak one indigenous language. Linguists have somehow given themselves the task of protecting indigenous languages. This task is often carried out in a paternalistic way, under the assumption that indigenous peoples need to be helped and that one of the justifications for the existence of disciplines such as anthropology and linguistics is to protect indigenous interests.

Besides the presumption that linguists and anthropologists could prevent the threat of disappearance of indigenous peoples and their languages, many linguists and anthropologists promote the idea that indigenous languages need to be standardised and normalised in order to counteract the tendency of indigenous languages to mix with national dominant languages such as Spanish and Portuguese, or to lose speakers while Spanish and Portuguese gain prestige. As many sociolinguists seem to agree, overall, “it is not the number of speakers of a language, but their positioning in society, that determines their patterns of language use” (Hornberger 1998: 452). In other words, they believe that “language choice is motivated by power relationships and by status” (Aikjenvald 2003: 1). Therefore, the production of grammars, alphabets and teaching materials on indigenous languages often aims to counteract the negative perception of these languages among the teachers and the indigenous speakers.

The normalisation of indigenous languages is not new. The process can be traced back to the early sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the colonisation of the territories known today as Central and South America. Standardisation and normalisation through alphabets and grammars usually responds to a desire for

unification that undervalues “language mixing, code switching, and creolization,” and leads to prescriptive responses (Cheshire and Stein 1997; Jourdan 1991, Ludwig 1989, Romaine 1994, cited in Woolard 1998: 17). Both grammars and alphabets set norms for correct forms of speaking and writing, and it is assumed “that all others are simply wrong” (Schieffelin and Doucet 1998: 306).

As the Californian linguist and anthropologist Katherine Woolard and some of her colleagues have observed, minority language activists often “find themselves imposing standards, elevating literate forms and uses, and negatively sanctioning variability in order to demonstrate the reality, validity, and integrity of their languages” (1998: 17). Despite how useful grammars and alphabets can be for “elevating the status” of a language and promoting its use among its speakers, language standardisation is undoubtedly problematic as it always privileges one dialect over others (Schieffelin and Doucet 1998: 306; Woolard 1998: 21). New hierarchies are created and again some speakers and their dialectal variations become socially less desirable and undermined. The next chapter discusses these violent normalisations and standardisations in more detail, as well as their implications and intricate relation to epistemic violence and coloniality.

Final Considerations

To conclude this first chapter, it is important to highlight that the multicultural model that shapes the current language policies in Colombia advocates for a romantic preservation of indigenous languages within a celebratory and romantic vision of difference. Within this model, indigenous languages, and the attendant constructions of cultural difference, are conceived as national cultural heritage that can be exposed and exhibited to national and international audiences and tourists. Despite the achievements of the multicultural model and the struggles that made it possible in the first place, this model is highly problematic since it appears to ignore the ways indigenous language practices build and rebuild indigenous communities, identities and ways of living.

As this chapter has demonstrated, multiculturalism celebrates indigeneity as the expression of difference while simultaneously defining this difference in its own terms, demanding indigenous peoples perform their “minoritarian difference” for a presumed majority. Indigenous language practices certainly surpass the models of multiculturalism and preservationism dominating today’s legal frameworks and policies in regards to indigenous peoples, indigenous language and knowledge practices. This is why this research engages with an alternative understanding of indigenous languages as (po)ethical language practices, and elaborates on their poetical, ethical and political dimensions (in Circle II and Circle III).

Chapter 2. Ongoing Violence:

Alphabetical and Grammatical Normalisations, Epistemic Violence and Coloniality

Linguists in general, and missionaries in particular, partly described, and partly created print-literate forms of colonial languages (Errington 2008: 10).

The Spanish colonisation of Central and South America, and the submission of their peoples was not only physical, territorial and military. Along with this more obvious oppression, there was another one that was more refined and yet equally violent. This other side of colonisation involved the undermining and progressive extermination of Amerindian cosmologies, spiritualities, ways of living and relating within their communities, as well as their lands. This was an epistemic and colonial violence that attacked knowledge and language practices, breaking filiations, affects, ethics and meanings that held Amerindian peoples together. The weapons used by this colonial epistemic violence were extremely complex and almost imperceptible to the inattentive gaze. It is even likely that the carriers of these weapons were not completely aware of their operation, as may also be the case for some of those who carry them today.

The languages of Central and South America were not simply compared and contrasted to a foreign model of language. They were defined and colonised by the coloniser's conceptions of language, literacy and grammaticality. Indeed, it is impossible to name them as indigenous languages and not allude to colonial constructions of otherness. To a certain extent, even using that name is a way of reproducing colonial constructions that defined the colonised "Other" in relation to the coloniser, who was located in a non-place of universality and neutrality. The coloniser became the paradigm of what was supposed to be the norm. This double colonial production of colonising and colonised subjects operated in the definition of both indigenous peoples and their languages.

This double colonisation and definition of indigenous language comprises various processes. First, they were invalidated as "incomplete", "ungrammatical" and "illiterate" languages. Then, they were "readjusted", converted and normalised

through the production of grammars and alphabets that replicated the Latin grammar and alphabet (Mignolo 1992). Hence, it is possible to say that America was not only militarily colonised but colonially Latinised (Mignolo 2005b). Furthermore, even today, these colonial legacies continue to be intimately entangled in Latin American nations and their relation to indigenous languages. Missionaries and linguists have long been in charge of the study and translation of indigenous languages into alphabetical and grammatical forms. Whether they intended or not to colonise indigenous languages, they have certainly played a significant role in their definition and reshaping according to foreign standards that are (violently) defended as universal, despite what Chakrabarty has described as their “provincial localities” (1998).

This second chapter shows how alphabets and grammars have operated as colonial normalising technologies. In addition, this chapter delves into the ways in which they produced a colonial understanding of indigenous languages as “illiterate” and “insufficient” languages, which “required” the external intervention of missionaries and European language experts in order to be completed. Additionally, the chapter analyses the ongoing colonial and epistemic violence traversing conceptualisations and understandings of indigenous languages and their “revitalisation” in Colombia. It also argues that neither language theories nor policies escape power-knowledge relations. After tracing the colonial legacies of alphabets, grammars and standardisation programmes, this second chapter questions and challenges the alphabetical and grammatical normalisations and standardisations that take place in linguistic research and language revitalisation programmes.

As the chapter progresses, it questions and challenges reductive models of monolingualism, alphabetisation and grammaticalisation, and the arbitrary opposition they sustain between orality and writing. It also elaborates on the ongoing colonial and epistemic violence and the asymmetries in play between linguistic academic expert knowledge and indigenous knowledge practices in the understanding and revitalisation of indigenous languages. Moreover, the chapter surveys interesting debates and discussions regarding the production and

standardisation of alphabets and grammars from the point of view of indigenous communities as well as linguists.

During the Spanish colonisation of Central and South America, indigenous languages were validated as languages only on the condition that they adopted the form of Latin grammar and letters. It is in this context that the first alphabets and grammars of indigenous languages were produced. It is thus worth considering the role that alphabets and grammars play today within programmes aimed at the revitalisation of indigenous languages. It is also worth questioning the implications of privileging alphabetic writing in schools and indigenous formal education.

This chapter highlights the attempts of some indigenous communities to create alternative writing systems that challenge alphabeticality. Moreover, it explores the conflicts, tensions and ruptures that have taken place in the normalisation of indigenous languages and have led to new hybrid forms. Finally, this chapter makes a case for the need to rethink indigenous language practices and their revitalisation beyond linguistics. This means considering the ways in which indigenous language practices inscribe and create shared meanings, memories, affects, filiations, ethics, and ways of being in their communities, which ultimately hold them together and keep them alive. In this sense, this second chapter, along with Chapter 1, lays the ground for this research's proposal of an alternative understanding of indigenous languages as (po)ethical language practices (developed in Chapters 3 and 4).

Colonisation and Normalisation of Indigenous Languages Through Alphabets and Grammars

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Spanish colonisers occupied the lands of the continent of America, settled and founded cities and renamed them. As they continued their journey in the continent, they started to refer to it as the New World. In this way, they defined and produced an empty land, where the local people were confused with the landscape and could be equally exploited. As Wolfe explains, one of the main purposes of settler colonialism was and continues to be the expropriation

of territories and the exploitation of their resources; this often involves death of the local or native population which can take place through its dehumanisation, elimination or forced assimilation (Wolfe 2006: 338, 397).

The name “New World” is the exact opposite to the Amerindian name of *Abya yala*, from the (indigenous) Kuna language. *Abya yala* is the term used by various indigenous peoples to refer to the Americas – as the ensemble of the regions of North, Central and South America that constitute the continent. *Abya yala* refers to a land that already was – before the Conquest – a “land in its full maturity” or “land of vital blood.”⁴⁸ As the colonisers and missionaries encountered the native peoples, they wrote about them in their chronicles using the rhetoric of medieval narratives; they described the “unknown lands” as marvellous and horrifying, and their inhabitants as monsters similar to the fantastic creatures they encountered in medieval narrations (Hulme 1986, Greenblatt 1991, Bolaños 1994, Padgen 1993, Borja Gómez 2002, Gómez Wey 2008, Mann 2005). In the chronicles they confessed to being overwhelmed by the large number of indigenous languages spoken in the colonies. Indigenous languages were both prohibited and studied during the colonial occupation of America. In order to reduce the chaotic multiplicity, only a few languages were chosen as *linguae francae*. These chosen languages were then “broken up” into the letters of the Latin alphabet and its grammatical categories (Zimmermann 1997: 11). As Errington observes, they “did not just devise orthographies, but adapted practices of literacy [...]. [They] chose to make one way of speaking stand for many” (2008: 9-10). Overall, alphabets and grammars attempted to render the overwhelmingly unknown into something familiar and comprehensible, but only in the colonisers’ terms. Consequently, the recognition of indigenous languages as *languages* implied their colonisation and invention, or in other words, their colonial production.

Coloniser-missionaries, who defined themselves as “language experts”, “heirs” and “producers” of “universal knowledge”, redefined and colonised indigenous

⁴⁸ The word *Abya yala* is currently used by different indigenous peoples to refer to America; it is also used by intellectuals, activists and militants, such as Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui and Catherine Walsh, who are involved with indigenous movements.

languages in ways that disregarded their particular practices. In fact, colonial alphabets ignored the performative textualities of the peoples of America, undermined their “cultural and intellectual production” and condemned them as “illiterates” (Mignolo 1992). Furthermore, colonial grammars were expected to reduce “the structure of the exotic” indigenous languages and readjust them to the Latin model (Patiño Rosselli 2000: 117, Alvar 1993: 95). According to the Spanish chronicler Olmos, indigenous languages were “dignified” and became “less barbarian” through their adaptation to the Latin grammar (Olmos [1547], cited in Hernández Sacristán 1997: 48, 57).

Generally speaking, the study of indigenous languages served the colonial purpose of “transposing” the foreign alphabets and grammatical rules of strangers to the indigenous languages. From this perspective, indigenous peoples and their languages were defined and colonised according to a presumable “ontological lack” of literacy, or alphabetic writing. Most of the codices and glyphs were burnt and broken into pieces and the few codices that were preserved were redefined as “books” in an attempt to normalise their alien otherness. The term “book” (*libro*) was chosen mainly to bring these productions “closer” to the writing practices of the colonisers (Mignolo 1992).⁴⁹

By translating the Nahuatl *amoxtli* and the Mayan-Quiché *vu* as “book”, the coloniser-missionaries neglected other indigenous written practices such as quipus, maps, calendars, pottery, stone-graving, wall-painting and body painting, as well as textile weaving (Ibid.). Therefore, making indigenous *amoxtli* and *vuh* into “books” is not simply an act of translation in the sense of finding an equivalent (which is rather unattainable), but of translation in the sense of dislocation and displacement. *Amoxtli* and *vu* were displaced, and even “effaced” according to Mignolo, by the book, which was believed to be the *normal* carrier of the written forms constituted by the letters of the alphabet (Ibid.: 199). In contrast to the Amerindian texts, the Bible (the colonisers’ Sacred Book) was written in alphabetic characters, printed in paper (Ibid.:

⁴⁹ Mignolo argues that the Greek term *biblos* was closer to the Aztec *amoxtli* because it referred to the handwritten papyrus, stored in a roll, and unrolled to be read aloud to an audience (1992: 204).

203). If the Bible was believed to have been dictated by God, the colonisers believed the indigenous books had been dictated by its enemy, “the devil” (Ibid.: 204). As a result, the evil indigenous “books” were condemned to burn in flames (Ibid.).

In 1521, the chronicler Bernal Díaz del Castillo wrote about the natives of today’s Guatemala and Mexico. He referred to the “evil” inks and charcoal used to “scrawl” “malicious” words and stories on whitened walls and fabrics (Díaz del Castillo 1521, cited in Rama 1998: 50). Similarly, in what is present-day Peru, Alonso Carrió de la Vandra, official of the Spanish Crown, described the Amerindian inscriptions on walls as unsophisticated “graffiti” in contrast to the “cultivated alphabetic writing” of the Spanish (Carrió de la Vandra, cited in Rama 1998: 51). In this context emerges the imaginary of the savage and illiterate cannibal (Rama 1998: 191, 205-206), whose “ontological lack” and “deviation” was supposed to justify the colonial enterprise: their persecution, enslavement and later on their conversion to the language and faith of the colonisers.

In the colonial encounter, indigenous peoples were produced as colonial subjects, outcasts unable to command their own lives and who needed the assistance of the “civilised” foreigners to be assimilated as Christians and Spanish speakers. Only when the inhabitants of America were placed in the position of colonial subjects was it possible for the colonisers to define themselves as such, and to justify the colonial enterprise, the submission of the indigenous peoples to the Spanish Crown, the invasion of indigenous territories, the plundering of their precious metals and stones, their physical exploitation and enslavement, and the dismantling of their social organisations and religious practices. “The negation of a part of humanity was the sacrifice and the condition for the affirmation of this other part of humanity that considers itself as universal” (Sousa Santos 2010: 18-19, my translation).

Since indigenous languages were colonised as they were defined, it is necessary to open a discussion around which definitions and conceptions of language contribute to languages’ coloniality and which disrupt the colonial bindings. Nowadays, indigenous languages continue to be subjected to grammaticalisation and alphabetisation, but this time in the name of preserving registers and even protecting

and promoting their “survival” with the assistance and intervention of expert linguists. Given that grammars and alphabets have had such a central role in the normalisation and colonisation of indigenous languages, it is important to rethink grammars, alphabets and writing from a perspective that is not mesmerised by principles of uniformity and universality – a perspective that does not reduce writing to alphabetisation and grammar to correctness. In order to detour from the logic of universality and interventionism that is at the core of coloniality, it is necessary to locate or “provincialise” (Chakrabarty 1998) the conceptions of language, writing and orality that have been dominant and conceived as universal. This is the preliminary step to considering alternative perspectives capable of challenging the colonisation and normalisation of indigenous languages.

Monolingualism, Alphabetic Writing, and the Illusion of Ownership and Objectivity

The colonised territories and their inhabitants were folded into a colonial system not only by the exercise of violence, but also by the production of restrictive writing practices and symbolic codes directly regulated by the metropolis (Rama 1998: 32). In the Imperial territories, in the metropolis and the colonies, grammarians and scribes occupied the privileged position of prescribers of norms and control. Grammarians such as Antonio Nebrija and López Velazco in Spain, and Mateo Alemán in New Spain (today Mexico), defended the unification of the grammar, syntax, and alphabetic writing of Spanish (Ibid.: 55). The missionaries in the colonies used their treatises of grammar and orthography to unify the language and fight against its diversification produced by the contact with the local indigenous languages.

The colonies were divided into two. On one side were the “illiterates”; on the other the “literate”. The Uruguayan writer Ángel Rama proposed the term “lettered city” to describe the distinctive class of literates that occupied exclusive positions in the colonial and republican city centres in Latin America (Rama 1998). Just as there were two sides, one inside the lettered city and another one outside, there were also two languages. One was “the language of the common people,” while the other was

the language of the “lettered city” (Ibid.: 44). The first language was mainly oral and unfixed, constantly evolving and changing beyond control. The second was manifested in controlled grammatical and alphabetic writing, fixed by the Academies of Spanish Language and the literates who belonged to the “lettered city” (Ibid.: 44-45). The literate elite in the colonies demonstrated a strong interest in consolidating Spanish as the only valid language, and the King was often requested to prohibit the use of other languages different from Spanish in the colonies in America (Ibid.: 46).

Language unity essentially became a central concern for the Spanish Crown. The missionaries in the colonies took on the mission of converting and evangelising indigenous peoples, imposing not only the Catholic creed, but also a particular form of Spanish language and its alphabetic writing. The written word also served to unify and reorganise the territories of America as the colonies of the Empire. Scribes of the Spanish Crown wrote deeds claiming the Crown’s ownership of “new lands”. As mentioned in Chapter 1, even to this date those deeds serve to confirm the territories in which indigenous peoples were slaved and exploited under the vigilance of officials of the Crown, known as *encomenderos*.

The written word was taken as the only carrier of truth and legitimacy. By contrast, the spoken word was considered somehow unreliable and precarious (Ibid.: 22). The Language Academies and a small elite of literates defended passionately the “purity” of their “literate language”, rejecting any changes coming from popular “illiterate” misuses (Ibid.: 45). A smattering of literate elites controlled a rare and “admirable” basin of knowledge, while surrounded by a vast majority of illiterates (Ibid.: 37). The writing practices were available to few, and they worked as a mark of distinction, creating an artificial distance between those who had the power and the knowledge of writing and those who did not (Ibid.: 43). This social division was reinforced by an elitist system of education. Only a few could study in universities in America and Europe, while the masses only had access to precarious elementary schools (Ibid.).

At the same time, indigenous writing practices, whether they were recognised as such or not, were challenging these models. In general, encountering what does not make sense, we do not simply encounter the senseless, but the limits of our

modalities of order, and hence it is possible to experience multiplicities, fluxes, and lines of flight escaping ordering and unification. This was what also happened in the particular context of the “encounter” between the Spaniards and the native peoples of America and their regimes of truth and systems of knowledge. As Foucault acknowledges, the “exotic charm of another system of thought” shows us “the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking *that*” (Foucault, cited in De Certeau 1986: 177). In this sense, the rare exception that does not fit our current thinking is the stimulus for thinking otherwise (Ibid.). Likewise, Serge Gruzinski (1998) argues that indigenous peoples in many ways challenge our systems of thought and modalities of order, just by their presence. Their “conceptual constructions challenge the alleged universality of our vision of things, because they yield forms of temporality and historicity irreducible to [the European one]” (Gruzinski 2002: 27).

Foucault recalls Borges’s Chinese encyclopaedia and its alternative classification of animals that may appear odd to the readers (Foucault 2002: VI-VII). He argues that this classification is not simply different but challenges our system of thought and its presumed universality (Ibid.: IX). De Certeau argues that this friction between two different modalities of order allows us to uncover, beneath an apparent “continuity of history, a discontinuity more radical still than the evident heteronomy that lies beneath the fictional homogeneity of our own time” (De Certeau 1986: 176). The following section discusses in detail the clash between the Amerindians and the Spanish colonisers’ epistemes and ways of structuring social life. More specifically, it analyses the role of writing and literacy in the establishing of hierarchies and privileges the framing of the colonisers and colonised subjects.

Writing Privileges, Hierarchies and Normalisations of Colonial Subjects before and after Independence

During the Colonial era as well as after Independence, scribes gained recognition as the only ones authorised to write the deeds, contracts and wills that legitimised ownership in America (Rama 1998: 44). The hierarchical order of the colonial societies was maintained in the new nations of Latin America, ruled by the *criollos* –

sons and daughters of Spaniards born in America. The small elite of *criollos* defended their privileged position, emphasising their higher level of “cultivation” and “civilisation” in contrast to the “uneducated” indigenous natives, afro-descendants, and *mestizos* of mixed origin. The *criollos* not only defended their Hispanic heritage by all means necessary, they also created a code of manners to distinguish themselves from the mass of peoples inhabiting the former Spanish colonies.

As the hierarchical order was perpetuated after Independence, the scribes and literates who had served the Crown during the Colonial era were integrated into the bureaucracy of the new nations. “Men of letters”, as they were often called, maintained their privileged position from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, and even a good part of the twentieth. They easily adjusted and substituted their duties to the King with the new tasks assigned by the national governments. They wrote laws, bills, edicts, regulations, and constitutions (Ibid.: 53). The professions related to the use of letters were widely respected and considered to be relevant for upward social mobility; elementary and high school teachers, university professors, scribes, notaries, and lawyers became the new citizens of the lettered city (Ibid.: 63).

The lettered city operated as a symbolic space of seminars, schools, universities, notaries, and audiences, gathering those who mastered literary and academic writing and were equally versed in good, “civilised” manners (Ibid.: 28, 35). The new independent nations have inherited these objectives of literacy, civilisation and refinement. Mandatory schooling sought to impose a single way of speaking and a standardised set of bodily gestures. This interest in education was intrinsically connected to the dissemination of literacy and knowledge of the Spanish language, effectively bolstering the project of unification and cohesion in the new nations (Balibar and Laporte 1974). Ultimately, the building of the nation required the production of its citizens according to the norms set by colonial hierarchies and aspirations.

The new nations of Latin America were produced and founded according to an “imagined community” of civilised, literate, refined citizens (Anderson 2006). They were built around the colonial writing cities and their privileged group of literary

citizens who praised their Hispanic heritage and maintained the hierarchies of the former colonies along with the walls separating the inside from the outside of the lettered city. In keeping with the colonial logic, the rural areas outside of this city were considered to be degraded, repugnant, disgusting, distasteful, vicious and ultimately savage. During the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century, there were important attempts led by this elite to revert what was considered to be the degeneration of the races caused by racial mixing, or *mestizaje*. Non-white people were pressured to whiten themselves, and mixed-raced people were blamed for reversing the that process. The crusades against the “degeneration” of the races were especially predominant in the 1920s and 1930s among government officials and medicine academies.⁵⁰

There were many procedures of “whitening” that were not limited to eugenics but also to the imitation of conducts, behaviours and ways of being “White”. Aiming to transform the “savage” into the “civilised”, the new ruling elite – the *criollos* – adopted cleansing policies designed to eliminate the “unwanted”, and migratory policies aiming to attract Europeans who would supposedly bring their “civilised” taste and “developing nature” with them (Castro-Gómez 2005). They also normalised the behaviour of the population, their ways of speaking, religious beliefs and their conditions of citizenship according to handbooks of good manners, grammars, the Catholic Bible, and constitutions (González-Stephan 1996). Overall, behaving correctly, professing the Catholic creed and speaking and writing correctly in Spanish were the basic conditions for being considered a civilised citizen (Ibid.). The Constitution of Venezuela, enacted in 1811, the first Constitution in Latin America,

⁵⁰ The discourse of racial degeneration also articulated with a discourse of the degenerative climatic conditions of the American continent (Castro-Gómez 2005: 22). This discourse on the “dreadful” conditions of the “New World” was predominant during the colonial period, particularly in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, and was intertwined with the discourse on the racial degeneration which in the nineteenth century was “justified” by the theories of evolutionism and genetics developed by Darwin and Mendel. In this context, extensive classifications were circulated that explained the multiple mixtures among white, indigenous and black people – taken as pure races – and among other (mixed) races including *zambos* (mixtures of black and indigenous people) and *mulato* (mixtures of white and black people) (Castro-Gómez 2005).

defined as citizens those who had “given up their unlimited freedom and the desires of the savages” (Ibid.: 27, my translation).

Only men who were at least 21 years old, who could read and write, who earned or had inherited sufficient money, who owned lands, and who were legally married with the approval of the Catholic Church, could participate in the politics of the nation as citizens (Ibid.: 33-34). Constitutions, grammars and manuals of good behaviour pursued two complementary yet opposite objectives: to incorporate and exclude (Ibid.: 24). Citizens were defined and constituted as the opposites of the “savages”, and becoming a citizen implied moving away from anything related to the common people and entering the prestigious circles of the “lettered city”. The values of the “savages” were described as “basic” and “natural” in opposition to the values of the citizens who had to cultivate themselves, investing a great deal of effort in the pursuit of the Hispanic heritage and the values of the “lettered city”.⁵¹

Defenders of the Hispanic legacy in America, such as Andrés Bello, engaged in a passionate crusade to regulate the Spanish language spoken in the emergent nations, hounding the “irregular multitude of dialects” emerging in America and the former colonies. In 1847, Bello published his grammar of Spanish for the Latin American nations of America.⁵² This grammar pursued a civilising mission as it attempted to install a linguistic norm for all the emerging Latin American nations (Ibid.: 28). From within the framework of the Foundation of the Colombian Academy of Language, Miguel Antonio Caro – a prestigious philologist, writer and politician – argued in 1871 that the “unity of language was God’s blessing and source of strength” in opposition to the multiplicity of dialects, which was a “curse that led to ruin” and destruction for the nations (Caro 1871: 132, cited in Zuleta Álvarez 1997: 94, my translation). Both Caro and Bello fought against the multiplicity of languages and advocated for “a fixed unified language”, capable of serving as a “transparent” code for law. These two

⁵¹ “It is a well-known fact that, from the end of the sixteenth century on, the *criollos* created what according to the criteria of the modern Eurocentric episteme is known as ‘Latin American culture’, in reference to colonial and republican literature and arts” (Morales 2008: 490).

⁵² Bello’s grammar was entitled *Gramática de la lengua castellana destinada al uso de los Americanos*, or Grammar of the Castilian Language addressed to the Americans (my translation).

philologists believed the new emerging nations of Latin America needed a unified language and a Constitution.

Grammars attempted to normalise languages and produced subjects who were not only under surveillance, but also exercised surveillance over others. Grammars operated as disciplinary interventions not only in schools, but also in the public language of the city and the emerging nation (González-Stephan 1996: 28-29). Grammars regulated the languages of the street and the home, unifying them under a unique project of citizenship (Zuleta Álvarez 1997: 32). Grammars, constitutions, and manuals of good behaviour defined what was normal and desirable, and condemned all deviations as “uncivilised” and “illegal” behaviours and languages (González-Stephan 1996: 36-38). They created the conditions of enunciation that the citizen – the new legal subject – required. And part of the mission of this domesticated literate-citizen subject was to civilise the multiple and chaotic forces of barbarism.

The Ongoing Privileges of the “Lettered City” over Indigenous Language and Knowledge Practices

For a long time, written societies have defined themselves as civilised and have described oral societies as inferior, “primitive” or “savage” (Ong 2002). “Literate” and “illiterate” have been used as categories to classify societies and peoples, and the idea of written history has privileged literate writers to tell the history of those peoples. There is a violent complicity between alphabetic writing and the history preserved and diffused by academies and institutions of Western knowledge (Mignolo 1992: 21). As Goody points out, the invention of writing as a recording instrument implied not simply a transformation of the societies using writing and recording their knowledge with it, but also the emergence of a new sector in the population, “a class of ‘lettrés’, specialists in the difficult art and technique of writing” (Goody 1987b: 74-75).

The distance produced by writing was fundamental for the emergence of the idea of objectivity and scientific validity, along with the figure of the “literate specialist”, the “scientist”, or “author” who has the capacity of producing “objective” knowledge. Literates have occupied a privileged and distinguished position in relation to others (illiterates) who have been thought to be “incapable” of having access to writing and science. The isolation of the written word gave birth to the idea of the neutrality of the text, as well as the idea of the text as a finished unit (Ong 2002). The written text was linked to a unique creator, an author; while oral communities narrated in a common voice.⁵³ “The culture of the printed text originated the romantic concepts of ‘originality’ and ‘creative spirit’ which set apart the individual work from other works” (Ibid.: 132). This belief gave rise to a new subjectivity based on authorship and ownership of knowledge including specialists, or “savants” (Goody 1987b: 75). Additionally, the emergence of writing affected the stratification of the channels of communication and placed itself at the top. It gave a higher status in the social hierarchy to those who wrote (Ibid.: 148).

The written text is detached from its creator; the author is absent and the author’s intention is somehow hidden. Walter Benjamin refers to this transition or passage into legibility as the movement from the present time of the author to the time of the text without the author (Benjamin 1999, cited in Cadava 2001: 38). In this movement, the truth of the text must survive the author’s death. Legibility, according to Benjamin, implies a “collision in between past and present” (Ibid.: 58). This collision of legibility “constitutes a specific critical point of the movement [...]: every Now is the Now of a specific ‘recognisability’ [...] is the death of the intentio, which accordingly coincides with the birth of [...] the time of truth” (Ibid.: 38). Generally speaking, a written text is decontextualized and the act of writing carries “a force of breaking with [...] its context, that is, the set of presences which organize the moment of its inscription” (Derrida 1982: 317). The absent author is no longer present to

⁵³ Oral narratives in oral societies play different roles. Besides being vehicles of collective memory, they gather into themselves a great variety of popular forms of knowledge and enable them to last via repetition (Ong 2002). Words are different in a written text and in oral speech; written words are abstracted from their context of production, and they are given some sort of independent life which is emptied from the intonation, expressions, gestures, and emotions of the speaker (Ibid.).

express their intentions or validate the text. Not only is the text separated from the author, but it is expected to be legible in their absence. The only presence of the author that remains in the text is their name or signature.

For the written to be the written, it must continue to “act” and to be legible even if what is called the author of the writing no longer answers for what he has written, for what he seems to have signed, whether he is provisionally absent, or if he is dead, or if in general he does not support, with his absolutely current and present intention or attention, the plenitude of his meaning, of that very thing which seems to be written “in his name” (Ibid.: 316).

The institutionalisation of the written, and the dissemination of a non-face-to-face kind of communication, also led to the institutionalisation of a new kind of learning. Here, children are no longer educated by their communities through daily and spontaneous interactions with their relatives, but are extracted from the community and placed in schools directed by unfamiliar teachers and “special authorities”. In the Americas (North, Central and South America), indigenous children were imprisoned and removed from their families, who were forbidden to speak their indigenous languages.⁵⁴ Oral exchanges in indigenous languages were undermined as the illiterate practices of “savages” (Mignolo 1992: 205-206). “The whole process of removing the children from the family, placing them under special authorities, can be roughly described as one of ‘decontextualisation’, formalisation; for schools inevitably [placed] an emphasis on the ‘unnatural’, ‘non-oral’” (Goody 1987b: 184).

In the 1924, the Nasa leader, Quintín Lame, dictated his first book, *Los pensamientos del indio que se educó en las selvas colombianas* (*The Thoughts of the Indian who Learnt in the Colombian Jungles*) (Espinosa 2007b), a manuscript where the indigenous leader distinguishes the “White school” from the “indigenous school”. Recalling his father’s words, Quintín says “the school of the indigenous peoples is the jungle” (Quintín Lame [1935], cited in Ferreira 2007: 145). For him, the jungle, the forest, the land, is the caring mother who provides food and knowledge to the

⁵⁴ Any language different from Spanish was forbidden in the schools or in any other public areas outside the indigenous communities, including urban areas such villages, towns and cities, where even the street names had to be in Spanish as proclaimed by Law 17 in 1927 (Pineda 1997: 113).

indigenous peoples. In response to the violent descriptions of indigenous peoples as “ignorant” and even “stupid”, Quintín says that “the indigenous people know how to think,” and argues that “it is not true that only the people who have studied for 15 or 20 years, [...] are the only ones who have vocation and have learnt to think” (Ibid., cited in Ferreira 2007: 145-146, my translation).

The lands that Quintín Lame and his followers defended – and continue to defend – as their ancestral territory, were taken away under the authorship of written letters, of ownership deeds. The indigenous petitions and manifestations against this colonisation were condemned by the written law of the Colombian nation. Until the 1990s, the same law excluded indigenous peoples from citizenship, and only recognised literate wealthy catholic men who owned exploitable land as citizens (González-Stephan 1996).⁵⁵ An eight-thousand-page legal file of written words condemned Lame to prison. In response to these accusations, he condensed his words and thoughts in the manuscripts he dictated to his secretary. These manuscripts were supposed to collect the testimony of the silenced voices erased from the legal documents of the national government. These legal documents permitted the removal of indigenous peoples from their ancestral territories on the basis that this territory was “legally” owned by privileged wealthy families, some of whom continue to exploit those lands and profit from them today.

Written legal documents are only valid under a specific regime of truth and validation. As colonisers settled in America, they wrote letters to the Castilian Kingdom declaring the ownership of new lands. Indigenous peoples have not been acknowledged by those laws and mistrust them, though they understand that they need to know how to deal with them to protect their “original law”. This “original law” is the ancestral law of their territories, a law that shapes the thought of and is shared by indigenous peoples who have transmitted it from older generations to new ones, as Jair Zapata Torres explains (Zapata Torres 2007).⁵⁶ Zapata Torres argues that

⁵⁵ As explained in Chapter 1, it was only in 1991 that indigenous peoples were (legally) recognised as part of the nation and the discussion about their territorial rights was opened.

⁵⁶ Zapata Torres is an Arhuaco architect who, like others in his community, went to the universities in Bogota to learn the “Western legal language” that most of the time attempts to invalidate the original law of his people (Zapata Torres: 1).

“since Europe [entered] in the American territory, the indigenous towns have defended their ancestral territories through the original law, in which the territory is part of a sacred, unnegotiable geography, where she/he stays the order of the world by means of an operative series of rituals” (Ibid.). The Western written word is often equated with truth, while the “illiterate” testimony is discredited, along with whatever knowledge is not written.



In the illustration, above, by Katalina Castro, Simanca Pushaina is holding a book with the title of her story, “Manifiesta no saber firmar” (Claiming not to Know How to Sign). Unlike many of her Wayuu relatives and community members in Guajira, Simanca Pushaina has mastered the use of letters and the legal discourse. This has allowed her to defend her people as she moves between the cosmology of her people and the regimes of truth accepted by the Westernised authorities and government of Colombia.

In her short story “Manifiesta no saber firmar” (Claiming not to Know How to Sign), the Wayuu writer and lawyer Estercilia Simanca Pushaina denounces the abusive treatment of “illiterate” members of her community by officials of the government (Simanca Pushaina 2012). She narrates how thousands of Wayuu people, who did not know how to read in Spanish, were registered under false derogatory names by the Registration Office of Guajira. Literacy was used against them to cause them

humiliation; their indigenous names were changed into “Tarzan”, “pocket”, “hot stuff” by the Registry officers (Ibid.). They took advantage of the situation, presuming that they could simply change the names and that the Wayuu people would not notice until someone else holding their ID cards would start laughing at them.

All my family stood in a long queue along with people from other *rancherías* [municipalities] to get the plastic card they call *cédula* [...]. That day I learnt my uncle *Tanko Pushaina* was named *Tarzán Cotes* [...], *Castorila* was named *Cosita Rica* [Hot Stuff] [...], my cousin *Matto* was named *Bolsillo* [pocket], and for a moment I was afraid the same happened to me (Ibid.: 1, my translation).

The encounter of indigenous people in Colombia with the Spanish language has often been violent and dismissive, mainly because Colombia, like many other countries, is “illiterate” regarding the traditions and knowledge practices of the indigenous peoples (Rocha Vivas 2012: 63). The Tikuna nurse Yenica Mojica Pereira, who recently graduated from a university in Bogota, recalls her elementary and high school teachers explicitly ordered her to “stop thinking in Tikuna” and to “think only in Spanish” (Mojica Pereira 2015: min. 30). Her language, along with her way of thinking, would continue to be excluded from the school and later the university where she would learn about Western medicine.

Another violent encounter was experienced by the Wayuu poet Vito Apūshana at the airport, when his *bastón de mando*, or cane of leadership, was taken away and destroyed by the immigration police. This cane was supposed to help him speak among the Mapuche people in a Congress of Indigenous Languages and Literatures at Universidad de la Frontera, in Chile (Rocha Vivas 2012: 63).⁵⁷ However, it was impossible for the immigration officials to understand (beyond the laws of customs for organic goods) the importance of the cane for telling the words and memories of the Wayuu people in this encounter with the Mapuche people.

⁵⁷ Apūshana was invited to share his poetry and talk with other fellow indigenous writers and poets of Latin America in the “Congreso de Lenguas y Literaturas Indoamericanas y Jornadas de Lengua y Literatura Mapuche”, hosted by Universidad de la Frontera (Rocha Vivas 2012: 63).



In the illustration, above, by Katalina Castro, Apūshana is holding the *bastón de mando* that was made in his community and imprinted with the ancestral signs and traditions of his people. At the bottom, he is surrounded by vivid colors used in the Wayuu tunics and *mochilas* (shoulder bags). He is also wearing a hat that is made and woven by his community from a single spiral. All these signs go with him as he goes visiting other communities. However, most of them remained unnoticed by the great majority of illiterates on his and other indigenous peoples' cosmologies.

Customs laws do not respect and rather mistrust the spoken word which is precious to the Wayuu people. Instead, they respond to what Rocha Vivas calls a “bureaucratic letter-centrism of colonial inheritance” (Ibid.). Apūshana had to face the “nightmare distilling ink on a white form” (Ibid.: 21, my translation). Endless hours of interrogation concluded with a long list of infractions, resulting in very expensive

penalties (Ibid.: 24). The Wayuu poet could not prevent the officials from declaring that the cane had to be destroyed (Ibid.).⁵⁸

The Misak poet and human rights activist Edgard Velasco Tumiña has experienced the general dismissal of indigenous knowledge practices in the Westernised universities of Colombia: “When I started to study philosophy [in the university], well, it was really hard because [...] it was such a “closed space” [not really opened to] dialoguing with other knowledge [practices], [...] there were four other indigenous classmates but the curriculum was completely Western” (Velasco Tumiña 2015, min. 20, my translation).⁵⁹ This experience seems to prevail in most universities in Colombia, where indigenous peoples and afro-descendants are treated as “minority” groups and forced to adapt to a presupposed national and even “universal” model of learning and producing knowledge. This model is openly and even proudly ignorant of the knowledge practices coming from other traditions, which are only praised in the name of multiculturalism (as argued in Chapter 1).

⁵⁸ The encounter between indigenous peoples and these unnegotiable laws began with the Spaniards’ crusade for the conversion and literacy of indigenous peoples, and continues today with the (legal) undermining of their ritual practices. Then and now, indigenous peoples face the (legal) expropriation of their lands (Vivas Hurtado 2015) and their most valued symbols, such as the *bastón de mando*. The cane has often been portrayed as a weapon by the media covering their demonstrations and protests against multinationals, mining and oil companies, which block indigenous peoples’ access to vital resources such as water. The Wayuu people in the Guajira desert, in Colombia, have been among the most affected by this willingness of the national and regional governments to let the population slowly die of thirst under temperatures fluctuating between 27 and 30 Celsius degrees (Rioacha 2016). Every December, Bogota, the capital city of Colombia, hosts *Expoartesanías*, one of the biggest handicraft fairs in the country. This fair exhibits the rich variety of handicrafts made by artisans in Colombia. Most buyers are particularly interested in the handicrafts of indigenous communities, and the Wayuu shoulder bags are on high demand. Non-Wayuu people in Colombia and international tourists can buy these bags and take them through national and international airports without knowing their meanings because nobody will stop them at custom controls and security checks to demand any sort of explanation.

⁵⁹ Grosfoguel refers to the West as a particular positionality in power relations that promotes a distinctive epistemology around the world, one that is both racist and sexist, as it only values the knowledge produced by “men from five countries” to “explain what happens in the whole world” (Grosfoguel 2016a). These five countries, Grosfoguel says, are the United States, England, France, Germany and, to a lesser extent, Italy, and despite the provinciality of the knowledge they produce, this knowledge is disguised as universal while other knowledge practices are accused of being too “particularistic” or local (Ibid.).

Indigenous Languages, Standardisation and Revitalisation within a Contested Battlefield of Knowledge Validation and Colonial Epistemic Violence

Indigenous healers have been subjected to all sorts of violence since the Conquest, when they were condemned as satanic sorcerers and evil witches. Even their healing practices were “transformed [...] into the opposite, as causing harm and death” (Osorio 2005: 31). Fray Pedro Simón accused the Pijao people of practicing witchcraft and displaying obscene erotic behaviour before condemning them to burn in fire (ibid.: 33). Urbina Rangel argues that one of the most catastrophic threats to the survival of the indigenous languages and oral traditions of the Uitoto, Muinane, Bora, Andoque and Miraña peoples in the Colombian Amazon has been the systematic killing of the leaders who guard and practice the knowledge of the communities (Urbina Rangel 2010b: 16). Nevertheless, epistemic violence is not limited to the assassination of leaders and figures of knowledge; it also includes the consolidation of regimes of truth and validation (Grosfoguel 2013b).

In the framework of colonial relations, colonisers as well as those colonised tend to believe that learning the language of the coloniser as a new language is harmless and even beneficial (Calvet 1981: 147). Similarly, it is presumed that the languages of the colonised are incapable of transmitting the modern scientific concepts of the colonisers (ibid.). Thus, the languages of the colonised are deemed incapable of producing knowledge and unsuited to the practices of education and research validated by the academic structures of the coloniser. As Calvet concludes, both dogmas – the first assuming the positive outcome of learning the foreign language of the coloniser, and the second refusing colonised languages the status of active producers of knowledge – lead to glottophagy, or the extinction of the language of the colonised (ibid.).

Just as some forms of knowledge are allowed to rise to the top of the scientific hierarchy, only certain languages are considered appropriate for the production of knowledge. Other languages may be studied, but they are assumed to be less suitable for the production of knowledge in the academy. This is how a classification system of truth, knowledge and language has emerged, privileging some languages over

others. Even today, languages such as English, German and French are privileged over others. Mignolo (1999) argues that there are more than 100 languages related to 95 percent of the world population, but only 12 languages are spoken by 75 percent of the world population, and six of those languages are alphabetic colonial Imperial languages. English, German and French dominate academic production; Spanish also, though to a lesser degree (Mignolo 1999: 62; Garcés 2007: 226).

Knowledge is produced and validated according to regimes of truth that recognise only the knowledge of certain subjects as true and rational (Foucault 1994b: 131). By means of power-knowledge practices, different subjects are produced and located in specific positions of enunciation. While some subjects are defined as capable of accessing and producing knowledge, others are defined as lacking the necessary conditions to produce knowledge. Western knowledge privileges unattached experts in the name of objectivity. In this regard, Mignolo argues that Western knowledge is not any less “geo- and body-politically” located, though it has managed to conceal its locality by producing “the figure of the detached observer” – “a neutral seeker of truth and objectivity who at the same time controls the disciplinary rules and puts himself or herself in a privileged position to evaluate and dictate” (2009: 162).⁶⁰

In Colombia, indigenous languages and knowledge practices have been placed in a subaltern position; they have been widely excluded from the validated practices of knowledge production in the academic sphere, where Spanish language dominates. Researchers who do not belong to the indigenous communities and do not practice their knowledge practices thus become the ones entrusted by academic institutions with the study and “explanation” of these languages, rituals and traditions. However, in this exercise of “translation” of indigenous practices into Western academic knowledge, there is a mutilation of the complex relations connecting indigenous languages, rituals and knowledge practices. This is particularly the case for medicinal

⁶⁰ Even within the Western network of academia, there is a clear geopolitical distribution of knowledge production. According to the Gulbenkian Commission, at least 95 percent of academic knowledge has concentrated in five countries: “France, Great Britain, Germany, Italy and the United States,” and this has produced a geopolitics of knowledge in which certain areas become areas of study but not areas of knowledge production in the so-called Third World (Mignolo 2005a: 23-24).

plants and healing practices, which are first separated from the context of the peoples who developed them, then appropriated and patented by private pharmaceutical companies.

This extractive model of knowledge production also creates isolated pockets of elite collaborators within indigenous communities, since their participation in the production of “academic”, “scientific”, Western knowledge is privileged. Those who collaborate with linguists “gain visibility inside and outside the community as ‘language experts’, while the existence of [...] other speakers and members of the community is overshadowed” (Gonzales Castaño 2013: 77, my translation; see also Rapport 2004). In addition, linguists, collaborators and indigenous language teachers make most decisions regarding the study and the standardisation of indigenous languages, excluding the majority of the population (Ibid.: 148).

It is important to consider that knowledge is located and that, therefore, Western academic linguistic knowledge cannot cover all the aspects and nuances of indigenous languages. The collaborators and indigenous teachers who work with linguists and anthropologist in the study, standardisation and revitalisation of indigenous languages are generally literate in Spanish and educated in (Western) schools and universities. As Western knowledge is placed at the top of the hierarchy, the daily life experiences and knowledge practices of the indigenous peoples are placed in a subsidiary position. Unfortunately, when the study of indigenous languages is disconnected from indigenous knowledge practices and cosmologies, these languages and practices are undermined and annihilated by epistemic violence and epistemicide (Grosfoguel 2013b). The asymmetrical relation between academic and popular knowledge leads to the validation of the “expert” knowledge of linguists and the banalisation of indigenous knowledge practices and cosmologies.

It is worth stressing that indigenous peoples do not necessarily agree with the work of linguists and their definitions of their languages, even if they often welcome linguists into their communities to produce registers of their languages, design teaching materials and conduct workshops for motivating younger generations to speak those languages. Similarly, the normalisation of alphabets and grammars

developed by linguists is not often successful because many indigenous people do not respect the “linguistic” norm (Marín Silva 2015). While there are disagreements between indigenous people and linguists studying their languages, there are also interesting disagreements among linguists involved in programmes for the revitalisation of indigenous languages in Colombia, particularly regarding the purpose and value of the unification and normalisation of alphabets and grammars.

For Pedro Marín Silva, normalisation is a priority because, in his opinion, there are many alphabets that are not “scientific” – in other words, they do not follow the criteria of the International Phonetic Alphabet used today (Ibid.). This alphabet (see CRIC 1987), however, though it is acknowledged by most linguists all over the world, does not seem to hold the same importance for the vast majority of indigenous speakers of Nasayuwe in Cauca, Colombia. Even if many indigenous people in the region respect the linguistic knowledge of the Western academy, many refuse to simply bow to it:

We have focused on the problem of the normalisation of the alphabets [of Nasayuwe language], which is not respected. There was a norm done by Tulio Rojas a few years ago, but it is not respected [...]. There are previous alphabets done by SIL [Summer Institute of Linguistics] missionaries, and many people who got involved in this [task] [...] were not prepared. The indigenous people do not acknowledge the norm approved by the CRIC,⁶¹ which is the norm done by Tulio Rojas, which is the scientific one (Ibid., my translation).

While some linguists believe that the unification of grammatical and alphabetical norms is a priority in the agenda of revitalisation, others think this unification obeys the political interests of indigenous organisations and the national government, rather than the interests of the wider population of indigenous people. The Colombian linguist Héctor Ramirez Cruz does not “stand for the unification of alphabets and grammars,” which from his point of view “are measures of control” and external “prescriptions”. “I think,” he says, “[that] the unification and standardisation of alphabets and grammars are political decisions made within specific political circumstances such as the unification of a territory or population,

⁶¹ CRIC stands for Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca (Indigenous Council of Cauca Region).

and in these cases are considered important” (Ramirez Cruz 2014, min. 20, my translation).

Even when indigenous organisations such as the Indigenous Council of Cauca Region promote a particular “norm” for an indigenous language, the indigenous population does not necessarily respond to that “norm”. While many indigenous people support this organisation and its work in regards to the defence of territorial rights and political autonomy, they do not necessarily want to accommodate to the grammars and alphabets produced by this organisation to standardise their languages. As I demonstrate in this research, when it comes to indigenous languages, linguistic norms promoted from hierarchical positions are disconnected from the complex understandings and experiences of indigenous languages that people have within their communities. The Colombian linguist María Emilia Montes Rodríguez argues that the unification of alphabets and grammars is futile if it does not generate “enough writing production and reading practice,” adding that “it is pointless to lose energy in unifying something that is not used or rarely used” (Montes Rodríguez 2015: min. 15, my translation).⁶²

Often, linguistic criteria end up being at odds with indigenous peoples’ classification of languages. Moreover, the commitment of linguists to producing standardising alphabets and grammars as part of language revitalisation programmes tends to leave behind indigenous peoples’ cosmologies and knowledge practices. The French linguist Jon Landaburu, who has been studying indigenous languages in Colombia since 1967, is aware that indigenous languages are not simply “linguistic phenomena” and that they mark important ethnic identifications affecting various social practices, including marriage (Landaburu, 2008, cited in Gonzales Castaño 2013: 33-34). During his field work in the Colombian Amazon, he heard two friends speaking; counter to his expectations, the two friends told him they spoke two different languages:

⁶² Montes Rodríguez (1998b) has worked with Tikuna peoples in the Amazon, not only studying their languages, but also developing teaching materials in collaboration with indigenous teachers.

They answered me that one was speaking Manaka and the other one was speaking Kuni, which were two completely different languages. I was astonished because they understood each other perfectly. And they were not wrong, nor trying to fool me. Beyond the dialectical variations, it is very important for them to define their identity. So they were not going to say they spoke the same language, even if they understood each other. If I revise the texts, the vocabularies, the grammar [of the two languages], they are very similar. However, they pretend those languages are two languages because their conception of language is not simply linguistic. It is not about the structure of language, but the concept of identity of a group. That is very important (Ibid., my translation).

Like Landaburu, the Colombian linguist Carlos Patiño Rosselli argues that ethnic language identifications do not necessarily match the linguistic criteria. He questions the proliferation of indigenous languages among the Barás, Carapanas, Cubeos, Desanos and Guananos living in Vaupés, Colombia (Patiño Rosselli 2000: 101). He argues that there is no “scientific” or “linguistic” evidence that they speak different languages; instead, he argues that they speak variations of the same language (Ibid.: 201):

The linguistic studies developed in the last years about the Easter Tucano linguistic family in Vaupés [by] Elsa Gómez Imbert, [and] Olga Ardila [...] indicate that there are not really fifteen different languages [in the area] but they are probably [...] dialectal variations that are close to one another [...]. If we count fifteen varieties of Easter Tucano as just one language [...] the number of indigenous languages in Colombia would be only 44 (as professor María Emilia Montes [argues]) instead of more than 60 as it is generally mentioned in most publications (Ibid.: 102, my translation).

Patiño Rosselli and Landaburu explain that indigenous peoples classify languages according to the distinction between peoples, and they respect the marriage norm of linguistic exogamy which only allows them to marry someone who speaks a different language (Ibid., my translation). Along with the differential classification of languages, there is a differential understanding of writing deeply influenced by colonial legacies. Practices such as weaving, carving, body painting and ornamenting, which are full of meaning and rooted in ancestral traditions, are not generally conceived as writing practices. The belief that indigenous languages are mainly oral and have no writing practices were widely accepted among Colombian academics since the early stages of the colonial era, continuing through independence

In the late nineteenth century and even during the first decades of the twentieth century, the pre-Hispanic glyphs – stones scriptures and carved sculptures found by treasure hunters and archaeologists – were not associated with the languages spoken in America before the Conquest. In 1892, the Colombian historian Ernesto Restrepo Tirado argued that pre-Hispanic peoples living in the territories corresponding to Colombia only inscribed glyphs as a “hobby, were inexpert, non-systematic and uncoordinated (Restrepo Tirado 1892, cited in Ortega Ricaurte 1978: 239).⁶³ However, there were a few intellectuals who defended the opposite idea. Miguel Triana was convinced that the glyphs constituted a kind of writing of the pre-Hispanic inhabitants (Ortega Ricaurte 1978: 238).

The belief that indigenous languages are primarily oral dovetails with the idea that their writing is a recent invention. In fact, some indigenous leaders agree with the former idea. For a long time, they even refused to incorporate any kind of writing because they perceived it as a foreign element (Pineda Camacho 1997: 169, cited in Gröll 2009: 95). And in many ways, it was, since the writing they were asked to incorporate was alphabetical. Alphabets of indigenous languages have been created mainly by foreigners: Spanish colonisers and missionaries (in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries), missionaries sponsored by the Colombian government (in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries), protestant missionary-linguists from the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) from the University of Oklahoma, in the United States (from 1962 to 2002), as well as Colombian linguists and anthropologists.⁶⁴

Many indigenous people and leaders mistrust the alphabetic writing of their languages. The Tikuna nurse Yenica Mojica Pereira says that the only way to learn Tikuna is to participate in the community’s life and to listen to the stories told by the elders (Mojica Pereira 2015). She says that she and most of the members of her community were called “illiterate” because they did not know Spanish or how to

⁶³ These statements appear in Ernesto Restrepo Tirado’s book, *Estudio sobre los aborígenes de Colombia* (*Study of the Aborigines of Colombia*, my translation), published in 1892.

⁶⁴ The consolidation of anthropology as a discipline in Colombia in the 1950s, with the support Paul Rivet and the constitution of the institution of Higher Education *Escuela Normal Superior*, led to an increase in the number anthropologists and linguists educated in the country (Arocha and Friedemann 1984).

write with letters; nevertheless, she believes that nobody knows Tikuna better than them, and argues that linguists make mistakes in their books (Ibid.). She says that what is written in the books does not always correspond to how the elders speak and teach the language to the younger generations as they narrate the stories of origin (Ibid.). She is not impressed by the author's name or credentials written in the book (a similar idea is expressed by Derrida 1981).⁶⁵ In addition, she thinks that the myths lose their truth when they are written in books; to a certain extent they become simple fairy tales in the classrooms (Ibid.). The elders (*abuelos*) speak for hours, and everybody listens and asks questions; only those who have listened can tell the story. Yenica Mojica Pereira explains:

The *abuelos* speak, discuss everything orally, no-one writes when they speak, you have to listen carefully [...]. People do not want to write. The *abuelos* get angry when people write, "why do you write?", "Why do you write like that?" Because what people write is often untrue. It is not the original, what you listen to is the original. It is abusive to the *abuelo*, we shouldn't write. But they threaten us, if you don't write it is going to be lost and I don't know what else. For us it is better to listen (Mojica Pereira 2015: min. 35, my translation).

Hermes Angucho, a member of the Totoró community in Cauca, says there is no need to write, only to listen and talk: "we are a community of oral tradition, so I do something and I do not write it [...], I do not go back but I move forward [...]. We are a community of oral tradition, we only talk" (Hermes Angucho, cited in Gonzales Castaño 2013: 198). Yénica and Hermes think that most literate people, who rely on written texts, do not know how to listen. To a certain extent, they believe that the written form is a "fake copy", in which the connection between the text and the speakers is lost. When writing is conceived as a mere instrument of memory, separated from the lived spoken word and reduced to literacy, it is relegated to a

⁶⁵ The signature of an author does not compensate the author's absence and the impossibility of knowing for sure what the intentions of the author are. This dynamic echoes Socrates' mistrust of Phaedrus, who writes speeches for "the citizens of greatest influence and dignity", but never pronounces those speeches (Derrida 1981: 68). These writers are branded as sophists, or people of "non-presence and of non-truth" (Ibid.: 68). They produce "a play of appearances that enable it to pass for truth" (Ibid.: 68, 103). In this sense, "writing (is) the *epkeina tes ousias*. The disappearance of truth as presence, the withdrawal of the present origin of presence" (Ibid.).

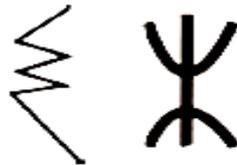
simple function, as an external to memory that dulls and poisons memory, making people lazy, blocking them from listening actively and preventing them from engaging with the speaker (Derrida 1981: 99, 103; n.d.: 440). It is in this sense, that Derrida invite us to conceive writing as the living practice that it is, as the inscription of meaning that traverses our bodies, and not simply as the registration of letters in a paper. Most indigenous peoples conceive writing in this wider and richer sense.

The Bolivian anthropologist, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui argues that story telling has a remarkable epistemic potential in indigenous communities today, as oral history renovates and reorganises the relation between knowledge producers and the subjects who are to be known (Rivera Cusicanqui 1990). Oral history challenges, in this way, the traditional practice of history and anthropology that treats indigenous peoples as if they were simple sources of knowledge to be analysed (Rivera Cusicanqui 2010). On the contrary, oral history promotes dialogism and collective knowledge production (Ibid.).

While many indigenous people continue to mistrust alphabetic writing, various communities belonging to indigenous organisations have been producing their own alphabets and developing programmes of literacy and indigenous education since the 1970s and 1980s. These two decades witnessed important debates concerning whether alphabets and grammars of indigenous languages should be created and standardised. Some indigenous languages have more than one alphabet dating from different periods of colonisation, missionary settlements and anthropological and linguistic research. In some communities, most of the indigenous population is unfamiliar with alphabetic writing, while in others many members of the communities have grown accustomed to alphabetic writing, having learnt how to write and read in Spanish at their schools.

An interesting exercise took place in 2008 in Cauca, where a community proposed an alphabet for Ambaló language that combines ideographic and phonetic systems. This alphabet includes the symbols of lightning and a lizard taken from petroglyphs (Gonzales Castaño 2012: 199). The linguist and anthropologist Gonzales Castaño explains the meaning of these symbols as follows:

The first symbol represents a bolt of lightning, it was included because it represents the major thunder *palaik*, one of the four spirits (*sre kOllimisak* “the major rainfall”, *kOsrO kOllimisak* “the major paramount”, *palaik kOsrO kOllimisak* “the major thunder” and *misak mOrOpik pishi mOrOpik* “the traditional medicine man”) who rule and influence the lives of the inhabitants of *Ambaló*. The second symbol represents the lizard and the mythic origin of the people of *Ambaló*, who are the children of water (Gonzales Castaño 2013: 59, my translation).



(Gonzales Castaño 2013: 59).

The “alphabet” of *Ambaló* mainly uses the vowels and consonants of the Western alphabet, derived from the Greco Latin alphabet. This system includes certain phonetic symbols from the International Phonetic Alphabet, but it also incorporates a new vowel, *O*, taken from the petroglyphs, and whose meaning is still unknown (Ibid. 2013: 61). This overlapping of alphabetic writing and pictorial writing produces a rupture in the form of alphabetic writing and introduces at least the possible articulation of other kinds of writing, pictographic and even musical, as Ferreira proposes (2007: 142). Ultimately, this alphabet challenges the opposition between orality and writing, which is not universal but was produced at the time of the colonisation of America by the Spaniards (Rabasa 2008: 51).

It is quite possible that during the first encounter a few Spaniards recognised the pictorial texts as “holding documentary evidence” and admitted the juxtaposition between verbal performance and writing (Ibid., Boone 1994). The Colombian linguist María Emilia Trillós Amaya notes that there was a highly developed ideographic writing, based on glyphs, paintings and carved inscriptions in rocks found by anthropologists in different areas of Colombia (Trillós Amaya 2003: 42). She also acknowledges the existence of ideograms in blankets, ponchos, gowns, hats and shoulder bags identifying lineage and clans (Ibid.). The Colombian philosopher and anthropologist Fernando Urbina Rangel has studied many of the glyphs in the middle

Caquetá River, which date from pre-Hispanic times. In these glyphs there is a recurrent figure, a human being, sitting.

The “North-Western Amazon basin”, he says “is the habitat of many [...] communities that keep a rich oral tradition, gestures and handicrafts, referring to the sitting man and the ritual stool” (Urbina Rangel 1994: 1, my translation). Urbina Rangel believes that these graphic symbols in the glyphs are similar to oral signs because they accumulate meanings throughout their history (Ibid.). The sitting man is the wisest in the community. He “is closer to earth, he is planted”; he sits to meditate, to narrate the oral tradition of the community and to pronounce the words that “make us human” – to “integrate a world [...], the words that indicate the right paths, the healing words” (Ibid., my translation).



(Urbina Ránel 1994: 1)

During my conversations with Yenica Mojica Pereira, she told me that she wonders when “‘they’ [referring to non-indigenous people] decided that there is an alphabet in Tikuna” (Mojica Pereira 2015: min. 15, my translation). She said that “there could be instead another kind of writing with representations like the drawings, the textiles, and the body painting because those do have meaning and I do understand them. I think that is a form of writing” (Ibid.). Despite the fact that most of these alternative proposals have been disregarded due to their difficult adaption to typing machines and keyboards (Queixalós 1988), it is interesting to consider how these debates about literacy and writing expand the notions of what writing and grammar can be in relation to the experiences and practices of indigenous languages that take place in the communities, independently of the work of linguists and anthropologists.

The following chapter (Chapter 3) elaborates on alternative and critical understandings of writing and language that engage with indigenous language

practices in relation to particular experiences, meanings, ethics and affects. It discusses how all these elements are mobilised in languages, and more importantly how they create traditions anew and rebuild communities' filiations through language practices.

Challenges for Language Revitalisation and the Colonial Legacies of Unity, Singularity and Normalisation

Some linguists in Colombia, such as Pedro Marín Silva, are concerned with the implications and limitations of the purist conceptions of language that dominate the field of “language revitalisation”. He believes that most linguists in Colombia are “very conservative, [...] frightened by novelty, everything new terrifies [...] scandalizes [them]” (Marín Silva 2015: min. 20, my translation). To a certain degree, linguists who engage in the revitalisation of indigenous languages hope to prevent or counteract the contact of languages and the transmutations contact produces. However, this contact – as Marín Silva acknowledges – is simply inevitable, not only between indigenous languages, but also in relation to Spanish, to the point that Spanish has been transformed in the indigenous territories:

When you go to Caquetá you see [...] [Spanish speakers] using words from [indigenous] languages in the area. [...] I think that linguistics is going in the wrong direction. Instead, we should explore why rituals are recovered by the people of certain groups; why some groups, despite the contact and displacement produced by the internal war and drug trafficking, still speak their indigenous languages (Ibid., my translation).

Many indigenous communities in Colombia speak two or three languages including their native language, the language of another indigenous community living close by to their territory and Spanish. Some communities also speak Portuguese due to the proximity of their territories to Brazil and the cultural and economic relations they have with other indigenous and non-indigenous communities in that country (Ramírez Cruz 2009). In Vaupés, there are indigenous peoples who speak more than four indigenous languages, Spanish and Portuguese and there is a high tendency for them to learn another language since, according to their cosmologies and traditions,

they can only marry someone who speaks a different language from the ones they already speak (Trillós Amaya 2003: 74). In Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Koguis and Wiwas peoples have created a common language to communicate among themselves while they continue to speak their own languages with their own people (Ibid.). In addition, their spiritual leaders use a different language during the rituals that is unknown by the rest of the population (Ibid.). Besides, mixed-raced or *mestizo* people in the surrounding areas have also produced a hybrid language of Spanish and Koguisian (Ibid., 1995).

After a long, recognised career in linguistics and language revitalisation, Marín Silva (2015) does not relate to the conservative understandings of indigenous languages that dominate his field. He also considers that the key of language revitalisation lies with indigenous cosmologies and religious rituals that take place in the communities under the leadership of locals, not linguists and anthropologists:

In Cauca, [...] the [indigenous] people started to recover a ritual called Saakhelu, which is extremely important [...]. There were meetings of 10, 20 and 30 people, but it continued growing and now it is enormous, with more than 1,000 people participating [...]. Now communities from all *resguardos* [reservations in English] in Cauca participate in the Saakhelu [...].⁶⁶ There is music, orality, politics. Now, they invite people from all of America. The last time [the Saakhelu took place], there were people from Brazil, Equator, Peru, as well as peoples from the Amazon, the Andes, Orinoquia. People from everywhere [...]. The ritual lasts three days and it recovers numerous lost traditions [...] and this makes people speak the [...] indigenous languages [...]. This was a dynamic of the local communities; this is not the achievement of any linguists or anthropologists. It was the community [...] that made it happen. [...] These are things linguists couldn't have figured out. Things that neither sociolinguistics nor linguistics, not even ethnography, [can project and even less so promote]. [...] [We] just collect data and do qualitative stuff that leads us nowhere. The answers [to the question of how to motivate people to speak their languages and feel proud about them] are somewhere else" (Ibid.: min. 23, my translation).

⁶⁶ The Saakhelu ritual is an ancestral and highly important ceremony celebrated by the Nasa people in Cauca to acknowledge and express their gratitude to their mother earth and all its gifts, its fertile lands, harvest as well as its medicine and spiritual plants.

Assuming that hybridity and creolisation are exceptions to the linguistic norm, or to norms of purity and singularity, is not only reductionist but also violent (Mazzotti 2008, McGroarty 2010). It creates the counterpart to “idealised”, “desirable” purity, and the “illegitimate”, “bastard”, “undesirable”, “contaminated” and “incomplete languages.” This division was particularly important in the Spanish colonisation of America and the simultaneous project of unification of Castile and Spain under the Catholic religion (proclaimed as the universal religion) and Castilian language (defined as a singular language).⁶⁷ In the fifteenth century, when Antonio Nebrija wrote his Castilian Grammar, he not only described a variant of the language spoken in Castile (the royal variety), but also instituted this variant as the norm to be adopted by all speakers in the Empire (Mignolo 1992, 1994b, 1995). Thus, other variants came to be defined in opposition to the Castilian norm (set by Nebrija) as poor deviations that needed to be normalised and corrected. This violent normalisation expanded and hardened when the Castilian Crown consolidated as an Empire by colonising America.

With the colonisation of America, the enterprise of unification and the spread of the Castilian language was placed at the top of the Royal agenda, in the metropolis and in the transatlantic colonies. This enterprise of unification is what now makes possible imagining the existence of a singular language called Spanish, now the official language of more than twenty different countries, spoken by more than four hundred million Hispanic speakers around the world. All these figures suggest that Spanish has expanded. However, this would imply the existence of “one Spanish language” and “one community of Spanish speakers.” Instead, the colonisation and imposition (rather than expansion) of a particular composition of Spanish language has produced a regime of validation and disapproval of some variants over others.

⁶⁷ When the debates about the humanity and souls of the Amerindians took place, it was decided that they would only be considered as something other than “soulless” “savage” “beasts” if they were converted Catholic believers and speakers of Castilian. It is also interesting to revisit the etymology of the word Catholic. Catholicism and the Catholic Church defined themselves as universal, with Catholicism as the “true” universal religion and the Catholic Church its singular, universal congregation of parishioners (Anderson 2007). Etymologically, the word “catholic” derives from the Latin word *catholicus* which also derived from the Greek word *καθολικός* (*katholikos*), meaning universal (Liddell et al. 1996, Oxford Dictionary 2016).

The search for the “original language” and the protection of what is supposed to be authentic in “a language” is a distorting motive in the programmes of revitalisation of indigenous languages. In fact, it was that motive that allowed the colonisers and missionaries who disembarked in the American continent to perceive the multiplicity of indigenous languages as a threat analogous to the Divine Condemnation succeeding the fall of the Tower of Babel. The references to this condemnation in the chronicles of the colonisers serves to defend the model of univocality against multivocality. The *Genesis* story of the Fall of Babel is often mentioned in the chronicles as an appraisal of univocality and monolingualism that favours the imposition of the “language of the Crown” in America. However, Babel has more than just one meaning:

I do not know why it is said in *Genesis* that Babel signifies confusion, for *Ba* signifies father in the Oriental tongues, and *Bel* signifies God; Babel signifies the city of God, the holy city. The Ancients gave this name to all their capitals. But it is incontestable that Babel means confusion; and it is obviously from the time on that the Germans no longer understand the Chinese; for it is clear, according to the scholar Bochart, that Chinese is originally the same tongue as High German (Voltaire, cited in Derrida 1985: 166).

It is interesting to see how Babel is not a univocal term itself, but it is a hybrid, layered and polysemic construction imbued with different meanings in different locations and times of enunciation. While Babel was the proper name given to cities, naming them as “holy city”, it was also given the meaning of “confusion of languages” as a form of punishment (Derrida 1985). This confusion produced by the multiplication of languages made communication impossible – punishment for the people’s attempt to construct a tower of eighty-one thousand feet reaching the sky and challenging God’s supremacy (Ibid.).

When indigenous languages are subjected to unification and standardisation, inspired by the processes of unification and standardisation developed earlier for national languages in Latin America, we are witnessing the repetition of the mechanisms of the *Arts of Latin Grammar* devised in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Despite this artificiality, the idea of language standardisation is built on the

assumption that there can be such a thing as a unity of language, one that remains unaffected by languages' variations and blurred boundaries.

Defining and defending unity and singularity in indigenous languages in the name of their preservation seems to maintain the colonial legacy of unification and standardisation. Colonial grammars and alphabets have undermined indigenous language practices and separated them from their knowledge practices and cosmologies. A double process of colonisation and invention of indigenous languages has permitted and even justified the violence exercised over indigenous knowledge practices and experiences of language in the name of a supposedly universal civilisation, reason, science and development.

Final Considerations

The effects of the conceptualisations of language go beyond what is said about language. These definitions have a performative effect insofar as, to a certain extent, they also produce indigenous languages – in the sense that they are perceived and even experienced according to a particular vision of “what language is” and “how it operates.” In this sense, the act of describing is performative: the chains of predicates of “what is said of language” have the capacity to produce and transform what they describe (Derrida 1982: 317-318).

Considering these complex power-knowledge relations, we may wonder how indigenous languages can be conceptualised in a way that challenges coloniality and the privileged position of Western academic knowledge. As the following chapter (Chapter 3) argues, indigenous languages go beyond the limits of grammars, alphabets, schools, linguistic records and archives. Indigenous languages cannot simply be trapped and preserved as collective or national heritage or be celebrated as exotic expressions of folklore (as discussed in Chapter 1). The attempts to document indigenous languages can never capture their performative, creative and transformative actions. They can only isolate fragmentary pieces and utterances from the dialogic language games and the play of agreements and disagreements of

grammar and meaning (Bakhtin 1935; Voloshinov 1929b; Wittgenstein, in Forster 2004).

Language documentation can never produce a faithful copy; it is condemned to always produce a failed copy of indigenous language practices. Instead, this research proposes to accept and embrace the locality of the experiences and practices of languages and the ways in which speakers actively and creatively participate in the transformations and becoming(s) of languages. This means that language revitalisation is not documentation and preservation, but principally the living praxis of languages as they continue to reinvent themselves along with the memories, filiations, affects and ethics of the communities they inscribe. From this perspective, the study of languages needs to engage with mapping rather than copying (Deleuze and Guattari 2008). A map does not reproduce or abstract what would be an idyllic, external pre-existent reality, but it has a material, active, creative, experimental, experiential and even performative direction. Chapter 3 argues that languages and speakers mutate and transform one another. To grasp this dynamic, it is not possible to rely on a clear division between “subject” and “object”, “signifier” and “signified”, “roots” and “branches” (Lecerle 1999, 2002; Deleuze and Guattari 2008).

Chapter 1 and 2 have laid the ground for Circle II and its elaboration of a (po)ethical understanding of indigenous language practices. As the next circle argues, this (po)ethical perspective acknowledges the ways indigenous languages articulate with the ways indigenous peoples relate to their territories and their communities, building affects, filiations, memories, traditions, ethics and ways of living anew. This perspective also acknowledges that indigenous language practices foster ways of being that creatively resist colonial and epistemic violence. Ultimately, this means that indigenous language practices escape their grammatical and alphabetical normalisations and that their vitality resides in their poetical, ethical and political dimensions.

CIRCLE II – INTERLUDE

Decentring Colonial Normalisations of Indigenous Languages and Detouring onto (Po)ethical Paths

This second circle, **Interlude**, is the second turn on the route of this research journey which proposes an alternative understanding of indigenous language practices and revitalisation in Colombia. This circle dialogues with postcolonial, decolonial, ecological, critical and cultural theories with the purpose of decentring language conceptions rooted in the problematic presuppositions of unity and singularity. Consequently, this dialogue permits relocating indigenous language practices in complex (non-anthropocentric) relations of memories, affects, ethics, community filiations and ways of living.

As the circle progresses towards a (po)ethical understanding of indigenous language practices, it highlights the deep articulations between the poetical, ethical and political dimensions of indigenous language practices.

This (po)ethical understanding of indigenous language practices attempts to convey their creative capacity not only to transform language, but also to recreate traditions and rebuild communities. Moreover, it acknowledges the deep connection between language practices and ethical ways of relating and living within communities. Finally, it recognises how indigenous language practices permeate and shape projects for making possible a world of many. This is a (decolonial) world that acknowledges the dignity and worth of indigenous peoples and defies colonial and epistemic violence. Accordingly, this circle not only redefines indigenous languages, but also points to their revitalisation beyond linguistics. It elaborates on how (po)ethical revitalisation is related to community rebuilding and healing while also creating communities of affect that, together, can challenge coloniality and epistemic violence both locally and globally. This second circle comprises two chapters: **Chapter 3**, entitled “**Redefining Indigenous Languages: Alternative Language Conceptualisations, Ecological and Decolonial Perspectives,**” and **Chapter 4**, entitled “**(Po)ethical Paths towards Language Revitalisation and the Rebuilding of Community Filiations.**”

Chapter 3 explores alternative conceptualisations of indigenous language practices and dialogues with critical, cultural and postcolonial theories, as well as with ecological and decolonial perspectives. This chapter challenges notions of language unity and singularity, and at the same time explores and reconsiders language revitalisation beyond documentation and standardisation. The chapter engages with the creative and transformative capacity of language practices, arguing that they constitute their vitality and enable hybrid translocations (Sakai 1997). This chapter also discusses the limitations of unidirectional translations and the decolonial and transformative possibilities of double translations involving not only language, but also knowledge practices, ethics and politics (Mignolo and Schiwy 2003).

In the process of considering the creative and transformative possibilities of language practices, this chapter redefines languages as a plurality of clashing and shifting forces (Lecerle 2002, Sakai 1997, Watkin 2012). It also expands on the limited alphabetical notions of writing, while engaging with an idea of writing in a broader sense and exploring the intermediate spaces between orality and writing (Derrida 1997, Rabasa 2008, Chihuilaf 2005). The chapter also proposes decolonial detours of epistemic violence and language normalisations via dialogues with ecological perspectives – such as ecocriticism and ecolinguistics – and engages with knowledge ecologies (Guattari 2000, Sousa Santos 2010). Finally, this third chapter maps the route for what would be a (po)ethical understanding of indigenous language practices within a contested battlefield of knowledge validation, identity definitions and community filiations.

Chapter 4 proposes a (po)ethical understanding of indigenous language practices and their revitalisation. This comprehensive (po)ethical perspective acknowledges the poetical, ethical and political dimensions of indigenous language practices. It also considers their potential for rebuilding and recreating community filiations and ways of living. In this regard, the chapter proposes an understanding of revitalisation as a (po)ethical practice of rebuilding affects and ethics and healing community filiations. Furthermore, it argues that (po)ethical practices and (po)ethical revitalisation can challenge totalitarianism(s) and dehumanisation, epistemic violence and coloniality.

Chapter 4 also discusses the implications of a (po)ethical understanding of indigenous language practices, particularly in regards to the rebuilding of community filiations, affects and ethics. Overall, the chapter engages with the agonistic and (po)ethical ways in which communities find and produce creative ways of resisting epistemic violence and coloniality. Chapter 4 closes by laying out the framework of the discussion that takes place the final circle (Circle III), which examines the singular and plural, local and global levels of (po)ethical practices in regards to their poetical, ethical and political dimensions, as well as their creative and agonistic resistance to colonial epistemic violence.

Chapter 3. Redefining Indigenous Languages and Revitalisation: Critical, Ecological and Decolonial Perspectives

As discussed in Chapter 2, the defence of unity and singularity in indigenous languages actualises the colonial legacies of unification and standardisation consolidated by colonial normalising technologies such as alphabets and grammars. There is an important relation between grammar and power, at least in the power to “draw the frontier between the grammatical and the a-grammatical” (Lecercle 1985: 50). We can no longer perceive grammar as the unbiased compendium of “natural laws”, as Chomsky would have us believe (Lecercle 2005: 51). It is therefore necessary to decentre grammar as an instrument of colonisation and normalisation, to challenge language unity and singularity, and to elaborate a notion of language revitalisation beyond the parameters of documentation and standardisation.

Instead of preserving or elaborating audio-visual copies and archives of indigenous languages, and attempting to standardise grammars and alphabets, revitalisation should engage with the creative and transformative potential of indigenous language practices to produce translocations, double translations. These translocations and translations need to be understood beyond the linguistic frame. They need to be analysed in the context of ecological articulations, and in relation to knowledge practices, ways of living, ethics, and transformative projects that enable healing, create communities of affect and rebuild community filiations.

This chapter advocates for an understanding of indigenous languages as a plurality instead of a singular unity; it acknowledges that this plurality is neither fixed nor stable, but rather shifts within a network of clashing forces of normalisation and rupture, effectively breaking from those normalisations. The chapter also emphasises indigenous languages as practices interlocked with knowledge practices, community filiations, affects and ethics. Additionally, it continues the discussions about the blurry boundary between orality and writing in indigenous language practices, challenging alphabetical notions of writing and engaging with an idea of writing in a broader sense. The chapter also dialogues with ecolinguistics and ecocriticism and explores ecological perspectives that expand the notion of language to include its

articulation with living practices, cosmologies, traditions, affects, filiations and ethics. This multidisciplinary and multi-vocal dialogue with different schools of thought, critical perspectives and indigenous local practices attempts to produce knowledge ecologies that defy epistemic violence (Sousa Santos 2010). Finally, the chapter sets the ground for understanding (po)ethical indigenous language practices, discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

Revitalisation beyond Documentation and Standardisation: Mapping Creative and Transformative Language Vitality

In Colombia, many of the programmes devoted to the revitalisation of indigenous languages have pursued documentation, registration and the unification of alphabets and grammars as tools for preservation. The fear of the dominant influence of other languages such as Spanish sometimes extends to the fear of the “corruption” of indigenous languages. The projects of standardisation of indigenous languages may repeat the colonial model of language normalisation through the creation of grammars and unification of alphabets. While there is no doubt about the commitment of linguistics and their good intentions of preserving and revitalising indigenous languages, these languages are often treated as fixed, as languages that are not in use, or dead languages.⁶⁸ This idea “of language as a unit unaffected by other languages” does not simply ignore the blurry frontiers between languages and language variants, but it also “freezes” languages (Viatori and Ushigua 2007: 15).

Grammars and alphabets establish norms that produce a supposedly “correct” language as well as the subjects who use it correctly. Along with the normalisation of languages, a process of subjection or production of subjects takes place. These

⁶⁸ It would be a mistake to believe that linguists do not have good intentions. The Colombian linguist Pedro Marín Silva (2015) describes linguists as “the good guys” who try to protect the indigenous languages with reduced budgets, while Catholic and other religious missionaries receive generous amounts of money from the government. Additionally, linguists who focus on language revitalisation continue to be marginalised within the field of linguistics. The Colombian anthropologist and linguist Geny Gonzales Castaño argues that “linguistic revitalisation continues to be considered a marginal practice [...] within the field [of linguistics], [...] a practice that is closer to anthropology than to linguistics” (2013: 77).

subjects are expected to speak a normalised, affixed language, defined and shaped according to the (desirable) principles of grammaticality, systematicity, and unity.⁶⁹ Yet languages' variations are the shifting forces that feed the becoming of languages, creating new forms instead of just remaining in a permanent state of stillness. To a certain extent, they die to be born again, renewed (Heller-Roazen 2008). In this sense, grammars and unified alphabets, instead of keeping languages alive, might be forms of imprisonment or captivity and not necessarily tools of "language revitalisation". Grammars and alphabets are not natural to languages but the products of their abstraction according to linguistic principles.

Linguistics – like all disciplines and areas of study – is based upon certain assumptions that are accepted in order to produce and operate around its object of study: language. Systematicity and unity are two of the assumptions that have permitted linguistic classification.⁷⁰ As the object of linguistics, language has been produced rather than found (Sakai 1997: 159). The discipline of linguistics, in order to come into existence, has had to create its object of study along with certain assumptions, which are "the necessary condition for the possibility of language research" (Ibid.). This means that language is not systematic until the discipline of linguistics produces its

⁶⁹ For example, the Castilian language, which was already multiple, was forced to adjust to a singular mould constructed by Nebrija. But since languages are not only multiple but also fluid, they tend to leak (Deleuze and Guattari 2008). Those leaks, often called deviations of the norm, were banned, persecuted and repressed. This persecution has continued long after the publication of Nebrija's Grammar of Castilian; the Royal Academy of Spanish Language and all the national and regional Academies of Spanish language that emerged in the world have tried to unify and standardise (albeit unsuccessfully) the multiple re-compositions of Spanish language. However, these re-compositions transform in such ways that calling them "Spanish" is, to a certain degree, already an unsuccessful attempt to fix them.

⁷⁰ Despite the multiplicity and the conflictive forces that inhabit languages, various schools of linguistics and language philosophies have attempted to force unity and systematicity into language. The studies of language that embrace unity and systematicity, Bakhtin argues, have "been major centralising forces whose method had consisted of seeking for unity in the face of diversity" (Crowley 2001: 184). Languages are not pre-existing realities that linguists study, describe, analyse or compare; instead, languages are produced as objects of study according to the specific criteria of the disciplines that study (or rather produce) them. The assumptions of the "unity", "systematicity" and "grammaticality" of language, dominant in synchronic linguistics, isolate languages from their social and historical contexts. These assumptions are abstractions that operate as a "regulative idea" (Sakai 1997: 59). Unfortunately, as linguists such Pedro Marín Silva and Héctor Ramírez Cruz observe, synchronic linguistics remains dominant in the study of indigenous languages in Colombia today (Marín Silva 2015; Ramírez Cruz 2014).

systematicity, and by producing that systematicity language becomes an object that can be studied by linguistics (Ibid.: 57).

What we call English, French or Japanese is an idea of unity, an idea that “enables us to represent to ourselves other objects”; an idea that makes us encapsulate in a coherent unit different thoughts, concepts of words, and put this abstract “unit” in relation to other abstract “units” (Ibid.). This abstract unit that linguists and the discipline of linguistics call “language” is not directly related to the experience we have of languages as material, shifting multiplicities. This implies that we only come across the abstract concept “language” as a construction of linguistic discourse, not by our experience of languages.⁷¹ Hence, regularity and systematicity do not pre-exist in language, but are instead produced by the discipline charged with studying this object. This means that “linguists do not come to discover the systematicity of a language through and as result of empirical research,” as if this systematicity of language was already there before the emergence of linguistics (Ibid.: 57).⁷²

The notion of “language as an abstract system” formed by arbitrary signs was constructed in the context of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. This tradition was kept and enlarged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by Ferdinand de Saussure and his followers at the Geneva School (Voloshinov 1929a: 29). The concept of *langue* is an abstraction founded in a myth that violently reduces language to “a non-historical, non-social system, where communication is reduced to an abstract schema, and does not involve interaction between actual speaking

⁷¹ “One can never *experience* either a foreign language or one's own (national language) as a systematic unity” (Sakai 1997: 59).

⁷² Even when we do not exactly experience the borders of languages presupposed by the idea of systematicity and unity, this idea has contributed to the normalisation of languages, imposing boundaries that separate “what is supposed to be language” from “what it would not be.” As Sakai has pointed out, the question of “What is language? inevitably gives rise to its counterpart: What is nonlanguage?” (Sakai 1991: 2). The distinction between “language” and “non-language”, “normal” and “abnormal”, is produced by the centripetal forces of normalisation (Bakhtin 1935: 75), which attempt to produce a monologic, systematic unity: *langue*. These static, reactive forces (Deleuze, cited in Lecerle 2002: 41, 194) repress heterogeneity and change; they attempt to rigidify, unify and territorialise language (Lecerle 2002: 41, 194).

subjects” (Lecercle 1990: 26).⁷³ *Langue* opposes *parole*, which is produced in everyday interactive encounters among speakers. Contrary to *langue*, *parole* is “the field where laws no longer apply and the freedom of the user is maximal” (Ibid.: 29). Because of its irregularity and disrespect for laws, *parole* is the rejected side of language by Saussure – known as the founder of linguistics.⁷⁴

Grammars and alphabets attempt to fix the flux of language, to stabilise its “rhizomatic dispersions, heavy mixtures, when supra-segmental phenomena like intonation invade syntax, and when iconicity subverts the arbitrariness of the sign” (Lecercle 2006: 144). Language does not obey grammar, but has “a life of its own” (Lecercle 1990: 5). Linguists cannot capture this plural and shifting side of language that escapes grammaticalisation, living in the neglected frontiers of the rules of grammar, creating exceptions while keeping the shifting flow of language going (Ibid.: 22, 36; Branca-Rossof 2001).⁷⁵ From an alternative point of view, language shifts and

⁷³ It is possible to distinguish at least three groups of normalising grammars preceding Saussure’s synchronic *langue*. Firstly, “descriptive” grammars presume that there is a universal or general grammar underlying the surface of all spoken languages and negate the possible existence of other grammars, which would simply be non-grammatical or a-grammatical (Harris 1988: 63). Secondly, “normative” grammars fix the “rules of language” according to a monolithic norm that is supposed to respond to the “universal operations of the human mind” (Ibid.). Finally, “historical comparative” grammars attempt to reconstruct languages that are no longer spoken, relying on written evidence of their usage to track and trace the “continuously evolving matrix of communicational behaviour, shaped by factors which largely elude the subjective grasp of members of the linguistic community and become apparent only to the objective eye of the historian” (Ibid.: 64). Saussure developed an open critique of these grammars and proposed a synchronic grammar independent of the particular uses and historical variations of languages (Harris 1988). This synchronic model was central in the development of linguistic structuralism. Saussure’s grammar focuses on *langue*, ignoring *parole*, speech acts and utterances (Voloshinov 1929a, 1929c).

⁷⁴ The starting point of this abstract objectivism can be tracked in Saussure’s distinction between two levels within his model of “language”: a system of forms (*langue*), and the speech act or utterance (*parole*). The utterance was removed from the study of language; Saussure’s model of “language” (*langue*) focused primarily on the formal structures abstracted from the material languages we speak (*parole*) (Voloshinov 1929a: 32). Bakhtin, who resists the dominant model of abstract objectivism, claims instead that the linguistic form cannot be separated from the “immediate purposes of speaking.” He argues that languages are experienced in relation to specific utterances and in the interaction with specific speakers (Ibid.: 33). In this sense, meaning is constructed dialogically and signs are interwoven by the social conditions of our interactions (Ibid.: 55).

⁷⁵ Lecercle calls this shifting, “agrammatical” side of language “the remainder”; the remainder operates under rhizomatic principles, as the remainder has no master root and connects at any point with bodies, speaking subjects, and utterances (1990). The remainder is

variations are signs of vitality. Languages continue to change, “living on”, while rearticulating their broken fragments into new shapes (Derrida 1979: 76; Cadava 2001: 43, 58).⁷⁶

As Chapter 2 argues, indigenous languages were not always known as “indigenous” languages; they were produced and colonised simultaneously. The notion of “indigenous” is a colonial creation that marks the rupture “between the pre-Columbian world and the world that is established after the Conquest” (Gros 2000: 35, my translation). The notion of indigenous as original native or aboriginal is problematic because it tends to produce an imaginary of fixedness and homogeneity. Moreover, indigenous peoples and indigenous languages were only labelled as indigenous in relation to outsider colonisers. More specifically, indigenous languages were described by the colonisers and chroniclers as chaotic noises and stutters. The apparent lack of unity and systematicity of the “unknown languages” and the existence of countless varieties and multiplicities was often described as overwhelming.⁷⁷

Indigenous languages were multiple long before the conquest of America. Acknowledging this multiplicity and instability within indigenous languages blurs

heterogeneous, since “there is [no] homogenous speech community or ideal speaker hearer” (Ibid: 133). The remainder has no unity; it is a multiplicity of subjects, bodies and utterances that cannot be reduced to a single object. The remainder connects and breaks as it establishes connections even when it seems impossible, out of meaning or sense. The remainder operates as a map and “develops according to its own lines of flight” (Ibid.: 134). The remainder is a fluid, historical, located, contingent, non-instrumental language that operates as a flow intercepting nodes, like a liquid flow in constant metamorphosis, always creating and taking different shapes which cannot be held or imprisoned by predefined “subjects”, “objects”, or “referents” (Lecerle 2002: 5). Therefore, it is historical and it is “a component in an assemblage of power” (Ibid.: 81). From this perspective, words are not abstractions; languages are in the world.

⁷⁶ Languages are in-between borders – the borders of total formalisation, fixedness, territorialisation and total dissemination (Derrida 1979: 91). When languages encounter each other in their multiplicity, they recompose new languages, new forms that are polysemic and multi-vocal. These encounters are translations, in the sense of displacement and movement, taking place “in-between-borders” (Ertel 2011: 10).

⁷⁷ The noises and stutters mentioned by the colonisers in their chronicles are related to the materiality of language, which, as Deleuze and Guattari argue, have their “origins in the primary processes of the body,” where the voices emerge from noise in the body (Lecerle 2002: 129). This materiality of language frightened the colonisers since it contradicted the abstract systematic unity of language they defended.

artificial limits and allows us to start considering indigeneity as a process of becoming(s) instead of as a pure, isolated state. “No culture can claim [...] homogenous purity and authenticity [...]: ‘hybridisation’ and syncretism [...] are age-old processes, historically endemic to cultures” (Venn 2006a: 25). Indigenous languages and indigenous peoples are constantly produced; they cannot be recovered by going back to an original form. When indigenous languages are no longer held up to the ideal of a singular unity, it becomes possible to talk of language as a multiplicity. “Language is essentially a site of hybridity” and “there is no such thing as the original [...] language with which hybridity can be contrasted” (Sakai 1991: 19).

Revitalisation needs to allow a dialogue among different voices and to create spaces for creative and transformative encounters, rather than preserving an “original”, “uncontaminated” form of a language. Instead of defending and promoting the preservation of colonial constructions, it seems more empowering to rethink and reconstruct them anew. The decolonial possibility is in the “work of re-figuration and transfiguration” (Venn 2000: 50). Thinking indigenous language otherwise is worth the risk. So is challenging colonial ideas of languages’ fixed unity and singularity, engaging with their transformative capacity, and transfiguring and confronting the limits they were once forced to fit in. Hence, indigenous languages are not to be thought as singular unities threatened with contamination. Instead, indigenous languages need to be understood as a multiplicity capable of creative transformation.

Revitalisation cannot be confused with the attempt to simply return or recover a pristine, authentic past. “There can [...] be no simple ‘return’ or ‘recovery’ of the ancestral past which is not re-experienced through the categories of the present” (Hall 1996b: 448). “Indigenous” is not a term related to static, “fossilised and immutable” beliefs and practices (Masolo 2014: 530). On the contrary, “indigenous” in this sense is a creative and transformative force – a disruption, rather than a continuity. “Indigenous” is always already a multiplicity of transformative forces in constant movement. Similarly, a multiplicity of languages lives within that which we unsuccessfully call “a language” (Viatori and Ushigua 2007: 15).

The revitalisation of indigenous languages needs to go beyond their registration and documentation, as well as attempts to preserve and fix them through the normalisation and standardisation of alphabets and grammars. These languages are practices that need to be seen from a new pragmatics, a micro-politics of language that “respects the heterogeneity and diversity of language,” instead of rigidifying and organising its “structures” according to hierarchies (Ibid.: 71).⁷⁸ This new pragmatics must recognise that languages are historical and capable of transformation, but not simply in the levels of grammar, syntax, phonetics or word-formation and lexicography (Lecerle 2002: 156)

The French philosopher Gilles Deleuze uses the concept of “metamorphosis” to explain how words become things, how language is no longer a practice of representation but pragmatics, a performance, a material transfiguration (Deleuze and Guattari 1986). Languages, he writes, are “immersed in the world of things, intervening among them, and forming machines with them, capturing and distributing intensities” (Lecerle 2002: 25). Languages work through metamorphosis and not through representation or metaphors; therefore, language is not something to be interpreted. Languages create, in an ongoing process of becoming or making; words do not describe or speak of things, instead words are things (Ibid.: 58).

Deleuze and Guattari’s new pragmatics does not pretend to produce universals of language or postulate an internal grammar or set of rules or structures “in language”; instead, language(s) is a multiplicity of language and tongues, “as a language is the site of lines of flight that disturb and dissolve its vocabulary and its syntax” (Ibid.: 160). Language(s) is always changing direction (Ibid.: 228). The pragmatics Deleuze and Guattari propose advocates for the study of “the collectivism of rituals and practices [...], the ontological mixture of bodies, utterances and practices that

⁷⁸ Traditional schools of linguistics usually separate the world and words, presuming that words refer to the world but lack the materiality of the world they refer to. Counter to this view, Deleuze and Guattari propose a new pragmatics, a micro-politics of language, a new cartography that “treats language as a plane of immanence and of consistency; it does not freeze its currents of becoming into structures, it does not force its lines of flight into a hierarchy of channels” (Lecerle 2002: 71).

constitute the assemblages that are the proper objects for the study of language” (Ibid.: 164).

Indigenous language and their living, performative, creative and transformative practices exceed linguistic registration and analysis since they mobilise and reinvent community filiations, affects, memories and ways of living. From this perspective, indigenous languages are conceived as living ecological bodies produced by complex articulations, and producers in turn of re-articulations of meanings, affects, filiations, territories, cosmologies, poetical forms, ethical engagements, social practices, creative resistance and political transformations. Languages are as material as the world (Ibid.: 52). Such an approach needs to engage with mapping rather than abstract descriptions, neutral registers, or copies – to use Deleuze and Guattari’s term (2008). Mapping indigenous languages involves not simply the knowledge of those languages, but also the practices and experiences of those who create and do things through those languages. Therefore, it is necessary to understand indigenous languages as practices, bringing attention to what is done with them.

Already in 1953, Wittgenstein had defied the notion of grammar as a universal structure or a mental capacity, arguing that grammar and meaning only came into place in their practice, within language games, when language came into life in the interaction between speakers (Wittgenstein 1953, cited in Harris 1988: 68; Virno 2005: 186; Baker and Hacker 2009: 52, 112, Forster 2004b: 163, Bloor 1997: 37).⁷⁹ A few years later, John Austin (1955) and John Searle (1969) reacted against the structural and abstract analysis of language that disregarded language use (*parole*) and highlighted the capacity of words and language to have performative effects through speech actions, which combined words and actions (Austin [1955] 1962). Wittgenstein’s, Austin’s and Searle’s interest in language practices defy the Chomskyan model of generative grammar as a cognitive universal capacity and its attendant “language innatism”.⁸⁰ The focus on language as practice goes beyond

⁷⁹ Wittgenstein developed this theory in his *Philosophical Investigations*, published in 1953.

⁸⁰ The theories of “language innatism” and “generative grammar” were developed by Chomsky in the 1950s. Unlike Chomsky, Wittgenstein does not perceive language as something naturally inherited by humans. Nor does he believe in the autonomy of a linguistic competence from which the universal grammar underlying all languages would arise (Virno 2005: 184-185).

instrumental communication, and is related to agreement in forms of life, concepts and cosmologies (Wittgenstein, cited in Baker and Hacker 2009: 250).

Language practices are heterogeneous multiplicities, forces in constant movement and change (Badiou 2005: 291; Lecerle 2002: 166; Dench and Evans 2006). Language as practice implies action, a (progressive) verb enacting language, *linguaging* (Maturana 2001). Language practices, and more specifically “conversations constitute and configure the world in which we live [...], [we] [...] are what we converse, this is how culture and history embody our present” (Ibid.: 66, my translation). Since indigenous language practices are plural and multi-vocal, their maps cannot have a single author; instead, multiple voices run through them and produce them (Ibid.). This means that revitalisation needs to engage with the creative and transformative practices of indigenous language as they pertain to memories, traditions and the rebuilding of community filiations, affects and ethics. This understanding of languages and revitalisation engages with their ecological articulations and challenges the segmentation of “subjects”, “objects”, “verbs”, “articles”, “adjectives”, “noun”, “signifier” and “signified” (Lecerle 1999, 2002; Deleuze and Guattari 2008).

Ecological and Decolonial Pragmatics: What Languages (Can) Do

The study of indigenous languages and programmes of revitalisation are often developed within sociolinguistic and ecolinguistic research. However, in Colombia, ecolinguistics remains marginal in most research on indigenous languages, with sociolinguistics dominating the field. Overall, within linguistics, there is a general recognition of the impact of non-linguistic or paralinguistic elements in relation to

Instead, Wittgenstein argues that grammar rules are neither hidden in the “unconscious mind” or the “encoded brain” (Baker and Hacker 2009: 52), nor universal to humankind. For Wittgenstein, grammar is not by nature cognitive; he believes, instead, that “language is a practice,” even a behaviour, but not a possession or ability (Ibid.: 160). Wittgenstein’s grammar is a grammar produced by the agreement on the “rules of language games” among speaker-players. In this sense grammar is thought of as relative, particular, historical, and local. While Saussure’s *langue* and Chomsky’s general grammar rely on arbitrariness, Wittgenstein’s grammar relies on convention, both agreement and disagreement (Baker and Hacker 2009).

language practices. Subdisciplines such as sociolinguistics and ecolinguistics have expanded the research from linguistic structures and forms towards the contexts in which languages are used. This has given more attention to the speakers and the communities in which the languages under study are spoken.

Sociolinguistics studies the way languages are socially used, how they interact with other languages and the ways in which more dominant languages influence and even overtake other languages according to constructed perceptions of prestige, respect or shame in regards to the social use of those languages.⁸¹ Additionally, ecolinguistics has proposed studying languages within their “linguistic landscape”, which includes the environmental, geographic, social and economic factors that affect language use and their prestige among speakers (Haugen 2001, Resinger 2008, Steffensen and Fill 2013, Romero Cruz 2015). Similarly, within literary studies, ecocriticism has considered the narratives of nature and the ways different populations relate to their landscapes (Dreese 2002; Wright 2010; Roos and Hunt 2010; El Dessouky 2011; De Loughrey and Handley 2011; Wenzel 2011).

While there is growing awareness of the existence of “surrounding” elements affecting language use, there is still not an open engagement with what language practices do – and, more importantly, what they *can* do – beyond communication and the production and exchange of meanings. This chapter acknowledges that languages are always language practices that produce, mobilise and rebuild filiations, affects, memories, ethics, territorialities, and social and political engagements. However, beyond this, it argues that community filiations, affects, knowledge practices, cosmologies and ethics are at the core of indigenous languages. Considering what indigenous language practices (can) do is what motivates this research to explore an alternative pragmatics. This is a pragmatics that goes beyond speech acts and actually engages with the creative resistance and healing capacity of

⁸¹ An interesting study in this area is Penelope Harvey’s work on how Aymara speakers in a small rural village in Bolivia had intentionally chosen the Spanish language to communicate within the community, even with other Aymara speakers, and yet “indulged” in their language when they were drunk and less ashamed of being judged (Harvey 1991, cited in Hornberger 1994: 225; Harvey 1992).

language practices within their communities. It considers the potential of language practices for rebuilding communities, filiations, affects and ethics.

More than a linguistic pragmatics, this chapter proposes an ecological and decolonial pragmatics. In order to serve its purpose, this pragmatics must go beyond the isolation, abstraction and fragmentation of language practices produced in the name of their linguistic study. This pragmatics must consider language practices in their deep ecological articulations and challenge the colonial epistemic violence that has served to define and colonise indigenous languages (Aparicio and Blaser 2008; Grisham 1991). Before delving into this ecological and decolonial pragmatics, it is important to analyse the differences between this alternative pragmatics and the existing sociolinguistic, ecological and pragmatic approaches involved in the study of indigenous languages and their revitalisation.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the Colombian linguist Pedro Marín Silva has already detected many of the limitations of the language revitalisation programmes in Colombia. While most of the attention has been focused on describing, documenting and producing archives of languages, there is still little research regarding the recovery of rituals through which practices of music, dance and orality have emerged anew (Marín Silva 2015). Overall, Marín Silva perceives a separation between words and the world, linguistic research and the actual practices of indigenous communities (ibid.). This concern regarding the separation of language and language practices has sparked significant debate within the fields of linguistics and the philosophy language.

Pioneering authors in the field such as Sapir (1884-1939), Whorf (1897-1941), Firth (1890-1960) and Hjelmslev (1899-1965) defended the idea that language not only affects the material world, but also has the capacity to create realities and shape experiences (Halliday 2001: 179, 190; Sapir 1921).⁸² Later, Austin defended the performative capacity of language to create realities, arguing that words actually do

⁸² Sapir argued that “any attempt to consider even the simplest element of culture as due solely to the influence of (natural) environment must be termed misleading” (Sapir [1912] 2001: 13).

things through speech acts (Austin [1955] 1962).⁸³ He warned about the lack of attention given in linguistics and language philosophy to the performative capacity of language and the naïve interest in considering language as an abstract or mental entity (Ibid.: 1). He likewise criticised the reductive limitation of language to the description of the world, and highlighted language’s capacity to shape the world (Ibid.).

Austin was one of the first to consider the way language relates to actions and performs actions (his theory of speech acts). More recently, the British linguist Michael Halliday has proposed an understanding of grammar as a “theory of experience” rooted in the actions we perform in the particular contexts we live in (Halliday 2001: 195). The shift from representation to performance has questioned the very possibility of language to “reflect” an objective, pre-existing reality that could be divorced from the *enactment* of language practices or speech acts (Howard-Malverde 1997: 10).⁸⁴ The performative, experiential perspectives have definitely rendered a more complex view of language. However, they still do not disclose the complex interrelation of language, speakers, their surrounding world, and their knowledge practices and ethics. Nor do they tackle the issue of epistemic and colonial violence.

The ecological turn that took place in the 1970s responded to structural models that isolated language from its “environment” by proposing a relational approach to language involving nature, culture, experiences, interactions, as well as sociological phenomena (Steffensen and Fill 2013: 1; Finke 1983, cited in Fill 2001: 45; Haugen 1972, cited in Steffensen and Fill 2013: 1).⁸⁵ In general, the ecological turn in

⁸³ In these lectures, Austin focuses on speech acts of contractual and transactional effect such as those taking place when someone marries somebody else or bets on something (Austin [1955] 1962: 7).

⁸⁴ This notion of enactment implies the participation of speakers and the actualisation of meaning in the “here and now”, as well as the playing out of experience (Howard-Malverde 1997: 11).

⁸⁵ Haugen, who is believed to be the founder of ecolinguistics, argued that language ecologies were just “like living species (which) evolve, grow, change, live, and die in relation to other languages and also in relation to their environment” (Haugen 1972, cited in Hornberger 2003: 320). In the nineteenth century, Humboldt often referred to nature as active or performative (Humboldt 1988, Roos and Hunt 2010: 12), a characterisation that has been central for the

linguistics reacted to formal schools of linguistics that followed the work of Saussure (on *langue*), Hjelmslev (on *the system*) and Chomsky (on *linguistic competence*), and isolated language to the point of losing “sight of what people actually do with language” (Fill and Mühlhäusser 2001: 1-2).

Over the past three decades, ecolinguistics has developed into different branches, including natural ecologies, symbolic ecologies, sociocultural ecologies, and cognitive ecologies. These subdisciplines have focused on the interactions between languages and territories, the co-existence of symbolic systems in common locations, relations between speakers and social structures, and cognitive capacities, respectively (Steffensen and Fill 2013: 6; Blackledge 2008: 27, cited in Steffensen and Fill 2013: 7; van Lier 2002, cited in Steffensen and Fill 2013: 7). Overall, these four perspectives have produced a complex understanding of language in relation to territorial, social and cultural particularities. They have also brought attention to the knowledge production of speakers and the influences and borrowings produced by the coexistence and interaction of speakers of different languages and from different communities.⁸⁶

Parallel to ecolinguistics, ecocriticism – a discipline that has emerged within literary studies – has analysed the narratives of nature and the environment (Glotfelty: XVIII cited in Wright 2010: 3).⁸⁷ In its earliest articulations, ecocriticism developed problematic primitivist narratives of deep and radical ecology, celebrating an unconstrained and untrimmed nature, “an unexploited world” (Smith 2011: 92-

conception of language ecologies and languages of territories. Unfortunately, many of the references to language and nature as living changing organisms have been driven by rather problematic evolutionary principles (Hornberger 2003: 320). Penycook has warned of the risks of ecolinguistics becoming an organismic science that naturalises linguistic changes and hides “the way in which political, economic and cultural forces cripple our mother tongues” (Steffensen 2007: 10).

⁸⁶ A particular articulation of these ecologies can be traced in the way the French-Tunisian linguist Claude Hagène refers to ecolinguistics as the study “of the ways in which ‘natural’ phenomena, like topographical characteristics, relations between humans, other organisms and cosmic phenomena, are integrated into languages and cultures” (Steffensen and Fill 2013: 4).

⁸⁷ Ecocriticism is often traced to studies on eighteenth and nineteenth century literature (considering authors such as Emerson, Wordsworth, Ruskin, Morris, and Carpenter) and US-based debates on environmentalism (Wright 2010: 4).

93). However, in more recent years, ecocriticism has dialogued with postcolonial studies, exploring postcolonial ecological ethics and aesthetics (Dreese 2002; Wright 2010; Roos and Hunt 2010; El Dessouky 2011; De Loughrey and Handley 2011).⁸⁸ It has also pursued the analysis of ecological racism and ecological coloniality and discussed the ways in which the destruction of nature enables the slow and eventual killing of colonised and racialised populations, as an “indirect” kind of “slow violence”, coining Nixon’s (2011) term (see also Nixon 2005, DeLoughrey and Handley 2011: 25, Wenzel 2011: 147, El Dessouky 2011: 259, Dreese 2002: 10, Roos and Hunt 2010: 3).

Certainly, these ecological perspectives offer complex approaches that acknowledge the colonial violence indigenous peoples have to face in regards to the destruction and overexploitation of their territories. Similarly, Serre’s “poetics of relation”, Glissant’s “aesthetics of the earth” and Spivak’s “theory of the planetary” have highlighted the intrusion of coloniality in territories, denouncing the latent connection between the protection and destruction of landscapes, ecologies and populations (De Loughrey and Handley 2011: 27, 28). Postcolonial ecocriticism has also brought attention to the work of writers in displacement and exile, and their “aesthetics of belonging through language and literature” (Ibid.: 30). Moreover, ecocriticism has reflected on ecological ethics grounded in the responsibility “for the effects of our actions on significant Others” which include not only humans, but which involve “the wider more-than-human world” (Smith 2011: xix).

This understanding of conviviality beyond anthropocentrism is central in indigenous language practices and the ethics they convey in their narratives and ecological articulations with the territory and ancestors (Reyes 2009). An ecological and decolonial pragmatics must concentrate on what people do with their languages, what language practices do in articulation with complex ecologies of affects, ethics, memories and community filiations. It also must acknowledge the creative resistance

⁸⁸ In response to the colonial environmental policies and the double standards of ecological discourses, postcolonial ecocriticism has engaged with an ecological ethics and aesthetics that go “beyond an ‘obsolete mysticism’” of nature and “homogenizing models of consumption, ‘exclusiveness’, and ‘territorial thought’” (De Loughrey and Handley 2011: 27).

(Derrida 1996b, Laclau 1996, Mouffe 1996), which can ultimately challenge coloniality.

Indigenous languages are embedded and deeply articulated in ways of life and practices of *being with* their communities, territories, ancestors, traditions, memories, cosmologies and knowledge practices (De la Cadena 2015). Generally, indigenous peoples approach their languages from a “language in life perspective,” as the Peruvian sociolinguist Luis Enrique López has observed (López 2008: 141). Language ecologies refer to these complex articulations of indigenous languages with affects and filiations, indigenous cosmologies and knowledge practices. These ecologies, as complex articulations, compose and re-compose in different ways, leaking through the limits arbitrarily imposed on the bodies of plants, animals, sounds, languages and peoples (Deleuze and Guattari 2008). As Deleuze has argued, in his revision of Spinoza’s philosophy, “a body can be anything: it can be an animal, a body of sounds, a mind or an idea; it can be a linguistic corpus, a social body, a collectivity. We call longitude of a body a set of relations of speed and slowness, of motion and rest, between [...] *unformed elements*” (Deleuze 1988, cited in Herzogenrath 2009: 7).⁸⁹ Similarly, Artenio Sánchez, from the Totoró people in Cauca, believes that indigenous peoples have:

a particular thought, and way of living, living spiritually [...] with their beliefs, deities, [...], decontextualizing history, respecting nature, as well as their sacred places, [with] the bow, the thunder, the sun, the moon, the animals [...], beliefs and myths [...], traditional medicine, signs in dreams, offerings, which are symbols of the Totoró people (Artenio Sánchez, cited in Gonzales Castaño 2013: 121-122, my translation).⁹⁰

⁸⁹ This ecological approach dialogues with what Herzogenrath describes as Deleuze’s conception of “the world as a multiplicity of recursively nested machinic aggregates that are, simultaneously, radically immanent to a plane of intensities|energetics although they are, simultaneously, radically separated from that plane in terms of their operational|informational registers” (Herzogenrath 2009: 10). Following Deleuze’s machinic perspectives, Herzogenrath argues that the environment needs to be thought as “a negotiation of dynamic arrangements of human *and* nonhuman stressors, *both* of which are informed and ‘intelligent’.” Environment and ecologies are, for him, “a pragmatic and site-specific tracing of infinitely complex ecological arrangements, and as such cannot rely either on a theory of cultural|linguistic constructivism or on a natural|biological determinism” (Ibid.: 4-5).

⁹⁰ He says this is also true for peasants and people from the cities.

The Peruvian sociolinguist and educator Luis Enrique López warns that understanding language in “life perspective” implies considering that languages are not only learnt in “their own specific social setting, but also in the political context in which these processes take place,” including the “life plans” or “platforms for the future” that are part of the indigenous political agenda in Latin America (López 2008: 141). It is therefore important to locate the “history of linguistics domination and oppression [*sic*] under which the indigenous languages function in the prevailing colonial organization of Latin American societies” (Ibid.). An ecological understanding of indigenous languages does not underestimate the clashes and asymmetries that accompany the definitions and compositions of indigenous languages, nor is it blind to the regimes of validation that operate in the scientific knowledge of linguists and the practical knowledge and cosmologies of indigenous peoples. Knowledge is located and articulated, but this articulation does not imply the absence of disagreement and conflict. In a similar vein, the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy argues that even when knowledge implies dialogue, “the end [or purpose] of dialogue is not to overcome itself in ‘consensus’” (Nancy 2000: 87).

Ecologies, understood as a multiplicity of bodies, knowledge practices and worlds are made of “diversity, and even disparity and opposition” (Ibid.: 185). Ecologies are not harmonious; they are traversed by asymmetric intrusions, ruptures and breaks. Indigenous languages have articulated with the Spanish language in different ways, creating words. However, these articulations are also asymmetrical and produce colonial displacements. For that reason, the theorisations of language developed and maintained by both colonialism and colonality need to be questioned (see Kroskrity 1999); likewise, the violence and silences in the conceptions of indigenous languages at the core of the current programmes of revitalisation must be acknowledged.

Language ecologies expand understandings of indigenous languages, writing and orality as practices embedded in indigenous cosmologies and daily life practices. This broader understanding of indigenous languages implies decentring Western academic and universalist perspectives of language and the privileged position of the language academic “experts”, and reincorporating the organic and experimental

expertise of indigenous speakers. This act of decentring inscribes itself in a wider project committed to rethinking knowledge production and knowledge validation in the framework of power-knowledge relations and forms of epistemic violence, or epistemicide. The following chapter, Chapter 4, proposes a (po)ethical understanding of indigenous language practices that considers their poetical, ethical and political dimensions, while following the poetical, ethical and political work and engagements of various indigenous poets and activists. This research acknowledges and dialogues with the creative resistance of indigenous poets and activists in Colombia who denounce and challenge colonial epistemic violence, while they participate in projects for healing and rebuilding their communities.

Transformative Potential of Indigenous Language Practices:

Violent Translocations and Double Translations

The languages of the colonised are not the only ones to disappear in the colonial encounter; the languages of the coloniser disappear also, to the extent that they are no longer the same. New Spanish languages came into life as “the progeny not only of the victors, but also of the vanquished” (Heller-Roazen 2008: 78). The transformation of languages does not – or at least not only – amount to their death, it also brings about the possibility of a new life. In this sense, languages remain “but only as another” (Ibid.: 127). What remains is what has changed. The vitality of indigenous languages rests in their multiplicity not in their homogeneity or standardisation. The transformative potential of languages surpasses the fear of corruption. Essentially, “every language, every culture is impure, made up of several tongues” (Venn 2006a: 163). What has never been pure does not need to be kept from impurity. Indigenous languages are flows of multiplicity and as such evade their reduction “to the sameness of Western assimilation” (Glissant cited in Britton 1999: 181-182). Just as importantly, they have a transformative potential that is expressed in translocations and double translations.

Instead of forcing indigenous languages into the model of systematic unity, an alternative conception of language should acknowledge the many dimensions, layers

and rhythms of languages and their incessant shifting (Heller-Roazen 2008: 87). If language is always the encounter of languages and the constant transformation of languages, the colonial encounter of languages needs to be rethought beyond the binary of “dominated” and “dominator”. This does not mean ignoring asymmetrical power relations. It only means considering colonial power relations and languages’ coloniality using a much more complex matrix of analysis – one that acknowledges that “coloniser” and “colonised” are not essential but relational categories that affect one another and the subject positions they circumscribe in turn. This is why, a decolonial project addresses both colonisers and colonised.

Languages are always experienced in relation to other languages, to the encounter which produces the overlapping of languages. The language we call “our own” is always in relation to *other* languages (Derrida 1996a, Sakai 1997: 59). Even when we attempt to identify something as one language, we are actually referring to a multiplicity of languages. Overall, language is always already plural and “essentially a site of hybridity” (Sakai 1991: 19).⁹¹ In addition, language is a site for the clash of forces, because this multiplicity is neither harmonious nor stable. Languages are constantly shifting according to the movement and the disequilibrium of asymmetrical forces (Lecerle 2002: 166). These clashing forces that disrupt languages lead to their transformation (Ibid.: 194). This transfigurations and transformation are their death, but also their possibility to be reborn anew (Derrida 1979, 1996a, Heller-Roazen 2008).

Although indigenous languages and indigenous peoples were produced or even “invented”, it is possible for new reinventions to take place. Indigenous languages are not produced once, but several times, as they are defined differently according to different conditions of possibility, configurations of knowledge and power, and ecological articulations of community filiations, affects, traditions, knowledge practices and ethics. To study indigenous languages in this sense is to study the

⁹¹ By hybrid and hybridity, I do not imply a harmonious result of the summation of two pure static units. Rather, as I explain later in this chapter, they refer to the multiplicity that is already present and continues to exist in the encounter and overlapping of different fluxes that produce conflict and tensions, which also lead to movement and transmutation. A language is never one language. It is more a multiplicity of language(s).

transformation of indigenous languages – their historically contingent becoming(s) and transmutations, rather than their original pure forms.

Acknowledging the translocations and transmutations produced by the encounter of languages implies considering the violence of translation. As a matter of fact, translation is hardly ever neutral, nor does it lead to the “symmetrical exchange between two languages” (Sakai 1997: 52). On the contrary, translation often serves and facilitates colonisation (Sakai 2012; Mignolo and Schiwy 2003). Translation implies the privileged subject position (of enunciation) of a translator, who is given the authority to render the unfamiliar, incomprehensible and unknowable into the familiar, comprehensible and knowable, but this is not necessarily a fair process (Sakai 1997: 26-27). During and after the Spanish Conquest, translation served the “consolidation of mercantile capitalism, slavery, and conversion to Christianity” as it redefined the continent as a new, empty world inhabited by non-human creatures that could be exploited without contradicting any of the Christian values (Mignolo and Schiwy 2003: 13).

The “West Indies”, the “Americas”, the “natives of America” – these are all constructions that were exclusively produced from the perspective of the “discoverer” (Zavala 1992: 1). This one-way translation served the purposes of conversion and assimilation, as well as the destruction of what was translated (Rafael 1993). This one-way translation is based on an epistemological paradigm of isolation and univocality, one that is founded on the idea of the superiority of a (supposedly unified) culture, religion and language over other cultures, religions and languages. This paradigm defends abyssal thought and knowledge, refusing to consider the “co-existence of the two sides” (Sousa Santos 2014: 22, my translation). Furthermore, this paradigm is at the core of European modernity, which is why coloniality and modernity are considered as two sides of the same coin for Latin America authors including Enrique Dussel, the Argentinian semiologist Walter Mignolo, and the Puerto Rican sociologist Ramón Grosfoguel. Dussel refers to this univocal paradigm as the *ego conquiro-ego cogito* that emerged in the context of the colonial invasion of America in the fifteenth century and was reinforced with the later invasion of Africa and Asia (Dussel 2014: 283-285).

This paradigm was defended by the ideas of purity and universality, which produced distinctions regarding what would be “purity of blood” and one singular “civilised language”, religion and knowledge owned by the Castilian Crown and the Catholic Church (Grosfoguel 2013b). This idea of purity and universality of blood and civilisation was used to justify the colonisation, violation and exploitation of America and its inhabitants. However, Spain was at the time already multiple, and the attempt to normalise and unify it through the expulsion of Jews and Muslims in Al-Andalus (today Andalucía) was parallel to the conquest of America (Ibid.). Coloniality is founded on the myth of the “universality” and “neutrality” of knowledge located in a no-place and enunciated by an anonymous “universal” subject of knowledge (Dussel 1999, 2000). This universal subject is the same Cartesian *ego conquiro-ego cogito* that has colonised-invented-produced peoples lacking culture (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries), history (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), development (twentieth century) and democracy (twenty-first century), and it has justified occupation and interventionism (Grosfoguel 2013b, 2014: 378).

Major constitutive elements of the coloniality of power are the racial classification and reclassification of the world's population (for which the concept of "culture" has been instrumental), and the development of the corresponding Eurocentric institutional structures (state apparatuses, universities, church) and epistemological perspectives to reinforce the global racial/ethnic hierarchy associated with such classification (Grosfoguel and Cervantes-Rodríguez 2002: XII).

The violent enactment of a paradigm of language and knowledge that pretends to be universal does not simply disregard, but aims to suppress, other forms of experiencing and approaching language. This paradigm limits the “valid” notions of language to a small community of experts validated by academia and a particular group of institutions of knowledge (see also Wallerstein 1997). In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, one-way translation played an important hand in the imposition of Christianity in America. It made possible language coloniality and epistemic violence, adapting indigenous language to a foreign model and producing the fragmentation and devaluation of local knowledge practices and cosmologies (Mignolo and Schiwy 2003: 15). Later, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the civilising project of the “White man” was conveniently translated and equated with

the values that humanity should pursue – a one-way translation of another sort, since it overlooked the validity of alternative values and ways of knowing.

In the twentieth century, translation made possible the imposition of the project of development followed by the acceptance of the “fight against terrorism” in twentieth-first century (Grosfoguel 2006: 64). In the former case, translation served to establish as desirable the industrial and extractive economic models for a group of agricultural countries which were negatively translated as “underdeveloped” countries in opposition to a selected group of industrial “developed countries” (Escobar 2011). Most recently, translation has permitted the labelling of entire societies as terrorists and enemies of democracy, justifying violent and indiscriminate military interventions in their territories. Overall, translation has produced concepts such as “savage”, “underdeveloped” and “terrorist” to qualify certain populations. These concepts serve to infantilise and even dehumanise them because they are perceived as incapable of adjusting to the prevailing models of civility, development, and democracy. By doing so, it has justified foreign interventionism as an instrument to “save civilisation”, “promote development” and “defend democracy” from today’s barbarisms and savagery (Grosfoguel 2006: 64).

Generally speaking, one-way translation has served domination based on the construction of hierarchical dichotomies producing a colonial difference.⁹² This has produced the division between languages of knowledge, science, valid knowledge and the other languages and knowledge practices, defined as insufficient and incapable of producing knowledge (Mignolo 2010). “Translation helped build the colonial difference between Western European languages (languages of the sciences, knowledge and the locus of enunciation) and the rest of the languages on the planet (languages of culture and religion and the locus of the enunciated)” (Mignolo and Schiwy 2003: 14-15). This translation machine continues to define one particularity

⁹² “‘Colonial difference’ is a concept introduced by [...] Chatterjee (1993) to account for the differential relations between India and the subsequent legacies of British colonialism” (Mignolo and Schiwy 2003: 14).

as universal and in doing so “annuls, displaces and segregates other particularities” and maintains colonial epistemic violence (Garcés 2007: 220).

One-way translation has created the conditions that enable the continued exploitation of indigenous traditions as exotic merchandise and folklore, while their knowledge practices, traditional medicine and the biodiversity of their territories biodiversity are expropriated and patented by private corporations. It has also helped to justify the destruction of indigenous territories and the constant military intimidation of any protest or resistance to these forms of exploitation (Sousa Santos 2014: 27; Garcés 2007: 229). Considering this panorama, it is necessary to challenge one-directional translation with double translations in which different languages and epistemologies meet one another and transform into something new.

A possible response against this abyssal, univocal, one-way translation machine is a post-abyssal epistemology from the south, an ecology of knowledge that confronts the mono-culture of modern science and acknowledges the plurality of heterogeneous knowledge practices outcast from the Western traditional academia (Sousa Santos 2014: 41). From this perspective, knowledge practices are multiple and heterological; they belong to the praxis of life and create the conditions for the existence of a world of multiplicity and multi-vocality (Sousa Santos 2014: 45; Zavala 1992: 3). Translation from this perspective is double-translation, meaning different sides and positions intervene in the translation, and as they meet, are transformed.

Subcomandante Marcos, from the Zapatista movement, has referred to this double-translation as a clash of languages, epistemologies, cosmologies and ways of living that has the potential to become an ethical-political-ontological-epistemological revolution (Marcos 1997, cited in Mignolo 2002: 8; 2003: 22, 23). As an identity, “Subcomandante Marcos” came to life in the encounter with indigenous cosmologies, knowledge practices and activisms. He died and was born anew as a collective “we”. Moreover, he started to speak a different language (in the broader sense), not simply translating Western Marxist knowledge to the indigenous peoples in order to liberate them. There was a double translation in which “the distinction between the knowledge (Marxism) and the subject to be known (the indigenous

community)” was effaced and transformed by the acknowledgment of indigenous epistemology (Mignolo 2002: 8):

We were not teaching anyone how to resist. We were becoming learners of the school of resistance of the people who have been resisting for more than five centuries. Those who came to save the indigenous communities were saved by them [...], we started to change our way of speaking, and the way we thought of ourselves and the place we had. (Subcomandante Marcos 2008, cited in García Rojas 2013: 28, 29, my translation).

In August 1996, in the framework of the Intercontinental Encounter in the Lacandon Forest, Major Ana María of the Zapatista movement addressed the audience by performing an act of double translation in which she referred to the “invisible” indigenous peoples as the people the “white” population did not want to see and whose languages they do not speak. She made those indigenous people (including herself) and their languages visible by twisting the syntax of Spanish and maintaining the Tojolabal’s syntax: “Behind our unspeakable name. Behind the ‘we’ that you see. Behind us, we are (at) you” (1997, cited in Mignolo and Schiwy 2003: 17).

Major Ana María chooses not to speak the “correct” Spanish of the “white”, and makes an intervention in Spanish with the Tojolabal language. She speaks as a Tojolabal speaker in Spanish, and she does not simply translate Tojolabal into Spanish, at least not in one direction. Instead of saying “we are behind you,” she said “Behind us we are (at) you” (*Detrás de nosotros estamos ustedes*, in the original in Spanish) (Ibid.). By doing so, she also transformed the dichotomy between “we” and “you”, indigenous and non-indigenous. “In the fracture produced by translation from Tojolabal to Spanish to English, the cosmologies of grammar highlight the dimensions of colonial difference” (Mignolo and Schiwy 2003: 18). In this sense, “translation becomes a “translanguaging” way of speaking, talking, and thinking in-between languages, as the Zapatistas have taught us” (Ibid.: 31).

Double-translation breaks the borders of languages and cultures, and in this sense is a process of translanguaging (Mignolo and Schiwy 2003) and transculturation (Ortiz 1983). It “works bi-directionally in the social life of things. It trans-lates objects that

transform modes of being and thinking while also transforming the [...] uses and life of the object” (Ortiz 1983, cited in Mignolo and Schiwy 2003: 21). It also facilitates the emergence of a “border space” (Anzaldúa 1970, 1987a). This border space is not a site of “happy hybridity”, but a site of epistemic and political confrontation that “rearticulates the colonial difference from a subaltern position,” making new ways of thinking possible (Moya 1997, cited in Mignolo and Schiwy 2003: 24, 25). “The [Zapatistas’] dictum ‘Because we are all equal we have the right to be different’ is the most concise and dear formula of the colonial difference as a place of translation/transculturation from a perspective of subalternity” (Mignolo and Schiwy 2003: 17).

Double-translations involve the translation of languages, as well as translations of knowledge, categories, symbolic universes, and ways of life (Sousa Santos 2010: 40). They defy language coloniality, its epistemic violence and the arrogant, univocal, abyssal discourses and knowledge practices through which it operates (Sousa Santos 2010: 39-40, 66, Grosfoguel 2014). Double-translations show how these models become inoperative within other languages and epistemologies. For example, the Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu argues that in the Akan language it is impossible to find equivalents to the Cartesian precept *cogito ergo sum* (Wiredu 1990, 1996, cited in Sousa Santos 2010: 41). Overall, double-translations acknowledge the impossibility of a general universal knowledge that explains all other knowledge practices, and the impossibility of “one language” that could comprehend all other languages (Sousa Santos 2010: 31, 118). It is on this ground that they demand the articulation of ecologies of knowledge (Ibid.: 67). This does not mean embracing an unlocated, abstract relativism so much as “[conceiving] universalism as a Western particularity” (Sousa Santos 2007: 113).

Hybridity: Articulations and Tensions In-Between

There have been important exercises of double translation in Latin America which have produced articulations and critical analyses of the disparity and tensions of the spaces in-between. The Cuban writer José Martí analyses the hybrid Latin America, a continent ruled by elites that persecute indigenous and African descendants with the intent of whitening America and imitating an idealised Europe (Martí [1981] 2005). The Brazilian poet Oswaldo de Andrade becomes a mestizo-hybrid cannibal-poet who devours and digests colonial imaginaries while discovering a new mixed identity in constant transformation (De Andrade 1991: 38, Sousa Santos 2007: 205).

The Cuban ethnomusicologist Fernando Ortiz (1881-1969) proposes the notion of transculturation, which acknowledges the clashes of a fragmented and divided Latin America that can produce creative *counterpoints* for challenging the violent legacies of colonisation (Ortiz 1940: 218). The feminist Chicana poet Gloria Anzaldúa embodies the polyphony, multi-vocality of Chicano language(s), unleashing her “wild tongue” to produce border thinking that challenges gender, language, identity, territorial, academic, popular binaries and frontiers (Anzaldúa 1987: 53, 209). Anzaldúa addresses her fellow companions, women of colour of the Global South who are simultaneously unnoticed and discriminated against:

Because white eyes do not want to know us, they do not bother to learn our language, the language which reflects us, our culture, our spirit. The schools we attended or didn't attend did not give us the skills for writing nor the confidence that we were correct in using our class and ethnic languages. I, for one, became adept at, and majored in, English to spite, to show up, the arrogant racist teachers who thought all Chicano children were dumb and dirty. And Spanish was not taught in grade school. And Spanish was not required in high school. And though now I write my poems in Spanish as well as English I feel the rip-off of my native tongue (Anzaldúa 1980: 26-27).

These four Latin American writers not only speak about hybridity and transculturation, they also live them while challenging oppression, discrimination, epistemic violence and coloniality. They speak plural languages and produce multi-vocal dialogues that involve them, but also the peoples surrounding them. Hybridity as multiplicity is an unresolved in-betweenness; it implies tension, as well as

movement and transformation (Virno 2004: 76, 78; Virno 2015). Hybridity opposes purity, although it has been instrumentalised to promote it. In the nineteenth and twentieth century hybridity was promoted in Latin America by a eugenicist discourse promoting whitening and Westernisation through a highly normalised process of interracial mixture (Rivera Cusicanqui 2010: 70). By contrast, in this research hybridity is considered as multiple, both in articulation and tension, and not as the dissolution of multiplicity in a unity.

It is worth pausing to consider the importance of hybridity as a concept in Latin American critical thought. The Argentinean anthropologist and philosopher, Néstor García Canclini elaborates on the notion of hybridity, defying the false opposition between local folklore and popular culture, on the one hand, and neoliberal modernity and global capitalism on the other (García-Canclini 2005). He shows the capitalist and neoliberal relocation of local folklore and popular cultural in the global markets, pointing out complex articulations of the local and the global, beyond the essentialising dichotomies (local vs global, local vs external). The Colombian anthropologist Eduardo Restrepo argues that the notion of hybridity developed by Canclini radicalises the critique of the essentialised conception of culture, which presupposes a direct correlation between “culture”, “place” and “people” (Restrepo 2007a: 299). Canclini conceives of cultures, peoples and places as fluxes and acknowledges complex encounters and interconnections (ibid.). Working in a similar vein, the Colombian social psychologist Juliana Flórez-Flórez argues that the idea of hybridity reconstructs the notions of “identity” and “ethnic struggles” and liberates them from a “standardised language” of relative homogeneity (2007: 250).

Indigenous subjectivities and indigenous languages are not isolated stable entities; they are multiplicities that can go through new localisations and transformations (Castro-Gómez 1996: 66, my translation). Notions of “indigenous” identity operate as unifying techniques that not only serve the purposes of the groups that identify themselves as an indigenous community, but also serve the purposes of the non-indigenous groups who see them as a rather uniform exteriority. Essentialisms are primarily abstract constructions that may serve the purpose of bringing together a group of people, despite their particular differences. In this sense, essentialisms can

be used strategically to invoke “to a strong identity politics” (Laclau 2007: 51). Subjectivity is plural and mobile (Hall 1996a: 3). This plurality and mobility make possible the articulation and transformation of subjectivities and enable them not simply to resist violence and coloniality, but to do it creatively, transforming the world.

A re-composition or “counterpoint” (Ortiz 1983) of languages emerges as various languages, voices and melodies converge and even clash in a new composition. The heteronomous subjectivity of the mother-infant dyad is not the convergence of two independent “unities”. Instead, the mother-to-be emerges as the infant-to-be emerges (Venn 2000: 42). They co-emerge, together – there is no mother without infant nor infant without mother – and yet they are not the same, they “are more than one but less than two” (Ibid., see also Irigaray 1979). When we refer to counterpoint, creolisation, hybridity and transculturation we must acknowledge the ongoing clashes of inequality and the possibility of both liberation and capture, and bear in mind that they are neither fixed nor stable states. As Venn explains:

The processes of creolisation, hybridisation, [and] transculturation [...], often take place in conflictual situations in which groups of unequal power and unequal access to the means of legitimisation of ways of being attempt to establish liveable spaces and identities without surrendering forms of constituting the community that preserves core elements of the original (or subaltern) cultures (Venn 2006a: 19).

Languages, including indigenous languages in Colombia, are not only multiple, but also conflictive; they inhabit the shifting tension that is in-between their articulations and compositions (Bhabha 1996). Indigenous speakers are intimately aware of this conflict in their language practices:

There is always a confrontation, which is called a borrowed language. There are words we say [in Spanish] because we probably don't have a word in Tikuna or because we want others to understand, so I say it in [Spanish] [...]. In simple words, like *azúcar* [sugar in English]. We say instead “sweet” in Tikuna *maikurai*, but we don't have a word for sugar, so we say “achucara”, which sounds like *azúcar*. That word *azúcar* is borrowed, it is not ours. We say *achucara*, for those who want to say it like that, otherwise *maikurai* which is ours (Mojica Pereira 2015, my translation).

Similarly, the Colombian linguist Héctor Ramírez says that, “due to the linguistic diversity of the Colombian Amazon, there are many influences among the languages of the region. In Tikuna, for instance, there are many words coming from the Yagua and Cocama languages” (Ramírez Cruz 2014: min. 15, my translation).⁹³ Anzaldúa talks about these changes and variations in language and their capacity to create new languages:

Chicano Spanish is a border tongue which develops naturally. Change, *evolución, enriquecimiento de palabras nuevas por invención o adopción* have created variants of Chicano Spanish, *un nuevo lenguaje. Un lenguaje que corresponde a un modo de vivir*. Chicano Spanish is not incorrect, it is a living language (Anzaldúa 1987: 77).

Hybridity and the spaces of tension in-between can produce new articulations. They have the potential to transform current forms of violence, but they can also reproduce and maintain inequality, creating a double-consciousness (Venn 2000: 62; Gilroy 1993, 2010). On the one hand, hybridity may reproduce the ideals of purity, universality, Westernisation and coloniality. This was the case of the *criollos* and their desire to occupy the place of the Spanish colonisers, “Whitening” themselves in order to catch up with what they perceived as modernity or development, so as to approximate the privileged position of the coloniser. On the other hand, hybridity has the potential to advance the embracing of mixture and creolisation. Hybridisations and transmutations are not decolonial exits per se, but they still convey that possibility. Hybridity is like the pharmakon, both poison and cure; we can only judge it according to its particular articulations (Venn 2000: 50).

⁹³ Since linguistics, despite the acknowledgement of variation, continues to centralise the “study of language” in the “abstract concept of language”, or at least in relation to that abstraction, creoles and creolisation tend to be considered as rare products of the encounter of two almost well-defined “language unities”: “Indigenous languages is a term that describes a group of languages spoken by a group of people. Dialect is a technical term that distinguishes among geographic varieties of a same language (American Spanish, Iberian Spanish) or historical varieties of a family of languages (Castilian, Gallegan, Portuguese). All contact can produce hybridity depending on the intensity, duration, and the kind of contact. Creoles and pidgins have emerged in specific kinds of contact, producing new languages in the Caribbean, Afro-Portuguese. There are still discussions whether mixed languages such as Spanglish and Portoñol, or the mid-language between Kichwa and Spanish, are new languages, creoles. I would say they are languages produced by contact, but in any case they are varieties which show hybridisations” (Ramírez Cruz 2014: min. 23, my translation).

Singular-Plural Oralities and Textualities:

Language Practices for Inscribing and Remaking Possible Worlds

As a mode of transcription and a recording tool, alphabetic writing is mechanic repetition – the repetition of the sound that presents itself as the sound of the speakers’ voice – but unlike the speakers’ voice, it is a dead repetition: “mechanically, without a living soul to sustain or attend it in its repetition, that is to say, without truth presenting itself anywhere” (Derrida 1981: 111). Alphabetic writing attempts to imitate and reduce the spoken word and its sounds and ultimately replace the voice of the speaker. Understanding writing as opposed to orality gives us an incomplete vision that inscribes writing in:

[...] the space of silence and in the silence of the space the living time of voice. It displaces its model, provides no image of it, violently wrests out of its element the animate interiority of speech. In so doing, writing estranges itself immensely from the truth of the thing itself, from the truth of speech, from the truth that is open to speech [...]. The silence of the pictorial or sculptural space is, as it were, normal. But this is no longer the case in the scriptural order, since writing gives itself as the image of speech. Writing thus more seriously denatures what it claims to imitate (Ibid.: 137).

Indigenous languages cannot simply be reduced to alphabetic writing, because they are written in the earth and sacred territory (Gómez 2000, cited in Ferreira 2007: 149); they are written, produced and actualised as they are experienced, practiced, remembered, and listened. To write in this sense is to inscribe, to produce a mark that continues to live as it is read and written anew (Derrida 1982: 316). This kind of writing is also a bond, a caring affiliation with the grandfather and grandmother as figures of wisdom and knowledge. When the children listen to them, they learn to listen; they also learn to speak, but more importantly they learn ways of living and ethics that are meaningful to their communities. The Tikuna nurse, Yénica Mojica Pereira, who lived more than six years away from her community while attending university and obtaining her degree, says that she felt she was losing her language (Mojica Pereira 2015). She missed speaking and listening to Tikuna language, but more importantly being there, living in the language with her community.

Indigenous languages need to be thought in a broader sense, beyond literacy and orality and the opposition between the two. By orienting his *Grammatology* around the *trace* – a changing, lived unit, yet empty and ungraspable – Derrida is challenging the Saussurian model of language, whose basic unit is the phoneme (Derrida 1997). The letters of alphabetic writing have neither meaning nor sound; hence they are completely arbitrary and divorced from the production of meaning or sound (Ibid.: 301). This abstract nature of phonetic writing reinforces the idea that this form of writing could be applied universally. On the basis of this definition of writing as merely phonetic and alphabetic, it has been said that some groups lacked writing and were therefore less civilised.

Who do you call illiterate?
Those who don't know how to read
books or nature?
The first ones and the others
know a little and a lot.
In the morning,
my *abuelo* was given a book:
He was told he knew nothing.

At night,
he was sitting in the fire,
turning in his hands
a coca leaf
and his lips were saying
what he saw in it
(Jamioy Juagibioy 2010: 179, "Ndosertanëng"
[Illiterate], my translation).

The Mexican historian José Rabasa has proposed expanding the idea of writing and literacy to indigenous textualities that do not oppose writing and orality. This expanded idea of writing acknowledges different practices – such as glyphs, corporeal painting, textiles, and pottery – and links them to oral narrative in rituals and storytelling practices (Rabasa 2008). "The concept of indigenous textualities enables us to conceptualize *fluidity* between a broad array of writing forms [...] and speech forms that might underlay the production of written texts or might elaborate further the recorded stories" (Ibid.: 51-52). Additionally, the concept of indigenous

textualities defines the act of inscribing the world and the body as a performing act, fluid and full of movement (Ibid.: 52).



As Katalina Castro evokes in the illustration above, Jamioy Juagibioy's poem "Ndosertanëng" (Illiterate) highlights the capacity of indigenous elders to read beyond letters and recognise the complex signs of nature and more specifically the powers and gifts of plants of knowledge such as coca, yage and tobacco. Jamioy Juagibioy's poem recalls the ceremonies in which words take shape and are embodied in the *abuelos* (elders) who read coca leaves and write in the wind as the words coming from the leaf get twisted and chewed in their mouths, then set free in the air for those who want to listen to them. These are the indigenous textualities to which Rabasa (2008) refers.

Derrida similarly conceives writing in a broad sense, as the inscription and the interweaving of signs (1997: 44, 62). He moves away from the phonologisation of alphabets, which were central to the consolidation of an ethnocentric understanding of the writing practices of other societies (Ibid.: 301).⁹⁴ All societies are "capable" of

⁹⁴ Derrida openly criticises Saussure's understanding of writing as a tool and the dependence of script on sound, which would be the foundation for a logo-centric and Westernised theory of language. He finds problematic Saussure's formalisation of "language as a system of signs" because it does not leave any room for understanding of languages outside the phonetic subordination of writing to speech (Derrida 1997: 30-35).

the practice of writing in general, understood as the practice “of producing [...] their proper names, and of bringing classificatory difference into play” — which means that there is no such thing as societies without writing (Ibid.: 109).⁹⁵ From this perspective, indigenous languages do not lack writing, and therefore do not need to be given it. They are capable of writing, inscribing the world with signs and meanings.

The Mapuche poet Elicura Chihuailaf talks about his work as a form of oraliture, a practice that straddles the border between orality and written literature, but also between the circularity of past and present times.⁹⁶ Elicura says that “oraliture is writing between the borders of orality, the borders of the elders’ thinking, and through them their ancestors. That is how I lived/listened, this is how I am living/listening: I tell myself, they tell me, they are telling me, they will tell me, they told me. All this rises from a circular conception of time: we are present because we are past (we have memory) and we will be future” (Chihuailaf 2005, cited in Sánchez Martínez 2010: 18, my translation).

The Colombian linguist María Emilia Montes Rodríguez also believes that “it is necessary to acknowledge the different forms of writing [coexisting in] indigenous languages” (Montes Rodríguez 2015: min. 10, my translation). This broader understanding should not be limited to accepting that there are already different alphabets circulating among indigenous peoples, but should explore other forms of non-alphabetic writing, including body painting, corporeal ornamentation, textile weaving, ritual dances and chants in which indigenous languages mobilise, create, produce and transmit knowledge practices.

⁹⁵ “By radically separating language from writing, by placing the latter below and outside, believing at least that it is possible to do so, by giving oneself the illusion of liberating linguistics from all involvement with written evidence, one thinks in fact to restore the status of authentic language, human and truly signifying language, to all languages practiced by *peoples whom one nevertheless continues to describe as ‘without writing’*” (Derrida 1997: 120, emphasis in the original).

⁹⁶ Edouard Glissant also uses the term “oraliture” to reconcile writing and orality while maintaining the textures of speech and collective voices in writing (Glissant 1989: 147, 245; Schabio 2013: 47; Low and Sarkar 2014: 114). The French linguist Claude Hagène, Glissant’s contemporary, suggested the term “orature” to refer to the archiving of knowledge in oral practices, establishing a parallel to literature (Hagène 1985, cited in Petrilli, Ponzio 2005: 417).

Final Considerations

The opposition between orality and writing is neither natural nor universal; rather, it is located and historical. Even in the sixteenth century, during the colonisation of America, the burning and breaking of codices, glyphs, statues and textiles was accompanied by a “proliferation of texts” produced by the coloniser-missionaries using iconic script, which “suggests not only that Spanish colonial authorities viewed pictorial texts as holding documentary evidence, but also that Indians valued and retained their forms of writing often in juxtaposition to alphabetized records of verbal performances” (Rabasa 2008: 51). Rabasa points out that “the use of alphabets did not exclude the practice of performing and producing texts in collective settings” (Ibid.: 53).⁹⁷ Orality and textuality work together, exceeding the limits that arbitrarily opposed writing and orality; they also articulate with painting, weaving and engraving practices today. Some indigenous communities still use “*lienzos, títulos*, and cartographic histories [that] provide scripts for ritual” (Ibid.: 52-53). This intertwining of practices produces an understanding of indigenous languages that goes beyond “the melancholy of a crushed rebellion” and creates “a sweet melancholy that gives place to mania, to the exhilaration, if not happiness, of crossing languages and forms of life” (Ibid.: 71).

Orality does not simply surrender to the text. Often, it questions the text and refuses to be normalised according to an abstract, artificial standard alphabet. Even if linguists appreciate certain expressions and words over others, certain graphemes over others, indigenous peoples and languages do not mould to “linguistic” expectations. Indigenous languages are alive; they create words and new expressions from the encounter of Spanish and indigenous languages. More importantly, indigenous language practices enable the recreation and rebuilding of memories, traditions, community filiations, affects, knowledge practices and ethics. The following chapter engages in a dialogical approach that focuses on the language

⁹⁷ Rabasa highlights the fact that in the “sixteenth – and seventeenth – century Mesoamerica texts were primarily read and performed in public rather than read in private” (2008: 53). He has also identified the intertwining of Amerindian un-normalised practices of alphabetic writing and pictographic forms (Ibid.).

practices of indigenous poets and activists. The chapter elaborates on the poetical, ethical and political dimensions of these practices; it also examines their creative resistance to coloniality and epistemic violence through the recreation and rebuilding of communities and their practices.

Chapter 4. (Po)ethical Paths towards Language Revitalisation and the Rebuilding of Community Filiations

We grow as trees, inside
the footsteps of our ancestors
We live, as spiders, in the weave
of our mother's retreat.
We love always at the edge of thirst.
We dream over there,
between *Kashii* (the Moon) and *Ka'l* (the Sun),
in the lands of the spirits.
We die as we were still alive.
(Apūshana 2010: 16, "Katta O'u-outaa"
[To live-To die], my translation).

Wayuu people define life as a circle, a continuum of life and death that never stops. This circle begins at the remote-invisible origin and then returns to it (Campos Umbarila 2010: 16.). Death and life are connected, as the threads of a spider's woven web are connected. Life returns to its point of departure, the lands of the spirits. Life continues after death and the ancestors who died remain connected with those who are born and grow up in the indigenous community. Death and life chase one another as the moon chases the sun; as the sun dies, the moon rises and when the moon leaves, the sun appears. The Wayuu poet Vito Apūshana narrates this life-death circle as dance and play, as "two celebrations that symbolize the ancient Universe and which actualise it in the current world" (Ibid.: 17, my translation). Dance and play are forms of learning performed by the "smiling apprentice of life" (Ibid., my translation). They also integrate and welcome the "eternal newcomers" (Ibid., my translation). Indigenous language practices are deeply connected to this understanding of life as a continuum, or a path. They grow and transform in this path, having a life of their own in connection to community filiations, affects, memories and ethics.

As this research argues, it is necessary to think indigenous language practices beyond linguistics and beyond models of communication. This means rethinking languages in relation to knowledge practices, community filiations, affects and ethics. This chapter proposes a (po)ethical understanding of indigenous language practices. This is a comprehensive understanding that acknowledges their poetical, ethical and political dimensions, as well as their capacity to rebuild and recreate community

filiations and ways of living. The chapter also explores the subversive potential of these (po)ethics – their ability to challenge coloniality while permitting the recreation of traditions and the coexistence of multi-vocal narrations. With this multi-vocality as its starting point, this chapter dialogues with different indigenous poets and their (po)ethical practices. Additionally, it discusses the specific motivations of these indigenous poets and activists, and considers how they have walked through their (po)ethics, revisiting the stories of their communities of origin and their families while creating new networks and alliances.

This fourth chapter opens with an analysis of the Uitoto people's notion of *rafue*, which expresses the Word that nourishes, connects, and empowers to heal and create. This analysis highlights the ethical obligation of the one who tells the *rafue*. This ethical obligation implies behaving according to the values of the stories of the origin and the narratives of the community that constitute the *rafue*. Doing so means not simply telling the *rafue*, but also materialising it in actions. Building on this analysis, the chapter then discusses the poetical, ethical and political dimensions of indigenous language practices and their (po)ethics.

As the conversation about (po)ethics progresses, it highlights the capacity of (po)ethical language practices to produce (po)ethical revitalisation and recreations of belonging and community filiations. Nonetheless, this conversation also contemplates the tensions and conflicts that take place within communities, challenging romantic idealisations. With this in mind, the chapter discusses how (po)ethical practices participate in contested spaces while challenging coloniality, epistemic violence and cultural appropriation. Finally, it considers the ways (po)ethical practices are embodied in memories and pains, and how they permit the rebuilding and even the creation of new filiations.

The Word that Nourishes, Connects and Empowers

The Uitoto people in the Colombian Amazon believe in a complex articulation of language, knowledge, nature, community and celebration. They refer to *rafue* as the articulation of word and thing which are understood as one entity, or “Word-Thing” (Urbina Rangel 2010c: 55, my translation). *Rafue* is also the “activity that transforms words into things” (Candre and Echeverri 2008: 28, my translation). Only the elder and wise leaders can tell the *rafue*, the Word of the Origin (Mora Púa 2010: 127). They are the ones who can use its power to heal, predict, invoke, or make things happen (Candre and Echeverri 2008: 28). *Rafue* is not gossip or vague words (*igai*) that tell unimportant stories (*bakaki*) (Mora Púa 2010: 127). On the contrary, *rafue* is knowledge and power. *Rafue* inhabits the plants of wisdom and facilitates memory and the accurate narration of the myth of origin. *Rafue* transforms in the mouth and becomes Word, Word of knowledge and power. It travels as it is pronounced to those who listen attentively. “This *rafue* is [...] inside the people who are interested in it. It is no one’s property. Those are the traditions [...] inherited from [the] ancestors” (Urbina Rangel 2010c: 55, my translation).

Rafue is food that nourishes the mind. The elders often call *rafue* the mixture of tobacco, coca and honey that they chew (*mambean*) as they speak the *rafue*.⁹⁸ In fact, *rafue* is a composite word in which the first particle, *raa*, means the thing that comes from power, while the second particle, *fue*, means “mouth” (Ibid., my translation). Therefore, *rafue* means “the being that is inside the mouth” and “the strong Word that comes from the mouth” (Urbina Rangel 2010b: 18, my translation). The “plants of wisdom” – coca, tobacco, yagé, to name but a few – are beings, and when they are chewed, smoked and imbibed, they transform. In the mouth of the

⁹⁸ *Mambear* is to chew coca leaves mixed with seashell lime. This lime is often kept in a *poporo* (hollow pear-shaped container), while the leaves are carried in a shoulder bag, or cross-shoulder bag weaved from different organic fibres. “The *Uitoto* and *Muinane* peoples consider the *Erythroxylum* coca plant a sacred plant, associated mainly with a type of knowledge expressed in words. The tongue is, symbolically, a coca leaf” (Urbina Rangel 2011: 200, my translation). In some communities only men of a certain age and wisdom can do this in the *mambeadero*, which literally means the place where the coca is chewed. In this *mambeadero*, the Word of origin is spoken; important discussions and decisions are also made regarding the community.

wise elders (*abuelos sabedores*), they transform into the Word; thus they start speaking.⁹⁹ They speak the “Word of knowledge” that will be later repeated by those who listened.¹⁰⁰ This transformation of the *rafue* takes place in the mouth and in the body that dances, painted and attired for the ceremonies.

Dancing is a way of learning, the *rafue* dance “teaches people about the power of creation of the Word” (Candre and Echeverri 2008: 29, my translation). Dancing is also the ultimate way of showing one’s knowledge, inherited from the ancestors (Mora Púa 2010: 120, my translation). Dancing is almost a test. Often, during the dances, there are some guessing games regarding the particular ritual they are dancing (Ibid.). The *rafue* dance “structures the life of the community according to major ritual circles” (Urbina Rangel 2010b: 40, my translation). The Uitoto people “live to dance and dance in order to live as true people” (Ibid., my translation). Most ceremonies and dances take place in the *maloca*, which is the place of knowledge.¹⁰¹ In the *maloca*, people share food, dance, perform rituals of initiation, passage and healing, as well as listen to elders. They also weave the *kirigai*, or basket of knowledge, which is associated with the capacity to be open and hold knowledge within oneself.

The basket of knowledge is woven in the ceremonies of *rafue*, while the *jaggagi* chants are sung in rituals of healing and guidance (Vivas Hurtado 2015: 115). The

⁹⁹ The *abuelo sabedor* is the grandfather, the wise guardian who takes care of the family and the community. The *abuelo* (grandfather) and *abuela* (grandmother) teach the younger generations the myths of origin of the community, the traditional weaving, pottery, chants, dances and rituals, as well as facial and body painting and adornment. They also teach words of the indigenous language(s) of the community and correct intonation and rhythm. In general, age is associated with “maturity and knowledge” (Mora Púa 2010: 127).

¹⁰⁰ Learning is only possible by listening to the elders whose Word, as *rafue*, fills the *canasto* (basket) of the children (Candre and Echeverri 2008: 3) who sit with their legs crossed forming a basket with their bodies, becoming an open recipient to knowledge, to the Word, to *rafue* (Urbina Rangel 1994).

¹⁰¹ The *maloca* is a traditional house. It symbolises the body that is alive and is related to the “original Mother whose force created the Father and then the Son who created the world with his Word, creating things by naming them” (Mora Púa 2010: 121, my translation). Accordingly, the *maloca* is built under the supervision of the wise elders who know this body and understand the difficult task of recreating in the *maloca* “the cosmic movement that originated all that exists” (Ibid, my translation).

jaggagi chants are also woven with these multiple voices, forming the “thread and breath of the ancestors” (Ibid.: 115, 116, my translation). The *jaggagi* along with the *kirigai* are connected by the thread of the community (Ibid.: 117, 118, my translation). Words-chants-plants-threads and dances-bodies-territories-ancestors form a complex body of ecological articulations with no hierarchies or sense of ownership.

Indigenous language practices are intertwined with knowledge practices and traditions where dance and play come to life. Recall Deleuze: “language is in play and at play” (Deleuze, cited in Lecerclé 2002: 29). In his poem “Binÿbe oboyejuayeng mondmën” (We are Wind Dancers), the Camëntsá poet Hugo Jamioy Juagibioy says that the words of the dancing wind are poetry that feeds the people from one generation to another.¹⁰² Poetry is in this sense the “Word of knowledge”, learnt from the elders, actualised in the dance and the ways of living of those who learnt from elders’ teachings. “Poetry is the speaking wind traversing the ancient footsteps” (Jamioy Juagibioy 2010: 61, my translation).

The land is also a teacher, highly appreciated by the communities. In the poem “Fshantsiñ” (In the Land), Jamioy Juagibioy says: “it is not that I am forcing my child to do forced labour in the crops, I am simply teaching him, from an early age, to cuddle his mother” (2010: 37). The land cannot be owned. Similarly, animals and plants are to be respected. However, this does not imply the erasure of all distinctions. It would be a mistake to presume that indigenous peoples “feel they are not different from animals or plants” (Urbina 2015: min. 47, my translation). They create bridges that allow them to place themselves in the position of other beings. This is how, without renouncing their being as humans, they add to their point of view, the point of view of other beings, in order to have a multiple “perspective of reality that is very useful when handling problems” (Ibid., my translation). Similarly, Rocha Vivas explains that

¹⁰² The Camëntsá people call themselves *Camuentsa Cabëng Camëntsá Biya*, though the short form Camëntsá is commonly used among them, as well as by other indigenous peoples and non-indigenous peoples referring to them.

There are all kinds of progressions, and only when you build the *maloca*, do the dances, rituals, and have a complex symbolic apparatus, then you are real people, [...] but you don't break up the connection to the animals, you can come back to them and learn with them through the rituals (Rocha Vivas 2015: min. 24, my translation).

Anthropologists of the school of perspectivism, such as Philippe Descola and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, do not support the universalisation of the opposition between nature and humanity; they show how some peoples live in a horizon where this contraposition does not exist (Viveiros de Castro 2004, Descola 2013, Urbina Rángel 2015). Nature as the enemy of civilisation that needs to be conquered and dominated is a particular Western perspective (Grosfoguel 2016b).

For many indigenous peoples, it is possible and necessary to establish a relationship of filiation and care with nature. The studies of the Colombian philosopher Fernando Urbina Rángel have described these complex interrelations in the Uitoto traditions. Glyphs in caves and rocks in Caquetá represent a man-snake-eagle that is also present in the Uitoto stories of origin (Urbina Rángel 2004). Many of these stories of origin refer to the possible dialogues between humans and other beings, as well as ongoing processes of humanisation.

Urbina Rángel recalls the story that tells how the Uitoto people had a tail that was cut from their body and then found their language to tell stories (2010a, 2015). They became Uitoto people when they learnt their language to tell stories (2011). Only then did they have access to *rafue*. They also were given a "moral obligation" to materialise the Word and "make it happen" (Urbina Rángel 2015: min. 23, my translation). Overall, *rafue* nourishes, connects and empowers to heal and create. The (po)ethical language practices of contemporary indigenous poets and activists follow those principles in their poetical, ethical and political dimensions.

(Po)ethics as Poetical, Ethical and Political

Indigenous language practices involve an ethical and political aesthetic; their beauty is not simply in the beauty of the words, but more importantly, in the beauty of thinking and acting according to a set of values. In his poem “Botamán cochjenojuabó” (Beautifully you must think), Jamioy Juagibioy says: “Beautifully you must think, then beautifully you must speak, now, right now, beautifully you must do” (Jamioy Juagibioy 2010: 59, my translation). Speaking beautifully and acting beautifully implies embodying the beliefs, teachings, traditions and values of one’s people. Indigenous language practices carry a profound ethics, which is “an integral vision that does not place itself over other living beings, but it takes place under the cosmos’ cape [...] in which life manifests” in different forms and bodies (Mora Púa 2010: 146).

Indigenous language practices and ethics are profoundly connected. They convey the teachings of the ancestors “in a permanent fabric of coherent meanings of the reality, in function and balance of the mother’s body” (Restrepo 2002, cited in Zapata Torres 2007: 1). Jamioy Juagibioy explains that he writes poetry according to what he learnt from the elders. Indigenous language practices are shaped by affects and filiations to the elders who are figures of caring wisdom and knowledge. The knowledge practices that they embody and transmit are not meant to be understood as abstract, universal and owned by a particular individual. On the contrary, they are plural knowledge practices materialised and embodied in territories and ways of being.

When children listen to the elders’ stories and incorporate their knowledge, they learn how to speak beautifully, and most importantly, how to act beautifully. Learning the language of the community is, in this sense, learning how to live in the community. As the Inga poet Pedro Ortiz remarks: “living poetically is much more important than writing poetry” (Ortiz 2015: min. 7, my translation). When the Yanakuna poet Freddy Chikangana is asked about the relation between his poetry and ethics, he argues that his poetry is not simply a literary genre, but an expression of ethics (Chikangana 2016). “Doing poetry is a way of living with a certain calm, even

during the most difficult times” (Ibid., my translation). For him, poetry is a way to interrogate oneself and search “the guidance of the [ancestors] regarding the immense darkness that force us every time to walk cautiously, and about the responsibility we have towards our mother earth” (Chikangana n.d., *cited in* Festival de Poesía de Medellín 2015: 1, my translation).

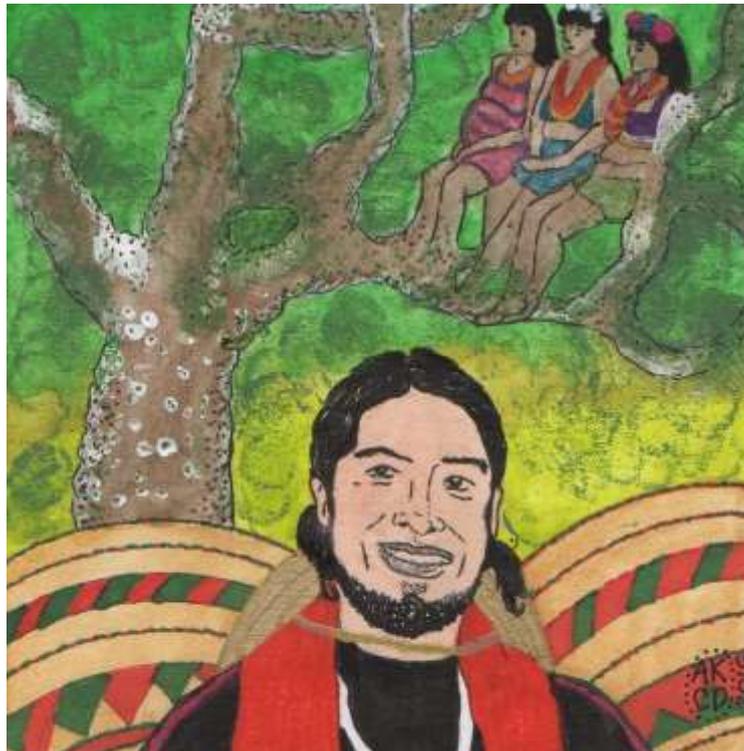
The Misak poet Edgar Velasco Tumiña says that his poetry is informed by the stories of origin of his community, as well as the teachings of his ancestors and family (Velasco Tumiña 2015). He believes that beautiful words are to be found in the stories he once heard in his community and also outside of it (Ibid.). While he recognises that he has a particular voice as a poet, he also attributes his poetry to the community. Velasco Tumiña engages with the Misak communities in Cauca, but he is also an active participant of national organisations such as Autoridades Ancestrales, Gobierno Mayor (Ancestral Authorities, Major Government) and Comisión Étnica para la Paz y la Defensa de los Derechos Territoriales (Ethnic Commission for Peace and the Defence of Territorial Rights). He refers to his role in these two organisations as poetic and political.

Velasco Tumiña has never published his poetry, but he believes he is always doing poetry because living, sharing and telling stories is already poetry (Ibid.). He believes indigenous languages and poetics are not reduced to words, written or spoken, because they also include the teachings that come through dreams, memories, music, dancing, farming in the crops. As he explains, for his people “everything has language and spirit,” and all languages and beings are “complementary” (Ibid.). They are all part of the languages of the territory and the language of the community, holding the communities together (Ibid.).

Velasco Tumiña has worked with many indigenous communities that have been persecuted, displaced and abused by legal and illegal military groups for years. He believes this work is poetic because when he visits these communities the first thing he does is listen to the people, to their struggles but also their stories of origin (Ibid.). Velasco Tumiña’s work is a (po)ethical practice that involves poetics, ethics, and politics. This (po)ethical practice consists of the narration and exchange of stories,

memories and ways of living and resisting. It also includes listening and communicating through different languages, voices, cultures and experiences. In the “lived word”, staying true to one’s word, being direct, honest and loyal when speaking, is one of the most important values (Rocha Vivas 2012). There is a responsibility in narrating and being a good listener. As Velasco Tumiña states:

Listening is very important, and it is learnt since you are a child. Elders can't be interrupted while they are speaking [...]. As I grew up I became more aware of the importance of listening and the stories I was given. I can tell new stories departing from those stories [...], and [I am aware] of my responsibility in telling those stories in this context [outside the community, in my poetry] because these stories are also political (Velasco Tumiña 2015, min. 48, my translation).



In the above illustration by Katalina Castro, Velasco Tumiña is placed in his community, wearing his traditional clothes, surrounded by young women of his community, with whom he works. As he explains, he is both a poet and activist and these two missions are not only complementary but also intertwined one with the other. Writing poetry is a way for him to place himself, the stories of his community and the stories he has learnt while working in other communities (Velasco Tumiña 2015). He recognises in himself the multiple voices and stories of others, which he carries on his shoulders whenever he is working in the name of indigenous peoples’ rights and dignity.

Speaking just for the sake of speaking and accumulating knowledge just for the sake of having that knowledge is not appreciated among the Minika people either (Vivas Hurtado 2015: 156). For the Minika people, the *aima* is a wise person “who must be composed, modest, generous, respectful, sweet, draw strength from the wisdom of the spouse and take into account the considerations of the community” (Ibid.: 155, my translation). Listening and telling stories demands a particular attitude; it is also a way to connect generations, reproduce and recreate traditions and provide guidance. (Po)ethical practices require the skill to listen and tell stories in a way that facilitates healing, activates memories, traditions and cosmologies, strengthens affects, and community filiations, and enables creative resistance through beautiful and strong words, but also through beautiful and strong actions.

The poet and professor of indigenous literature Selnich Vivas Hurtado argues that he has been transfigured by the (po)ethics of the Minika people through an encounter which he describes as a “boundless” “vital experience” (2015: 75). He also claims that it is impossible for letters to capture the connection that exists between poetry and the sense of life and the world (Ibid.). He refers to the poetical living of the Minika people as *pensamiento poetológico* (poetologic thought) that involves the spiritual practices of well-being (Ibid.). The Minika people have deep reflections regarding the existence of living beings; their “living well” meets their hope of conserving their bond with the world in its totality (Ibid.: 164). Dancing, singing and narrating are forms of keeping this bond (Ibid.: 162).

When Velasco Tumiña refers to poetics, he is implying an ethics – a form of life that is “capable of dialoguing with other knowledge practices” (Velasco Tumiña 2015: min. 18, my translation). These (po)ethics are usually transmitted orally and recreated in poetry. They aim not only to “conserve” narratives and traditions but to allow them to dialogue with other voices in other contexts, indigenous and non-indigenous. Thus, (po)ethical language practices cannot be reduced to literacy or literary genres. They are poetical, ethical and political practices that recreate and actualise traditions, memories, affects and enable healing and creative resistance. Ultimately, they produce (po)ethical revitalisations and recreations of belonging and community filiations.

(Po)ethical Revitalisations and Recreations of Belonging and Community Filiations

Indigenous (po)ethical language practices enable the recreation of traditions, community filiations and affects. They make possible (po)ethical revitalisations that go beyond linguistic documentation and standardisation. They facilitate the rebuilding of communities, their ethics and ways of being. *Oraliture*, the *archeology of the word* and the (po)ethical practices of indigenous poets have facilitated the rediscovery of *strong* words and languages, allowing indigenous peoples to rename themselves and their territories and create their identities anew. In Colombia these (po)ethical revitalisations have been led by indigenous poets who have developed methodological approaches in dialogue with other indigenous poets in Latin America and other regions of the Global South.

Many of these indigenous poets describe their work as in-between orality and literature (oraliture). They also say that their work straddles the border between past and present times, where the voices of ancestors and elders meet the voices of younger poets and narrators. From this perspective, oraliture is a particular practice of listening, living and narrating. As Chihuailaf Nahuelpan explains, oraliture exists

[In] the borders of the *thinking*, and through them their ancestors. That is how I lived/listened, this is how I am living/listening: I tell myself, they tell me, they are telling me, they will tell me, they told me. All this rises from a circular conception of time: we are present because we are past (we have memory) and we will be future (Chihuailaf Nahuelpan 2005, cited in Sánchez Martínez 2010: 18, my translation).

The Yanakuna poet Fredy Chikangana has also adopted, along with others, the term “oraliture” to describe his work and to show that poetry is not only a literary activity, but an ethical and a political way of living beautifully with the communities. In 1997, Chikangana published an article entitled “The Oraliture” (“La oralitura”) in the Colombian newspaper *El Espectador*. In this article, Chikangana reviews an anthology of indigenous poetry and narrative emerging in the continent; he also explores the term “oraliture” in relation to his experience in the South America of Writers in Indigenous Languages workshop that took place in Chile and where he met Elicura Chihuailaf (Chikangana 1997, cited in Rocha Vivas 2013: 85).

When Chikangana thinks back to his 1997 article, he remembers how he and Chihuailaf found oraliture to be a very powerful concept because it conveys the idea that they are not just poets, writers or producers of literature, in the Western academic sense, but that they and their poetry are a bridge mediating between the oral and an emergent writing and composition (Chikangana 2016). Chikangana had long been interested in the narratives he had heard from the elders in his community, and soon found himself creating other narratives through his oraliture. His poetry has facilitated the circulation of the “spoken word”, and has awakened the “memories of the elders,” rescuing their stories from oblivion (Chikangana 2015, cited in Ceballos Ramírez 2015: 92, my translation).

Made of corn are my verses,
and of water my essence.
I sing today as before others sang
as strong seed eluding death
(Chikangana 2010: 54, “Takimananta pachakuna”
[Verses of the land], my translation).

In Chikangana’s poems, there are constant references to the land and the sowing of seeds. He even refers to his poetry as verses of the land where seeds elude death and flourish in new lives. Through his poetry, stories and voices once considered to have disappeared come back revitalised. Through his (po)ethics, Chikangana finds a “a way of remaining calm before all the madness and barbarity, all the injustices” (Chikangana 2016, my translation). This strength, this calm in dealing with violence, is something he does not want to keep only for himself or his community; instead, he wants to share it:

I write to plant words in the mother earth with the only purpose of reaching awaken hearts and making them vibrate. [...] I write because the snake of the Yanakuna river inhabits me, along with the colourful birds that touch me with their mystery, like the songs of the elders near the fire, as I hear the questions that someone asks me from the heart in any corner of this Earth (Chikangana n.d., cited in Festival de Poesía de Medellín 2015: 1, my translation).

In an interview for the magazine of the Festival de Poesía de Medellín, Chikangana explains that his oraliture emerges from “the memory of the origin” which is not simply “the nostalgia for the indigenous past, but a way of naming the magic

elements hidden in the space of life, dreams, hopes and the constant struggle” of his people (Ibid, my translation). He sings from the sacred spaces he has inhabited – “the land, the *chagra* (crops), the house, the fire, the mountain, the rivers, the wind’s whistle” – as well as the intersections of “the rural and the urban which [indigenous peoples] have learnt to carry with them” (Ibid, my translation).

In his poems or songs, as he often describes them, he narrates how he has been touched by the stories of his people, and with his words been able to touch other people in turn – not only inside his community, but also beyond it. However, he feels conflicted about not having access to the language of his ancestors and being forced to use Spanish – a “borrowed verb” – to tell the memories and dreams that inhabit him and his people.

I am a singer in this land,
and I search for words in the lake that goes through me,
I also chase silences in the streets,
and lost looks in the bodies it touches.
I speak with the fireflies,
I am the farmer with no land,
who makes gardens that smell like fruits,
I am the one who holds the seed of dreams
to plant it in the furrow of the human heart
(Chikangana 2010: 106, “Nuqa taki”
[I am a singer], my translation).

In his poem “Nuqa taki” (I am a singer), Chikangana expresses his calling to sing, to tell stories. This calling is like a lake, he says. However, despite the depth and strength of its waters, something is lacking for him. As a farmer with no land, he has had to recover his land along with its meanings and words. In a certain way, Chikangana has had to transform himself, mend the broken body of a singer with no verb. At first, he composed his poems or chants in Spanish, but he decided not to circulate them or to publish them (Chikangana 2016). He needed to find his language and tell stories through this language.

Chikangana grew up in the *resguardo* of Río Blanco (Yurak Mayu, in Kichwa) in Cauca, where the Kichwa language was no longer spoken. Born in the 1960s, Chikangana witnessed the struggles for the land and the autonomy of his community

in the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁰³ Keen to engage with his community's struggles, he travelled to the city of Bogota where he pursued studies in anthropology. When he finished his studies in 1995, he returned to his community and decided to embark on a dialogue with the other communities of Valle del Cauca. He started researching the linguistic and cultural connections he had perceived "between his community and the people who wander between cities, having similar accents and using similar words to him, but who [were] not from Río Blanco" (Ceballos Ramírez 2015: 78, my translation).¹⁰⁴

Chikangana continued exploring the Kichwa language in the Andean countries of Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia. He lived in Cuzco and Cochabamba, where he learnt the language by listening to the stories of the communities that welcomed him as a member of the big family (Chikangana 2016). This is how he found himself as a Yanakuna and *archaeologist of the word*, as he describes himself (as someone who navigates through the oral narratives and the spoken words of the peoples, digging into the memories and creating new stories in his poetry). Having found his language, he can effectively plant the "seed of dreams" of his oraliture in the hearts of those who listen to his stories and his songs (Chikangana 2010: 106, "Nuqa taki", my translation). In his poem "Quechua es mi corazón" (Kichwa is my heart), Chikangana tells this process of visceral transformation, as he rebuilds himself by finding and creating his language:

¹⁰³ During Spanish colonial rule and after the achievement of Independence, indigenous peoples were excluded from participating in the national project and prevented from ruling and over themselves and their territories. Indigenous peoples were not considered as citizens in the later Constitutions; only since 1991 has there been an about-face in the acknowledgment of their civil rights, though these have been constantly violated (Espinosa 2007a: 278).

¹⁰⁴ One of Chikangana's first publications appeared in *Antología de Literatura Indígena de América*, in Chile in 1998 (Festival de Poesía de Medellín 2015: 1). He has also published in various Colombian and international reviews and newspapers and participated in continental encounters and national events for writers in indigenous languages in Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela, Chile, Ecuador and Peru (Ibid.).

Kichwa is my heart
I have in my body
the song of the birds announcing the rain. [...]

Kichwa is the morning mist,
and the voice of our dead ancestors.

Kichwa is the heart
agitated among flutes and drums,
in the cry of the millenarian time,
smelling like *kiñiw* and roasted corn,
where we still say: our hands,
our bodies, our voice,
our music, our resistance.

Kichwa is the mother land
to whom we belong,
who gives shelter to the placenta,
and gives birth to us in the world,
in a *minga* of struggles and never ending moons.¹⁰⁵
(Chikangana 2010, cited in
Ceballos Ramírez 2015: 48-50, my translation).

In this poem, Kichwa is not described simply as a language determined by a certain vocabulary, phonetics or grammar rules. Instead, Kichwa is felt in the hands and in bodies; it even breathes through the voice of the poet, who sings in Kichwa but who also acknowledges his people through Kichwa, their common origin being rooted in the motherland and a present of collective struggle in the *minga* for their lands. Through the Kichwa language, Chikangana is born again. His community has been buried under the *maloca* as it is tradition, the placenta inside the motherland (Ceballos Ramírez 2015). He is born again with a Kichwa name, *Wiñay Malki*, meaning the root that remains in time (Chikangana 2016).

Naming himself, his territory and his life in the community in Kichwa is the path of becoming that he chooses for himself and his Yanakuna people. In this, way through

¹⁰⁵ *Kiñiw* is the Kichwa name for quinoa, a cereal from the Andes that is central in the diet of the Yanakuna people and other indigenous communities in Peru, Bolivia and Chile (Ceballos Ramírez 2015: 49). *Minga* in this context refers to a collective gathering for carrying out tasks such as building houses or discussing and solving central issues for the community; it also refers to the mobilisation of peoples against the dispossession of their lands by private landowners, national companies such as the sugar cane plantations of Incauca, and mining multinationals and oil companies expanding their borders for exploitation purposes.

Kichwa, he names himself and “renames his community” (Ceballos Ramírez 2015: 50). He becomes *Yana*, the Kichwa word for the singular member of a community; and his community becomes *Yanakuna*, the collective of those singularities, as *Kuna* in Kichwa expresses the idea of community (Ibid.: 48). Chikangana decided he would first translate all his previous poetry written in Spanish into Kichwa, and he now composes his poetry in Kichwa first (Chikangana 2016). Then, he translates it into other languages to share it with those who are interested and want to feel his words (Ibid.).

Chikangana, *Wiñay Malki*, undertook a quest that he calls *archaeology of the word*. This quest consists, he explains, in a constant dialogue with the elders, not only of the Yanakuna people, but also of other peoples, speakers of Kichwa in Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia. A “dialogue that sets the landscape for a memory journey” (Ibid, my translation). As a poet/singer, Chikangana composes new songs, new stories that straddle the border between oral traditions and his writings. These songs are deeply interwoven with the territory, which Chikangana describes as a territory that is hidden within each “I”. Each Yanakuna singular individual forms the plurality of the Yanakuna people (Chikangana 995: 19, my translation).

This territory is not only the background of the community’s life, is not simply the geographical borders of a particular settlement; for the most part, Chikangana explains, the territory is a major source of learning for the formation of the “Yanakuna self”, as it is the surrounding material symbolic nature and the mythical beings that move around that territory (Ibid.). The Yanakuna people, he adds, are mainly those who walk through their territory and construct a community of care and support: “Yanakuna *Mitmaqkuna* means people who help each other in the darkness” (Ibid.). *Mitmaq* means walker (Ceballos Ramírez 2015: 70, my translation).

Chikangana’s oraliture comes from his archaeological excavations of the memories and words of the elders (Ibid.). This oraliture creates bridges that go back and forth. As he explains, “many of my poems are currently used in the ceremonies within my community” (Chikangana 2012, cited in Ceballos Ramírez 2015: 81). Chikangana has initiated and actively participated in regional workshops in Cauca,

such as “Recovery of our language,” “Songs of our people,” “Vindications of the word and the coca leaf,” and “Orality and resistance from the indigenous communities in Cauca.” He also founded the group “Yanamauta: Yanakuna knowledge practices” (Festival de Poesía de Medellín 2015: 1, my translation).

In his dissertation for obtaining a Bachelor’s degree in anthropology, submitted in 1995, Chikangana was already interested in navigating the search of memories for the Yanakuna people from orality, starting from his particular experiences as an “‘I’ who can be any Yanakuna child, any Yanakuna of the land, or any Yanakuna migrant” (Chikangana 1995: cited in Ceballos Ramírez 2015: 66, my translation). He conceived the plurality of the “I”, which is also “someone else”, someone who share with him life experiences, communal filiations, memories. The “I” (of Chikangana) is not an individual; it is also the “other”. This other is the Yanakuna brother who had to live a similar world, “[...] between the historical repression and vindication, and I connected to others” (Ibid., my translation). Overall, Chikangana believes that poetry “builds bridges and continues to offer new elements to the oral narrations” (Chikangana 2016: min. 17, my translation).

In dialogue with the elders, Chikangana composes and sings his poems to his community where these poems are interwoven with the voices of the elders in the collective narratives that tell and seek their origins, and draw their presents and futures (Ibid.: min. 19). The traditions of the community are in this way created anew and the forms colonised by the Christian values and narratives are challenged (Ibid.: min. 23). With his archaeology of the word, Chikangana excavates digs for lost memories to find and create new memories, new traditions that bring together his community while at the same time bringing his community in himself in communion with other communities.

Chikangana’s poetry is woven with teachings, life experiences and memories passed from generation to generation to enable life in the community (Ibid.). “My voice,” he says, “is not just my voice, but it is also the voice of the elders guiding with the Word in the arts of living well” (Ibid.: min. 22, my translation). Chikangana acknowledges the multi-vocality of his poetry, but he also acknowledges the plural

universality of poetry to enable a global dialogue around the common worries of peoples and communities regarding displacement and dispossession (Ibid.). His poetry is therefore not just local, but also universal. “It builds bridges [...], allows poets to look to one another,” to feel their songs, even when they are often “singing in different languages” and yet “singing the same” memories of the elders and the rich elements of everyday life (Ibid.: min. 25, my translation).

Indigenous Communities, Affects and Filiations beyond Romantic Idealisations

The Tikuna nurse Yenica Mojica Pereira had to be away from her community to pursue her studies at a university in Bogota. She said that she needed to go back to her community, and there, to listen more, weave more, and even wash her clothes in the river; she missed cooking fish and yucca, singing lullabies to the children, weaving shoulder bags and bracelets, listening to the elders’ stories of origin (Mojica Pereira 2015). All these actions that she repeats during the day, during the week, make her Tikuna. All of these actions inhabit the Tikuna language, happening, being with her people. From this perspective, the Tikuna language cannot be disassociated from being with the Tikuna people. The Tikuna language is spoken with the community, rather than learnt at school: “I don’t understand that idea of learning Tikuna in a school, you don’t learn Tikuna, you listen to Tikuna” (Ibid.: min. 10, my translation). Yenica also seems to imply that the Tikuna language is *lived with* her community rather than studied as a subject at school.

The Bolivian anthropologist Rafael Bautista highlights the notion of “*ayllu*” as “living in” and “living with” the indigenous community (Bautista 2014, cited in Rodrigues Selis and Fernandes Maso 2014: 22). Likewise, the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy proposes an interesting understanding of “being with” as “being-many” or “being-with-one-another” (Nancy 2000: 43). Being with is also an act of sharing (Nancy, cited in Hutchens 2012: 137). For the vast majority of indigenous peoples in Colombia, sharing food and sharing drinks is a way of being together. This is why any visitor is received with all kinds of food and drinks and is expected to

accept them with joy and gratitude; rejecting them implies a “rejection of the people” who offered them.

It is not about wanting every visitor to get drunk.
Chicha is a welcoming greeting.¹⁰⁶
If you accept it,
we accept you.
If you reject it,
you will never get anything from us again
(Jamioy Juagibioy 2010: 161, “Bocoy” [Chicha], my translation)

Being is both singular and plural: “to be singular is always already to be-with other [...] beings” (Pettigrew 2012: 160). Even when Jamioy Juagibioy writes his poems alone, he is already with his people and the elders who taught him the Word he rewrites, rearticulates and recomposes in his poetry.

Being cannot be anything but being-with-one-another, circulating in the “with” and as the “with” of this singularly plural coexistence [...]. But this circulation goes in all directions at once [...] opened by presence to presence: all things, all beings, all entities, everything past and future, alive, dead, inanimate, stones, plants, nails, gods – and “humans,” that is, all those who expose sharing and circulation as such by saying “we” (Nancy 2000: 3).

While expanding the notion of community to the plural articulation of beings who are always with other beings, it also seems fundamental to acknowledge the multiple articulation of indigenous language practices with cosmologies, rituals and daily life practices where words, knowledge practices, ethics, affects, family and communal affiliations form complex ecologies. The territory, the plants of wisdom, the animals of the clans, the people and the languages form an “ontology of being-with” which “is an ontology of bodies, of everybody whether they be inanimate, sentient,

¹⁰⁶ *Chicha*, an alcoholic drink prepared from fermented corn, is very popular in Colombia among indigenous groups. It was also a common drink among peasants and the working class in towns and cities. However, its consumption was slowly reduced as part of a crusade conducted by the national government in the first decades of the twentieth century. *Chicha* was associated with backwardness and mental deficiency. “Chicha makes you stupid” was the famous slogan of this crusade. While drinking *Chicha* was discouraged and penalised, beer was promoted as a popular drink; this consolidated the beer industry in the country in association with foreign enterprises.

speaking, thinking, having weight, and so on” (Ibid.: 84). Indigenous languages practices are embodied in this way; they dance and sing with their people:

In every celebration of the *viajij*
the *taitas* arrive
whispering their chant.¹⁰⁷
Dress up with your language
Otherwise they might not see you
as they approach
(Jamioy Juagibioy 2010: 101, “Acbe bichtajac matobopormá”
[Dress up with your language], my translation).

The indigenous Camëntsá poet Hugo Jamioy Juagibioy has expressed some of the conflicts he lives as he pursues his dreams of being a poet and a writer while still respecting the desires of his ancestors, not wishing to offend them. As a writer, Jamioy Juagibioy occupies a double position: inside and outside his community. He has published his poetry and participated in various cultural events and literature summits outside his community, where he has read his poetry in his language, but also in Spanish. Yet, all his poetry is inspired in the Word of the elders and particularly his *abuelo* (grandfather):

Abuelo,
Today when the light comes
To the house of my reasons
I wonder:
Is it possible that when I try
To make my dreams
come true
I am also killing yours?
I also want to tell you
that in my dreams are my children,
the extension of your roots.
Now I ask you:
Do you see in them
your dreams come true?
(Jamioy Juagibioy 2010: 101, “Ndegombr soy acbe otjenayán”
[The Reality of your dreams], my translation).

¹⁰⁷ In the yage ceremony (*toma de yagé* in Spanish), leaves of ayahuasca are prepared along with other plants to produce a strong beverage that is taken with a group of indigenous people, often under the direction of a leader who has the knowledge of *yagé* and who can help others into the path and transit. In the context described by this poem, *taitas* refers to the ancestors who present themselves in the *yagé* ceremony.

Between different generations there are usually tensions and yet those tensions do not necessarily cause a total rupture. Older indigenous peoples in the communities, as well as linguists and anthropologists, witness the overlapping of traditions from different indigenous communities and the re-articulation of those traditions with practices from non-indigenous groups including peasants and *mestizos*. In Aymara, the notion of *ch'ixi* is used to express an idea of community that has space in its meaning for the presence of conflict (Rivera Cusicanqui 2010, cited in Rodrigues Selis and Fernandes Maso 2014: 25). Indeed, *ch'ixi* describes the presence and articulation of “multiple cultural differences, which do not melt together, but antagonize or complement themselves, [and] coexist in parallel” (Ibid.).

“We need to think differently, with less romanticism,” as the Colombian linguist Marín Silva says. “Indigenous societies are changing because of the effects of contact. How do you stop that? How do you ask a girl not to use a brassier or lipstick?” (Marín Silva 2015: min. 18, my translation). The re-articulation of subject positions is not simply the “coexistence” of a plurality of subject positions; it also involves and is conditioned by asymmetries of power-knowledge relations and regimes of validation. “The subversion and over determination of one by the others makes possible the generation of ‘totalizing effects’ within a field characterized by open and indeterminate frontiers” (Mouffe 1993: 77). Indigeneity is not static, fixed or pure; rather, it is ever-shifting and metamorphic; it takes different shapes and is articulated in different ways. Despite these transformations, there is something that makes indigenous people feel like indigenous people, and that is belonging to a people, being with their people.

Indigenous peoples are not interested in becoming museum objects. They are aware of the transformation of their identities, yet still they use a borrowed language of recognition to defend collective rights. This not mean that they are surrendering to this foreign legal language, however. As Rabasa explains, the “endurance of native cultures up to our present is bound to the refusal to seek the recognition of their capacity to reproduce European forms” (Rabasa 2008: 71). The Aymara writer, Fausto Reinaga, from Colquechaca, Bolivia, rejects the word “Indian” and its colonial allusions to backwardness, ignorance and poverty: “Damn you,” Reinaga says, “I'm

not an Indian, I am an Aymara. But you made me an Indian and as an Indian I will fight for freedom” (Fausto Reinaga, cited in Rodrigues Selis and Fernandes Maso 2014: 13).

Undoubtedly, “nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being” (Taylor 1994: 25). However, recognition implies being recognised in the terms of another subject whose recognition is valued along with their privileged position. The terms in which indigeneity is brandished are contradictory and obey asymmetrical power relations. It is worth noting that colonial terms such as “Indian” are currently being used and articulated by indigenous movements in an attempt to make visible the violence used against them. In academic and official discourses, the term “Indian” has been replaced by “indigenous”.¹⁰⁸ These two terms mark the rupture “between the pre-Columbian world and the world that is established after the Conquest” (Gros 2000: 35, my translation). Most communities in Colombia prefer to name themselves with the specific name of their people, instead of using the generic term “indigenous”.

The Baniwa anthropologist and philosopher Gersem Baniwa, from Brazil, has surveyed numerous discussions about the use of the word “indigenous” in the framework of the emergence of the organised indigenous movement in Brazil in 1970:

The indigenous peoples of Brazil [...] concluded [...] it was important to maintain, accept and promote the generic name of Indian or indigenous as an identity that unites, articulates and makes visible and strengthens all the native peoples of the current Brazilian territory and mainly to demarcate the ethnic and identity border between them as originating and native inhabitants of these lands, and those coming from other continents, like Europeans, Africans and Asians (Baniwa 2006: 30, cited in Rodrigues Selis and Fernandes Maso 2014: 18).

The concept of indigeneity is relational. The definition of “indigenous identity” is produced in relation and in opposition to other identities. In Colombia, it refers to

¹⁰⁸ The term “indigenous” is considered to be more politically correct and less charged with the negative associations compared to the term “Indian”, which emerged during Conquest and the formation of the independent nations of Latin America in the nineteenth century.

the ensemble of many particulars such as Inga, Yanakuna, Camëntsá and Wayuu peoples, constituted as a general unity in opposition to other ensembles of particulars constituting abstract unities such as the white foreigners of the colonial times and *mestizos* (mixed people) born in those times and their descendants in the present. In both cases, there is an abstraction and artificial erasure of the differences among the indigenous peoples and their members, as well as the individual particularities of the *mestizos* in regards to their social class, ideologies and beliefs.

Identities are constructed by processes of abstraction and differentiation. By naming or identifying someone as an “indigenous person”, the differences among those who are identified as “indigenous peoples” are erased. At the same time the differences in regards to those named and identified as “non-indigenous people” are accentuated. It is even common that the “oppositional” identities are conceived as a threat to one another. This is particularly the case when a dominant identity has been associated with a more privileged social status such as those of the white and, to a lesser extent the *mestizos*. In this context, it is much more difficult for those who identify as indigenous people to guarantee that their differences vis à vis the white and mestizo people will be respected, valued and maintained even by their descendants. In this case, the “‘something identical’ shared by all the terms of the equivalential chain [...] proceeds from the unifying effects that the external threat poses to an otherwise perfectly heterogeneous set of differences (particularities)” (Laclau 2007: 57).¹⁰⁹

While the construction of identities emphasises a commonality among a set of particulars, not all indigenous identities are the same; they are neither fixed nor pure. In this research I use the term “indigeneity” to indicate the multiple and dynamic, contradictory and conflictive production of indigenous identities as “complex temporarily fixed shifting articulations” (Mouffe 1993: 77).

¹⁰⁹ Laclau explains this constitutive opposition at the emergence of identities which are “essentially relational” because “something is particular in relation to other particularities and the ensemble of them presupposes a social totality within which they are constituted” (Laclau 2007: 13).

We are in fact always multiple and contradictory subjects, inhabitants of a diversity of communities (as many, really, as the social relations in which we participate and the subject positions they define), constructed by a variety of discourses, and precariously and temporarily sutured at the intersection of those subject positions (Ibid.: 20).

The erasure of singularity in a univocal and universal mode is a form of violent supremacy and totalitarianism. The Uitoto people reject any kind of universal hierarchical order. Urbina Rangel recalls an episode that illustrates this absence of a hierarchical universal organising institution or leadership among the Uitoto people: once, while he was learning from the wise leader, *abuelo* (grandfather) José, his “ritual brother” Octavio García referred to himself as the *cacique de caciques* (chieftain of all chieftains) and everybody in the place mocked him because they would not accept that authoritarian concept (Urbina Rangel 2015). Urbina Rangel explains that García was adopting the hierarchical ways of the governmental institutions of the region. “Octavio García is a politician [...], he was actually thinking of how to unite [...] people for presenting projects”, but the idea clashed with the indigenous people to whom he was talking, who could only accept a horizontal organisation in which they all benefited equally (Ibid. min. 51, my translation).

The Misak poet and activist Velasco Tumiña is also sceptical of the hierarchical, englobing institutions and figures of power. He prefers to rely on dialogue and the exchange of stories with the peoples with whom he works. He recalls that the Misak people left the Indigenous Council of Cauca Region sometime between 1974 and 1976 because this Council was constituting itself as an executive committee and an authority englobing all the indigenous peoples in Cauca (Velasco Tumiña 2015). Velasco Tumiña prefers horizontal dialogue, which is how he speaks to the people he visits, letting affect be the thread that connects them through stories, pains and experiences.

Communities and identities need to be understood in permanent tension and movement. The French philosophers Jacques Rancière (1999) and Jean-Luc Nancy (2000), the Indian philosopher Leela Gandhi (2006) and the Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe (2013) all offer important insights regarding how to resolve the opposition between individual and collective without erasing singularity, but also

without renouncing to its extension beyond particularism. An individual's identity and relation to others is historically conditioned, but it can also be transformed (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Laclau 1996; Gros 1991, Grossberg 1997). It is important to allow disagreement to happen and yet embrace commonality (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991; Rancière 1999). Instead of opposing the individual to the collective, it is more useful to consider the element of singularity within the collective (Gandhi 2006: 30). It also is essential to understand that singularities are not univocal, but plural within themselves (Nancy 2000). Finally, rather than thinking of conflict as the enemy of community life, and looking for its resolution in the elimination of the enemy or of difference, it may be more productive to consider it from the perspective of an "agonistic model" (Mouffe 1999, 2013). This implies accepting disagreement and the validity of passions and affects, and the right of adversaries – rather than enemies – to defend their interpretations (Mouffe 1999: 755-756; Mouffe 2013: 14). Circle III explores this agonistic model by proposing a (po)ethics for agonistic healing that acknowledges trauma and tension, but also enables creating the conditions for making possible a world of many rather than the elimination of others.

(Po)ethics in Contested Spaces of Epistemic Violence and Cultural Appropriation

Chikangana remembers some of the many poetry festivals in which he has met poets from many peoples hailing from different regions of the Americas (including North, Central and South America), but also from Asia and Africa. They shared their pains caused by the violence and dispossession they face every day. All their poetry is in a language they could all feel, even when they were not always able to understand the words (Chikangana 2016). "There is an understanding of the pains, of the feelings, of the looks in the eyes of the people who are going through these difficult realities" (Chikangana 2016: min. 20, my translation). "It is beautiful," he adds, "to touch with the word" (Ibid.: min. 21, my translation). Although he started composing poetry for his community, he now conceives his poetry and his "worries as more universal" and believes that "there are no borders for the word," because from his point of view

“there is a bond” (*una hermandad*) that gathers and feels together because it wants to “create a better world” (Ibid.: min. 21, my translation).¹¹⁰

Many of the indigenous poets who have met through their (po)ethical practices have gone through similar pains. They have faced colonial and epistemic violence and the appropriation and exploitation of their traditions and practices. When he thinks of his childhood, Velasco Tumiña remembers the tenacity and commitment of the leaders of his community. He witnessed the mistreatment of his people by police officers and the National Army during their occupation and reclamation of lands that had been appropriated by private landowners (Velasco Tumiña 2015). He has written about these memories and has shared these stories with many indigenous communities in Colombia. He recalls how touched he was when he visited the Embera communities in Choco that are surrounded by the menace and control of paramilitary squadrons (Ibid.). This encounter was painful yet inspiring for continuing his (po)ethical practice.

Along with the armed violence, indigenous peoples face the destruction of their territories by multinationals, including mining and oil companies. The Wayuu people in the desert of Guajira have been one the most affected by neglect of the national and regional governments in recent years. These governments have allowed the over-exploitation and population of their territories, leading to water shortages and the slow and progressive death of the population under the relentless heat of the desert, with temperatures surpassing 30 degrees Celsius. While this tragedy continues, the Wayuu shoulder bags and other handicrafts continue to be successfully sold in stores and salons.

While cultural diversity is praised and commodified, indigenous people continue to fight for and defend their traditions, which are judged by outsiders as illogical and insignificant. The poet Selnich Vivas Hurtado recalls a story he heard about an *uzuma*, “one of the last holders of ancestral wisdom in the clan of the sun’s children” (Vivas

¹¹⁰ The Spanish word that Chikangana uses, *hermandad*, refers to a horizontal relationship among equals regardless of their particular age, gender, origin, etc. It is also a family relationship that carries a sense of community, care and affect.

Hurtado 2011: 1, my translation). The *uzuma* was sick and was sent to Leticia, but he died in the airplane. “His oldest son requested his father’s corpse to take it home,” but against his will and the will of his people, the body “not only ended up in the hands of the Catholic church, but was also cremated and [...] transformed into something meaningless” (Ibid, my translation). It was not possible for the Jitómagaro people to say goodbye since they did not have a body to do so.

Armed violence, environmental destruction, dispossession, cultural appropriation and epistemic violence menace indigenous peoples. Indigenous poets and activists denounce and challenge them through their (po)ethical practices. They have also found new allies and supporters. Although popular knowledge practices and oral traditions are commonly outcasts in Westernised academic institutions, some professors have created new spaces. This is the case of the poets Selnich Vivas Hurtado and Miguel Rocha Vivas who have worked as university professors in the literature departments at the Universidad de Antioquia, in Medellin and the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, in Bogota.¹¹¹ These spaces welcome indigenous, Afro-descendant and peasant storytellers, poets and writers, and invite students to research the narratives of their families, communities, neighbourhoods, streets and other everyday spaces often dismissed by the academy and the “world of letters” (Rocha Vivas 2015).

The publication and circulation of the work of indigenous poets continues to be precarious, though it has increased since the 1990s and especially after the start of the new millennium, which witnessed the emergence of new markets and platforms. Since 1992, the Festival de Poesía de Medellín (Medellin’s Poetry Festival) has invited indigenous poets from Colombia, Latin America, Canada and the United States.¹¹² This has facilitated the creation of networks, collaborative projects and translations of their work from their languages to Spanish, English and French (Rocha Vivas 2013:

¹¹¹ Both are former students of Fernando Urbina Rangel and followers of his work on indigenous thought, archaeology, anthropology, ethnophilosophy and literature.

¹¹² In 1992, the Festival de Poesía de Medellín invited its first indigenous poet, the Kuna-Tule writer Manibinigdigin, also known as Abadio Green (Rocha Vivas 2013: 84). In 1996, the Festival invited the Maya k’iche’ writer Humberto Ak’abal, one of the most celebrated and internationally recognised indigenous writers (Ibid. 84).

75). In 2005, Jamioy Juagibioy shared the stage with the Cherokee writer Allison Hedge Coke at the Festival de Poesía de Medellín, and later that year Jamioy Juagibioy and Chikangana were invited to the United States, where Jamioy Juagibioy published some of his poems in the anthologies *Ahani: Indigenous American Poetry* and *Sing, Poetry from the Indigenous Americas*, and Chikangana wrote a “series of poetic texts” on his encounter with North America’s “indigenous universe” (Ibid.: 97, my translation).

As the indigenous poets and writers gained visibility in the 1990s, some of them also received awards. In 1993, the Uwa writer Berichá received the Cafam Award for the Woman of the Year, as well as a Meritorious Distinction by the Mayor of Bogota, and the José Eusebio Caro Badge for Woman of the Year from the government of the Region of Norte de Santander (Ibid.: 78, 79).¹¹³ The same year, Chikangana received the Poetry, Humanity and Word Award from the Universidad Nacional (Ibid.: 79) and the Wayuu poet Vito Apūshana received the Latin American Scholarship for an Artistic Residency from the Ministry of Culture in Colombia and Conaculta in Mexico (Ibid.: 93). Then, in 2006, Jamioy Juagibioy was awarded the National Scholarship for Research in Literature from the Ministry of Culture in Colombia, which allowed him to carry on his research on “Orality indígena de Colombia” (Indigenous Oraliture of Colombia), visiting *oralitores* from different communities all around the country (Ibid.).

In 2009, the Ministry of Culture organised the first “Fiesta de las Lenguas” (Celebration of Languages) in which indigenous and Afro-descendant poets, writers, singers and dancers found a public stage. Also in 2009, after a long series of conversations, filmmakers and supporters of indigenous visual projects who have been working with Cine Minga, the ONIC and other regional and local indigenous organisations launched the Independent Festival for Indigenous Films, Daupará (Mora 2015). Then, in 2010, Colombia’s Ministry of Culture published Rocha Vivas’ *Biblioteca Básica de los Pueblos Indígenas de Colombia* (Literary Collection from the

¹¹³ These awards were given to her for her publication *Tengo los pies en la cabeza* (I have my feet on my head) (Ibid.: 78, 79).

Indigenous Peoples of Colombia).¹¹⁴ More recently, in 2014, Apüshana, Chikangana, and Jamioy Juagibioy have published a compilation of their poetry entitled *Voces Originarias de Abya Yala* (Aboriginal Voices of Abya-Yala) with the independent publishing house Ícono (Apüshana, Chikangana and Jamioy 2014).

After some struggle, and against the envy of some people in the academy, Rocha Vivas managed to make this publication available online, completely free, and to deliver a good number of printed copies to the poets, their communities and various indigenous organisations (Rocha Vivas 2013: 102-103, 2015). These books have become part of the curricula of various indigenous communities, responding to the willingness of the poets to have their poetry serve their communities and their programmes of linguistic and cultural revitalisation.

Today it is impossible not to mention the names of writers such as Jamioy Juagibioy, Chikangana and Apüshana when referring to contemporary poetry in Colombia. They now have the possibility of communicating with the Hispanic Colombian society and are in charge of their own representations, even rediscovering and recreating themselves through these new representations (Ibid, my translation). The number of films and literary works made by indigenous communities has increased in recent years, along with their audiences. Indigenous poets, writers and filmmakers participate more actively, though they also risk becoming commodities and being exploited along with their handicrafts and traditions in the market of diversity.

The co-existence of multiple voices goes well with the dialogical nature of (po)ethical practices and their capacity to produce knowledge in dialogue with other knowledge practices. But exchanging stories is not easy. It is a task of translation that involves movement. And in the movement of something as fragile as the stories and memories of a community, there is always a risk of chipping and cracking. Some may not be willing to accept that risk, but others will, with the understanding that they do not necessarily have everyone's support to act as "official" mediators or translators.

¹¹⁴ This publication was jointly published with the Biblioteca de Literatura Afrocolombiana (Collection of Afro-Colombian Literature).

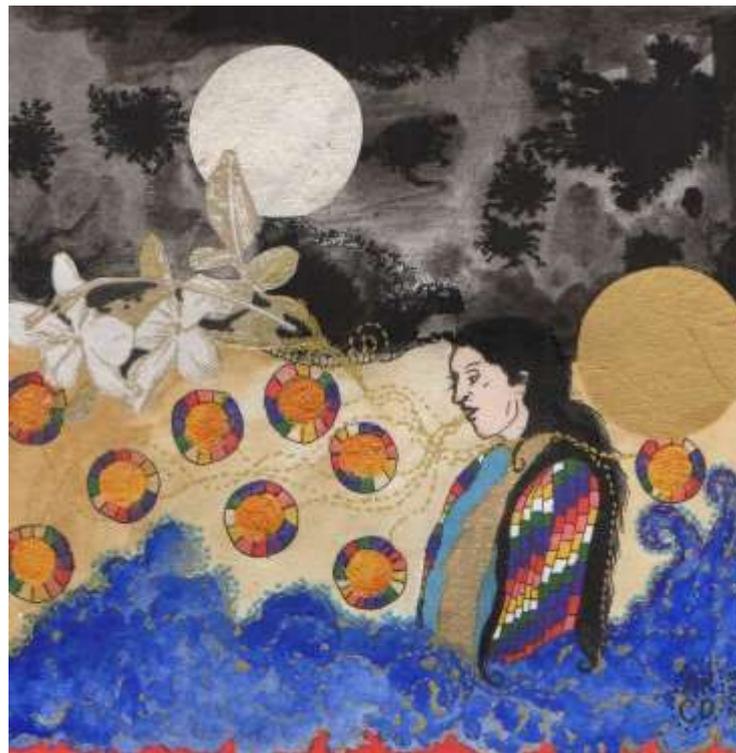
Indeed, some indigenous voices have gone silent due to tensions within their communities; the poet Verichara talked about this difficult experience in her book *Mi vida en el exilio* (My life in exile) (Rocha Vivas 2015: min. 38, my translation). In the poem “Culturas” (Cultures), written in Spanish, by the Wayuu poet Vito Apüshana, he declares his role as a poet who sings the stories of his people to those who do not know them. He pursues the task of being an unofficial mediator who “smuggles” dreams with foreigners (*alijunas*):

Taras, the jayechimajachi of Wanulumana,
has come to sing to those who know him...
his tongue celebrates our own history,
his tongue holds
our way of seeing life.
I, on the contrary, write our voices,
to those who don't know us,
to the visitors who pursue our respect.
I smuggle dreams with close *alijunas*
(Vito Apüshana 1992, cited in Rocha Vivas 2013: 88, my translation).

(Po)ethical Embodiments and Agonistics

(Po)ethical practices take place in the body, a fabric woven with community stories, memories, experiences and affects. The body places the (po)ethical practices in relation to a territory, a community, a shared history, and very often a project seeking the transformation of current violence. In his poem “En verbo ajeno” (Foreign Verb), written in Spanish, Chikangana narrates the process through which he finds the voice that will allow him to speak, through which he finds the language to communicate. His (po)ethics tell the silenced story of his people, a story he carries and feels in his own body:

In me,
Navigating spirits have arrived
From the far space
With hundreds of moons on their bodies,
They come from the pain
And from the echo of a time;
They are earth, sun,
They are the hope for our nocturnal fatherland.
They come, and so I sing,
I raise my verses with no revenge or hate,
With no bitten lips,
Just looking for a corner for my sleepy chant,
To the voice of my people
I sing from a borrowed verb
(Chikangana 2000, "En verbo ajeno,"
cited in Rocha Rivas 2012: 176, my translation).



Katalina Castro's illustration evokes how Chikangana's voice is not simply his, but is the voice of many spirits, human and non-human. His body is printed by the symbols of the ancestors which he has found while tracking his Kichwa language and creating new symbolisms of the peoples of the Andes. This body not only carries these traditions, but it also feels pain and resonates with the voices and stories of those who are not there, but are more present than ever when they make the body vibrate with their (po)ethics.

Chikangana writes with his body and through his body, with a verb that is not his own. This foreign verb, this foreign language, serves him to sing loudly, breaking the imposed silence of the forgotten memories and the forgotten words of his people. It is through the body that others can feel his voice, even if it is once again translated into a foreign language. The body is universal to all human kind; through the body we listen and feel. The body not only marks the particularity of our experiences, but also enables us to feel the universality of our pains.

Although not all bodies have gone through the same pains, the universal capacity to feel enables us to feel the pains of others. The violence of coloniality and the dehumanisation of lives, memories and knowledge practices are corporeal experiences. (Po)ethical practices are in the body, and in the body they are written and felt. Through shared affect, care and agony they produce a fundamental place where the violence of coloniality can be disputed. The exchange of stories and deeply felt narratives can build filiations of affect and facilitate healing. Velasco Tumiña recalls the intensity of his encounter with an Embera leader whose community had suffered a great deal of violence and had been forced to leave their territory. The encounter was not only informative, but also healing, mainly because it was an act of listening and feeling one another's pain.

He told me that it was the first time he had heard about indigenous rights, autonomy, and that we had autonomy and such a strong word, which have a juridical power, here [in Colombia] with the non-indigenous peoples [...]. He told me it was the first time he had heard these things and it was a sort of memory and at the same time a wound, a terrible pain [...] (Velasco Tumiña 2015: min. 27, my translation).

(Po)ethical practices create communities, bringing them together while healing the pains each one carries. Velasco Tumiña says that in listening to one another "the poetic reveals itself" (Ibid, my translation). This curative power of listening and storytelling has also been identified by the Vietnamese artist and theorist, Trinh T. Minh-ha. She has found that among the Basaa people in Cameroon, the storyteller heals and gathers the community, and the source of power is in "listening and absorbing daily realities" (1989: 140). Minh-ha also explains that "what is transmitted from generation to generation is not only the stories, but the very power of

transmission” (Ibid.: 134). Both Minh-ha and Velasco Tumiña seem to agree that poetry is not only about writing, but also about listening.

In *Woman, Native, Other* (1989), Minh-ha describes the complexities of this poetry which is born from “listening to others” and even “reading the other’s eyes” (Ibid.: 30). As a poet herself, Minh-ha wishes to have the capacity to listen and read, because, as she adds, “the more ears I am able to hear with, the further I see the plurality of meaning and the less I lend myself to the illusion of a single message” (Ibid.). Following this perspective, this chapter argues that (po)ethics go beyond the literary forms of the poetic. (Po)ethics are always in relation with others. In this relationality exists the possibility of ethical practices of care and healing for the narrating voices and the listening bodies involved. (Po)ethics are not abstract; on the contrary, they take place in the body which is woven with stories, memories, experiences and affects; a body capable of feeling the other’s stories and pain. Therefore, it is through the body that (po)ethics can heal.

The Basaa people in Cameroon and the Enxet people in Paraguay locate these (po)ethics in the belly, which the Basaa people call *hu* (Minh-ha 1989: 136) and the Enxet people call *wáxok* (Kidd 2000: 115). These (po)ethics are developed by the exchange of stories. The Enxet people say that the *wáxok* is the place where both knowledge and love grow; it is where it develops and gains strength as the people “listen to good words” and allow the “words to enter the *wáxok*” (Ibid.: 115, 117). According to this perspective, love constructs community and it “implies helping others” as well as speaking to others with “good words” (Ibid.: 118). Care and love are very important in these (po)ethical practices. For example, for the Piro people, in the Amazon, “good/beautiful love” enables healing and living well (Overing and Passes 2000: 17).

In (po)ethical practices, affects are not segregated from knowledge, nor is knowledge abstracted from the bodies that it inhabits. In this sense, knowledge practices are understood as diverse, multi-vocal, material, and corporeal, as well as connected not only to different generations, but also to different times. In their studies on affect and conviviality in the Amazon, the US anthropologists Joanna

Overing and Alan Passes have observed that affects are not “just a matter of emotion,” but that “they are integrally linked to knowledge and moral value, and *therefore* to a type of sociality that continually demands reflection upon the moral virtues and their practice” (Ibid.: 19). Overing and Passes have also become aware of an important distinction between the notions of collectivity that prevail in these indigenous groups and the understanding of ethics in relation to social imperatives derived from the Kantian categorical imperative in Western traditions:

To understand difference between Western theory and the Amazonian vision and practice, the distinction must be made between collectivity as might be expressed through social-structure imperatives [...] and the collective *as an* attachment to (or among) the people who follow specific cultural and social ways of being [...]. Many indigenous peoples of Amazonia are strongly [...] fond of their own cultural and social ways of *doing* things, and of the people with whom they share them, but not of heavy imperatives of social structure or collectivity” (Ibid.: 14).

Communities are in this context built from filiations of affect, or *attachments* expressed in a desire of conviviality and sharing stories, experiences, advice, food, strength while building houses or carrying wood, and even sharing jokes and laughing together. In this last respect, Overing highlights the way in which the Piaroa people foster “good laughter” as something that “is essential to the health of the community” (Overing 2000: 76). This sense of togetherness, which is felt and promoted as what brings the community to life, can be seen as a sense of friendship or as a “co-belonging of nonidentical singularities,” as Leela Gandhi suggests in her book *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought and the Politics of Friendship* (2006: 31).

The basket (*kirigai*) that represents knowledge for the Uitoto people connects language and knowledge to the body. It is in the body of the wise guiders and the apprentices where knowledge and language practices take place (Vivas Hurtado 2011, 2013a). Minh-ha has also noticed this corporality of stories, remarking that they are “transmitted from mouth to ear, body to body, hand to hand,” in a materiality that is “seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and touched” (Minh-ha 1989: 121). (Po)ethics are preserved and guarded in the body, and when someone dies, their body of knowledge leaves a hole. In some communities in Africa, Minh-ha recalls, “it

is said that every griotte who dies is a whole library that burns down (a ‘library in which the archives are not classified but are completely inventoried’)” (Hampate Ba, cited in Minh-ha 1989: 121)

The body is a container and the place where the words of knowledge, memories and stories of these communities reside; it is also the place where they are received, nurtured and felt. (Po)ethics takes place in the body, which has the capacity to feel, to feel its own pain and that of others. That is where the (po)ethical as poetic, ethical and political should be located. As the Argentinian anthropologist and philosopher Roldolfo Kusch acknowledges, “everything seems to indicate that there is no *ethos* without a *pathos*” (Kusch 2000a: 43, my translation). Following this argument, it is possible to argue that (po)ethics are only possible because there are bodies and lived corporeal experiences; therefore, the body is both the place of the (po)ethical and its condition of possibility.

In his study of Kichwa, Kusch encountered the concept of *ukhu*, the inside, the intimate, which is thought to be empty and the place where the essential resides: an essential whole, where the barriers between the rational and the emotional are dissolved (Ibid.: 44). The Kichwa language resides in specific bodies, in the feeling bodies of its speakers; it is therefore already located in a context, a culture, a time, and a space (Kusch 2000c: 365-366). Those bodies sing, dance, feel and make things with their hands: they weave and heal. Through these expressions of the body, indigenous languages resist the unification and standardisation of the linear, abstract, incorporeal alphabetic writing and univocal knowledge imposed on their peoples in the name of civilisation and progress.

One form of resistance that is emerging in the continent, “from Alaska to the Patagonia”, is the poetry that challenges this reductionism (Vivas Hurtado 2015: 78, my translation). These (po)ethics – which are more than the literary poetry of the world of letters – permit, as Vivas Hurtado highlights, the dissemination and preservation of the “spiral knowledge born from textiles and dance” (Ibid.: 77, 78, my translation). Furthermore, these (po)ethics permit the constant recreation and

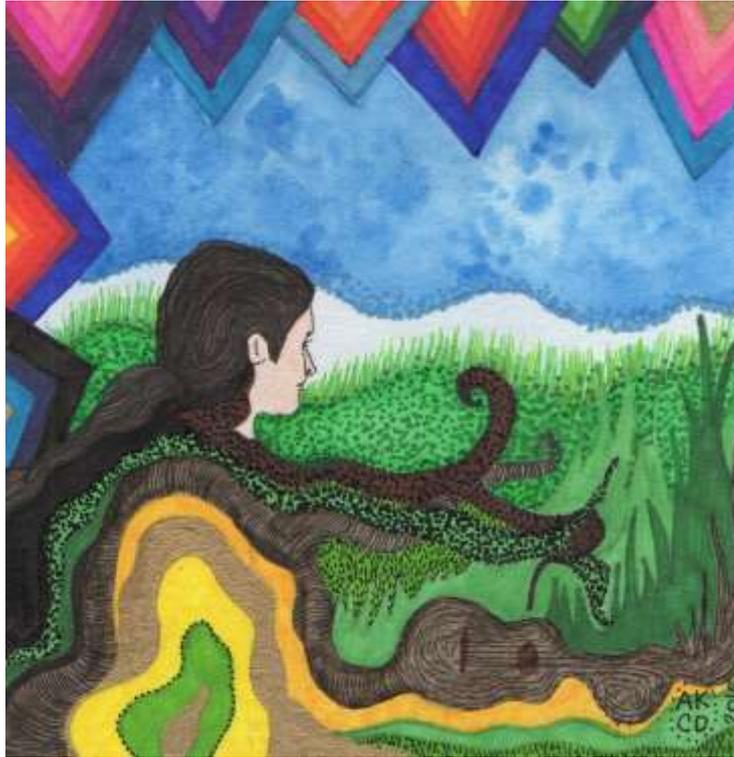
renovation of knowledge practices and ways of being which are multi-vocal and inhabit different times, while integrating all sorts of beings and entities.

(Po)ethical Practices for Rebuilding and Creating Filiations

Most indigenous poets are involved in programmes of education, and have developed community projects and played the role of mediators and translators on behalf of their communities, for instance, by participating in indigenous organisations or by negotiating with the national government and even with legal and illegal armies in their territories. Their poetry and work is deeply connected to their communities and their peoples, and often dialogues with other non-indigenous communities.

The Inga poet Pedro Ortiz, along with his colleague Alexander Vallejo, organises every year the “Festival de Literatura de Valle de Sibundoy” (Festival of Literature of Valle de Sibundoy), in Putumayo. This festival promotes the traditions of the Inga and Katmetshä communities, and gathers indigenous and non-indigenous poets, writers, storytellers and musicians from Putumayo, as well as other rural and urban areas of the country – including Barranquilla, Cali, Pasto, Medellin and Bogota.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Children and youngsters from the Inga and Camëntsá *resguardos* celebrated their traditional dances, dressed in their traditional clothes, chanted in their language and played traditional melodies for the audience. *Mestizo* children and youngsters read aloud stories and poems that they had composed, and presented original songs in a wide range of genres including popular, folk, rock and rap music.



This illustration by Katalina Castro evokes Ortiz’s calm contemplation that Ortiz does of the valley as he finds himself connected to his land of origin to which he writes and composes not only verses but also music with his guitar.

Similarly, the Inga poet and linguist Francelina Muchavisoy teaches Kichwa to numerous students.¹¹⁶ She has worked with children from vulnerable sectors, displaced families and different ethnic backgrounds, offered special courses of Inga language to children who were born or raised in the city away from their communities, and has been teaching Kichwa to undergraduate students of the Universidad Nacional in Bogota since 2001 (Muchavisoy 2016). While teaching different students, she revisits her language and discovers new questions she can later research with members of her community in Cauca (Ibid.). Along with her poetry, teaching has been for her a way of learning anew her language and *reconnecting* with the ways of thinking of her people (Ibid.).

¹¹⁶ Muchavisoy has been interested not only in studying the Inga language from the perspective of linguistics, but has also supported the elaboration of Inga alphabets, pedagogic materials, programmes and curricula for bilingual indigenous education in several Inga *resguardos* in Cauca (Muchavisoy 2016). She has participated in the “Fiesta de las Lenguas” (Celebration of Languages) organised by the Ministry of Culture as well as in different literary festivals in Colombia, Equator and Bolivia, and some of her poems have been published both in Inga and Spanish (Ibid.).



In this illustration, Katalina Castro evokes Muchavisoy's pedagogic work with indigenous and mestizo children from Caquetá.

Final Considerations

The experiences above mentioned have redefined the poets' personal histories and experiences in relation to their communities of origin and in their encounter with others. (Po)ethical practices are relational and enable the rebuilding of filiations and even the creation of new ones. The emergence of these community filiations is related to affect, to a feeling of family and even friendship that can extend to other indigenous communities with other languages; even to distant territories, inhabited by Afro-descendant communities, peasants and others who have felt the pain and agony of violence.

CIRCLE III – RITORNELLO

(Po)ethics for Agonistic Healing and Building a World of Many in a World of Conflict

This circle concentrates on how (po)ethics challenge epistemic and colonial violence, enabling dialogue and disagreement instead of promoting the “resolution” of conflict by the elimination of enemies. This circle elaborates on the ways (po)ethical practices serve to denounce and challenge the violence indigenous communities suffer every day in Colombia in the middle of the conflict and the overexploitation, destruction of their natural resources and the expropriation of their lands. It also considers the ways in which (po)ethics stands against the global dehumanisation and violence of coloniality. In this regard, it discusses the way in which (po)ethical practices can be translated and establish alliances between different peoples and communities who have suffered the effects of violence.¹¹⁷ This third circle proposes agonistic translations of (po)ethics for enabling creative and collective resistance and healing from colonial epistemic violence, both locally and globally. It elaborates on the way agonistic translations permit different communities to share their experiences so they can pursue together new ways to resist and challenge the dehumanisation of peoples, coloniality and epistemic violence. The circle comprises two chapters: **Chapter 5**, entitled “**(Po)ethical Responses to Violence in Colombia,**” and **Chapter 6**, entitled “**(Po)ethics for Healing, Rebuilding a World of the ‘You’ and Agonistic Translations.**”

Chapter 5 focuses on the local agonistic experience of indigenous peoples in relation to the armed conflict in Colombia, their strategies of resistance, as well as the ways in which they have engaged in (po)ethical dialogues to construct conditions for peace. The chapter shows how languages are not only contingent to historical power-knowledge relations, colonial legacies and epistemic violence (Chapter 2), but how they can also, as (po)ethical language practices, enable creative resistance to these historical conditions of violence, by rebuilding and creating community

¹¹⁷ The Uruguayan political theorist Raúl Zibechi (2006) discusses the relation between affects, alliances, social movements and emancipation in Latin America.

filiations, affects and ethics. It also discusses the conciliatory attempts of indigenous communities and organisations to end the violent attacks against their populations. It follows the (po)ethical practices that indigenous poets, activists, leaders and organisations have developed in regards to the complex and multi-layered violence in Colombia and the articulations that have emerged for resisting this violence.

The chapter considers the participation and struggles of the Comisión Étnica para la Paz y la Defensa de los Derechos Territoriales (Ethnic Commission for Peace and the Defence of Territorial Rights) and the inclusion of the Ethnic Chapter in the Peace Agreement between the national government and the FARC-EP guerrilla in August 2016.¹¹⁸ It discusses the popular initiatives that emerged in response to the rejection of the Peace Agreement in the referendum held in October 2016. Finally, the chapter highlights the importance of (po)ethical indigenous language practices in relation to the ways in which they enable creative resistance and the rebuilding and creation of community filiations and ethics.

Chapter 6 explores the potential of the agonistic translation of (po)ethical practices based on the plural acknowledgement and feeling of one another's existence and pains for challenging the naturalisation of violence and dehumanisation. It also considers the capacity of the (po)ethical practices to connect and translate agonistic experiences in regards to coloniality and epistemic violence. It elaborates on the agonistic dimension of (po)ethical practices to enable plural healing of trauma and pain while acknowledging disagreements and tensions. It also rejects problematic idealisations, and expectations of homogeneity, harmony and consensus and proposes instead an agonistic understanding of community.

The chapter discusses the role of agonistic translation for producing a local, global, singular and plural (po)ethics that works as a lingua franca for connecting and sharing experiences of colonial violence and producing collective networks for creative resistance. It also discusses the creative and active role of agonistic (po)ethics in the acknowledgement of one another's existence, as well as the

¹¹⁸ FARC-EP stands for Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército Popular, in Spanish (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – Popular Army).

agreements and disagreements between plural and singular voices. Moreover, the chapter analyses the conditions for the collective creation of a world in which different language and knowledge practices, (po)ethical approaches and positionalities can dialogue and articulate in agonistic translations to construct pluriversal (po)ethics.

Chapter 5. (Po)ethical Responses to Violence in Colombia

- Samusa [I am coming in]

- Yaikui [Come in]

- Puangi [Are you? Are you alive?]

- Allilla [Ok]

(Muchavisoy, 2016).¹¹⁹

The Inga poet and linguist Francelina Muchavisoy, who teaches Kichwa at Universidad Nacional in Bogota, highlights the importance of acknowledging the other in Inga's greetings. The word *puangi* acknowledges the interlocutor's existence and expresses concern or care. Whether the encounter takes place at home – as in the dialogue opening this chapter – or outside, one must always acknowledge the other's existence and ask how they are in the particular moment of the encounter: *puangi* (hello, or good morning), *chisipuangi* (good afternoon), *tutapuangi* (good evening) could be translated as “how do you feel now?” (in this morning, afternoon or evening, respectively). Acknowledging the other's existence is a fundamental aspect of the indigenous language practices that I have described as (po)ethical in this research. Furthermore, it is an important principle for the (po)ethical understanding of communities and for considering the rebuilding of communities in the context of Colombia's multi-layered violence, the armed conflict and the design of a post-conflict agenda.

In the following sections, this chapter discusses the search for strong words that permeates Chikangana's (po)ethics, and the poet's willingness to speak up in the middle of the silence and fear produced by the systematic violence and armed conflict that takes place in the Yanakuna's territory in Cauca. It also analyses the multiple layers of violence in Colombia and the forms of creative resistance that indigenous peoples have found through their (po)ethical practices to rebuild their communities.

¹¹⁹ This is the kind of greeting that takes place inside the house of Inga people when someone from outside the family is visiting.

In Search of Strong Words

According to the Wiwa people in Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, the word is valued as truthful, powerful, the source that creates and shapes things. Narratives and stories are considered to have a power of creation:

The word emerges [...] as the light [...], various stories told in Sierra Nevada date from the times of *Urruama*, when everything was in darkness [...], [they tell] how were the origins [of different peoples] [...], these are stories that were given by the first fathers and mothers, at the sunrise, which is also that moment in which things gain a certain solidity [...]. The word helps the sunrise of a work; the word shapes things. That is also teaching [...], but interestingly there is no authorship. [...] These stories find sense when they are told. It is always an event [...], there is a reason why the story is told” (Rocha Vivas 2015: min. 46, my translation).

This belief in the power of the word and strong words permeates most indigenous peoples in Colombia and their (po)ethical language practices. Chikangana’s particular revitalisation of the Kichwa language among the Yanakuna people in Cauca has not been simply linguistic and literary.¹²⁰ Through his (po)ethics, he has made Kichwa his language for expressing and producing new memories for himself and his Yanakuna community, renaming and recreating its stories and territories. The poems and stories inside Chikangana’s books, he says, are like clay vessels moulded by the poet’s hands (Chikangana, cited in Festival de Poesía de Medellín 2015). They are imprinted with the stories and memories of other times and memories of them. The poem-vessels are made, and engaged, with the materials of the past, but those materials are strong, which is why “they will last” (Chikangana 2016: min. 18, my translation).

Chikangana does not write or attempt to publish his poems for the sake of selling books or being a published author (Chikangana 2016). He sees his (po)ethical work as advice that has the power to move and affect perceptions, feelings and memories of lived experiences (Rocha Vivas 2010: 32). He describes his books as “storehouse[s] of

¹²⁰ The Yanakuna people in Colombia are distributed across three major departments: Cauca (where about 85.6 percent of the population resides), Huila (6.15 percent of the population) and Valle del Cauca (3.2 percent) (Ministerio de Cultura 2010: 1)

memories” that help the children of any culture to “live, dream and build with us [a better world]” (Chikangana, cited in Festival de Poesía de Medellín 2015: 1, my translation). Moreover, composing poems is Chikangana’s way of finding strength to face death and violence. Words remain, they can be told again, told anew, even when the narrator dies. In his poem “Nadie oyó, nadie vió, nadie sintió” (Nobody Heard, Nobody Saw, Nobody Felt), Chikangana narrates one episode of this violence. He accounts for the lost life, which will live forever in the memories and words he tells.

A boy was killed on a cold morning,
between silences and shadows of the darkness
it is said that a sparrow sang in the late night
and that in some huts, smoke spread announcing the sorrows,
but nobody heard, nobody saw, nobody felt
and everybody asks
Who the hell killed that boy?

There is a rumour going round between the mountains and the trails,
people run, that air of death runs,
it already seems so normal,
cry the *taitas* and women cry,
but nobody heard, nobody saw, nobody felt.¹²¹

High on the gorge’s spring a body lies
with its broken *ruana*, still hand,
tight closed teeth,
and a bullet inside its body.¹²²

In the paths, words of love are given to the dead [boy],
Words recalling the goodness of those who are now dead,
but nobody heard, nobody saw, nobody felt.
Some people ask:
Why did he wake up early?
Why did he leave alone in that air of death?

Others say the dog did know
that those prowling around the town’s square
showing their teeth, defying people
and somebody knows who killed him,
but nobody felt but nobody heard, nobody saw, nobody felt.

¹²¹ In this context, *taitas* can mean the elders or the fathers.

¹²² A *ruana* is similar to a poncho. It is usually a long square piece of wool that protects from cold weathers and it is worn around the neck, covering the shoulders, chest, back and arms, sometimes even the hands.

This boy is already carried in a coffin
while everybody looks to one another
feeling that each one is guilty
when nobody hears, nobody sees, nobody feels.
(Chikangana 2015, “Nadie oyó, nadie vió, nadie sintió”
[Nobody Heard, Nobody Saw, Nobody Felt],
cited in Festival de Poesía de Medellín 2015: 1, my translation).

Chikangana calls for the creation of a new world, different from the one in which “nobody hears, nobody sees, nobody feels.” His (po)ethics are a form of creative resistance that is affirmative of the filiations, ways of life and knowledge practices of the communities that have been dehumanised and whose death has become natural, or simply a collateral effect of secondary importance. Through his (po)ethics, Chikangana denounces the atrocities that take place in the villages, expresses his disgust towards a world of death, and highlights the ethics, the strength, the dreams and the hopes of the peoples who resist this violence while advocating for the creation of a new world. Through his (po)ethics, Chikangana has searched, found and created a language with which he continues to live and create – along with his community – affects, filiations and ethics that exercise a spirit of self-determination in the face of dispossession, displacement, exoticisation, demonisation, and the direct and indirect destruction of communities.

The armed conflict in Colombia has been primarily driven by the control of land. The indigenous population has been one of the most affected, due to the economic interest of national and multinational companies in their territories. Their lands have been subjected to the extensive exploitation of gold, silver, coal, iron ore and nickel, the cultivation of African palm and the production of biofuels (ACNUR 2012: 2). As is already well known, many actors participate actively in this conflict: The National Army, left-wing guerrillas, right-wing paramilitary squadrons and wealthy drug mafias (Escobar 2008). “Massacres and human rights abuses are the order of the day, inflicted primarily by paramilitaries, but also by guerrillas, and the civilian population is most often brought into the conflict as unwilling participants or sacrificial victims” (ibid.: 19).

The conflict's trauma is often worsened by the stigmatisation of the victims and the silencing of their testimonies due to the lack of protection and the blaming for their own destiny (MSF 2010: 16). The feeling of being constantly chased, silenced and even blamed intensifies the terror and the fear already reinforced by the dynamic of the conflict itself (Ochoa Gautier 2004). The violence is not just about killing the victims and throwing the corpses into the rivers so they cannot be found.¹²³ It also includes the transformation of the body into a dismembered, unhuman, worthless body (Uribe 2004: 88).

Paramilitaries call those who [...] are about to be murdered 'my little hens.' Feminized and faunalized, victims are assimilated to the domestic sphere; they become susceptible to being penetrated, [chopped into pieces] [and] eaten [...]. If the Other can be thought of as a hen or a chicken, it is quite easy to cut into pieces. Thus, for the perpetrators there are no moral dilemmas, because in their terms nothing human is hurt; the dead do not have human qualities (Ibid.: 94, 95).

The mutilation of the body and its display during public massacres and later as they are found floating in the rivers produces a land of inhumanity, anonymity and constant terror which serves as a reminder of the violence yet to come. "The rivers became the symbolic space to perpetuate the anonymity of the victims whose dismembered corpses were thrown to the waters to make them disappear, and yet at the same time so they would float along the territory" as a terrorising warning (Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación 2008, cited in Orrantia 2010: 188). The severe violence of the armed conflict includes confinement, restricted access to vital resources and food; bombings, the fumigation of crops and even populations; constant direct and indirect threats, assaults, and violent murders; massacres, tortures, displacement, kidnapping, arbitrary detention, and forced recruitment; sexual violence and forced prostitution; and the detonation of landmines sown randomly around areas of transit causing the mutilation of bodies (ACNUR 2012: 2, ACNUR 2006: 4, MSF 2010: 6-7).

¹²³ Yet in 2006, about "206 corpses were found in rivers and ponds, all of them with clear marks of violent death" (Orratia 2010: 188, my translation).

Although the conflict does not exclusively affect the indigenous and Afro-descendant populations, these two groups are the most affected given the interest in their lands. Cauca has been one of most affected areas in Colombia:

From the emptiness
nothing will be as it was before
Just
e
m
p
t
i
n
e
s
s
over our bodies
as a desolated swinging
as waves in pain, enraged,
as sleepy volcanos
(perhaps)
as stones or traces
in an endless
h e a p o f b o n e s

(Chikangana 2010: 65, "Del Vacío" [From the Emptiness],
cited in Rocha Vivas 2010: 294, my translation).

In 1985, the Yanakuna ethnic movement and the Yanakuna Major Council consolidated as a way of resisting this violence, which had caused the disintegration of communities, now dispersed in rural and urban areas (López Garcés 2013: 1-7). New organisations emerged in urban areas where migrant populations had formed new settlements (Ibid.: 12). Since then, the communities of the area have attempted to recover and reconstruct their traditional attires, musical expressions, rituals, and relate to their stories of origin and common lineages with the Andean communities in Peru and Ecuador (Ibid.: 11). Until very recently, the Yanakuna Kichwa language was at high risk of extinction, with only 2,864 speakers, corresponding to only 8.6 percent of the population (Ministerio de Cultura 2010: 3).

It is in this context that Chikangana, who grew up in Río Blanco, in Cauca, embarks on a dialogue with other communities in Colombia, Perú and Bolivia (Chikangana

2016). He researches the linguistic and cultural connections he finds in the stories exchanged and starts creating new ones through his poetry (Ceballos Ramírez 2015: 78, 79). Chikangana's poems have been well received by the Yakuna people in their efforts to rebuild their traditions. They have adopted several of his poems into their rituals while continuing the "building of their Yakuna house":

Using the metaphor of the house as a space of daily life, the Yakuna people express their will to reconstruct themselves as an ethnically differentiated people. In this sense, the "Yakuna house" not only represents the idea of the territory as a physical space that guarantees their material media of survival, but it also corresponds to the political space the Yakuna people are rebuilding through the strengthening of their indigenous councils as traditional political entities (López Garcés 2013: 1, my translation).

While digging among ancient traces and building their house anew, the Yanakuna people have served themselves from the archaeological findings which indicate their territory has one of the most ancient settlements in Colombia, dating from about 3,000 years ago (Guhl 1940, cited in Ministerio de Cultura 2010: 3). Building the house is not easy, but it is necessary for the Yanakuna. Rebuilding their traditions is necessary for them to face together, as community, their concerns regarding the presence of illicit crops and illegal armed groups in their territory, as well the fumigations of their crops which are already too reduced and whose pollution stands to increase the already high levels of malnutrition in the community (Ibid.: 10).¹²⁴ Along with health and mortality issues, they deal with difficulties in transportation, lack of access to public utilities, health and schooling services, and discrimination due to the ignorance and undervaluation of their knowledge practices and traditions (Ibid.).

Chikangana's (po)ethics are regarded by some as a method to "defend, control and prevent the violence that destroys the will to live, to reconstruct the identity, the pride of being who one is" (Ceballos Ramírez 2015: 117). In a very general way, one

¹²⁴ These fumigations are part of the programme for the eradication of "illicit crops" sponsored and supported by the United States. This programme targets plants such as coca – traditionally used by indigenous peoples in rituals – which are used by drug cartels in the processing of cocaine, exported to countries in North America and Europe.

might refer to his (po)ethics as strong words spoken in the middle of the silence; strong words that set him, his people and his interlocutors free from the fear that silences. Chikangana recovers the imaginaries of his community in a time of crisis and silence that he experiences as an individual and translates them via his poetry to the collectivity (Ibid.).

Multi-Layered Violence in Colombia

Colombia's conflict is deeply intertwined with people's unequal access to arable lands in a country that is primarily rural, despite the dominance of an urban imaginary. The roots of the conflict can be traced to various factors. The displacement of people has served to vacate the lands, which are controlled by a privileged minority. Around one percent of landowners are in control of 55 percent of all arable land (Escobar 2008: 19). Along with an unresolved agrarian problem, one must consider the intense gaps between the countryside and the city, which manifest in high levels of relative and absolute poverty in the rural areas (Cárdenas Rivera, Madrid-Cárdenas, Rodríguez 2003: 38). Economic growth and purchasing power are stronger in the cities, particularly in the major cities (such as Bogota, Medellin and Cali) due to centralist policies dating from the early years of Independence in the beginning of the nineteenth century. The most privileged urban populations from those major cities are often unaware of the dire situation in the rural areas of the country. This urban imaginary correlates with the dominant *mestizo* perception. Paradoxically, 27 of the 32 departments that form the unitary republic of Colombia are mainly inhabited by indigenous peoples.¹²⁵

While most of Colombia's population identifies itself as mixed-race Spanish descendent (*mestizo*), the indigenous and Afro-descendant population is considerably large, particularly in the rural areas. Over the years, Afro-descendant

¹²⁵ 25 percent of the overall national territory corresponds to indigenous lands resulting in area of about 27 million hectares (Gros 2002: 324). In the departments of Guanía, Amazonas, Guajira and Vaupés, indigenous peoples are the leading population corresponding to 96.8, 76.6, 60.6 and 55.4 percent, respectively (Ibid.).

and indigenous peoples, as well as peasant families living in the rural areas, have been consigned to working smaller and less productive lands, while the wealthy landowners dedicated to the agricultural and cattle industries have expanded theirs, and private national and multinational enterprises have settled nearby, exploiting natural resources such as sugar cane, gold and oil.

In the seventeenth century, *haciendas* emerged as individually owned productive lands, where indigenous and African peoples were enslaved (Espinosa 2012: 91). These *haciendas* remained after Independence and still continue to exist for the profit of wealthy families, who depend on the exploitation of cheap labour – provided by peasant families, indigenous and Afro-descendant workers. Many of the *haciendas* have expanded as small farmers in precarious conditions have had to sell their lands; *haciendas* have also taken over “empty” lands (not recognised as property) without many flags being raised by landowners and new peasant colonisers (Ibid.: 92). One of the areas of the country in which the phenomenon of the *hacienda* has been the most evident is in Cauca, where there are currently six major indigenous peoples: of which 65 percent are Nasa, 15 percent Yanaconas, 13 percent Misak, 5 percent Coconuco, and 2 percent Emberas and Ingas (Peñaranda 2012a: 13).

One of the many causes attributed to the armed conflict in Colombia is the exclusion and impoverishment of the vast majority of the population, particularly in the rural areas, and the overall incapacity of the state to guarantee equal access to a dignified life in regards to nutrition, health care, education and security (Cárdenas 2003: 11). The corruption of the ruling class, and the concentration of political and economic power in the hands of the same privileged families over centuries has created the conditions for the emergence of unorganised delinquents and organised criminal bands, as well as militias and guerrillas aiming to challenge the ruling yet mistrusted state. It is also important to consider the historical tendency of political parties to turn to armed confrontation with their adversaries. This was the case of the Liberal and Conservative parties at the end of the nineteenth and during the first half of the twentieth century (Cárdenas Rivera, Madrid-Cárdenas, Rodríguez 2003: 26).

This period of confrontation between the political parties, also known in the official history of Colombia as *La Violencia* (The Violence), led to the persecution and assassination of relatives of the current generation in rural and urban areas.¹²⁶ On 9 April 1948 the streets of Bogota burned in fire.¹²⁷ The Liberal presidential candidate, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, had been killed; the masses revolted and the violent confrontation between the two political parties continued until the 1960s. The provisional solution, chosen mainly by the elites of the two political parties, was to alternate their mandate. This measure, known as the Frente Nacional (National Front), excluded the participation of third parties.

While the political “loot was shared by traditional parties,” little responsibility was taken in regards to their failing policies and their impact on the population (Nasi 2003: 157). The Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército Popular (Popular Army of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), known as the FARC-EP guerrilla, traces its history to the communist guerrillas that supported the Partido Comunista Colombiano (Colombian Communist Party), or PCC, which had emerged in 1949. These communist guerrillas organised against the monopoly of the two traditional political parties and confronted the private armed bands paid by the wealthy landowners (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2014a: 337). These private armed bands not only protected the landowners’ lands, but also helped them to expand by forcibly taking the lands of peasant families, and indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples in the rural areas.

As the FARC-EP guerrilla expanded and consolidated, it replaced the state’s control in abandoned impoverished territories, supervised and approved the creation of peasants’ organisations, and became responsible for security, as well as the

¹²⁶ I heard from my mother’s aunts the stories of how my grandfather had to hide himself in the roof of his house in Ubaté, a small town in department of Cundinamarca. He had to remain quiet for hours inside the water tanks of the empty house, while members of the opposite political party broke in, searching for and ready to eliminate their “political enemies”. My grandmother had to hide in Bogota with my mother, who was a baby at that time, and there they would not escape the violent episodes related to this war of political parties.

¹²⁷ This event is known in the official history of Colombia as the *Bogotazo*.

prosecution of delinquency in the territory (Ibid.: 338).¹²⁸ In the decade of the 1980s, as the drug cartels and the drug trafficking consolidated, the paramilitary squadrons and guerrillas offered protection to drug traffickers to sponsor their activities (Ibid.: 198).¹²⁹ In the 1990s, the FARC-EP guerrilla found other financial sources in kidnapping and extortion.¹³⁰ Moreover, the alliances between drug traffickers and government officials often led to violent confrontations (Pécaut 2002: 45).

For over fifty years, the armed conflict in Colombia has been concentrated in the rural areas where land workers have been forced by guerrillas and paramilitary groups to pay taxes, grow coca crops and even improvise laboratories in their kitchens for the production of cocaine (Ibid.: 46).¹³¹ When peasants and small landowners have failed to pay the taxes requested by the guerrillas and paramilitary squadrons, they have been violently punished with kidnapping, torture, rape or murder, or the threat thereof. Many peasants and small landowners have been forced to sell their lands or even abandon them (Ibid.: 48).¹³² Most of the time these

¹²⁸ Although the FARC-EP guerrilla was officially founded in 1964, 1949 is widely accepted as its year of emergence (one year after the *Bogotazo*). 1978 is also accepted as the date of the guerrilla's consolidation, marked by the FARC-EP guerrilla's announcement, during their 6th Conference, of their purpose of becoming a "Revolutionary Army" that sought to take the political power of the country (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2014a: 17).

¹²⁹ The paramilitary groups have been "related to drug trafficking since they started to confront the guerrillas" (Cárdenas Rivera, Madrid-Cárdenas, Rodríguez 2003: 40, my translation). However, this does not exclude the participation of the guerrillas in the "circulation and commercialisation of coca plants and field poppies (*amapola*)" within circuits of drug production (Ibid, my translation).

¹³⁰ Between 1991 and 2007, the FARC-EP guerrilla was responsible for 50 percent of recorded kidnappings, followed by the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army), or ELN guerrilla, which was responsible for 38 percent, and the paramilitary squadrons, responsible for 12 percent of recorded kidnappings (Ibid.)

¹³¹ However, the armed conflict has also affected cities where chaos and insecurity have risen, along with the large presence of delinquents, criminal bands and *sicarios* (hired assassins) associated with drug traffickers and cartels (Pécaut 2002).

¹³² While both guerrillas and paramilitary squadrons have violated human rights, they operate differently. Guerrillas privilege extortion and kidnapping to finance their activities, while paramilitary squadrons use torture and rape in order to collect forced testimonies and confessions from the populations they have accused of supporting the guerrillas (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2013: 35). Paramilitary squadrons also vacate lands, sowing fear in the population by announcing and perpetrating public massacres as a form of punishment of the populations they accuse of being guerrilla supporters (Ibid.). In both cases, the population suffers the consequences of the war. They are usually confined and surrounded by landmines which have mutilated both adults and children.

violations have gone unreported, forgotten little by little, buried in fear. A witness of the massacre at Trujillo, in Valle del Cauca, explains this dynamic of fear and silence:

If nobody speaks, if nobody writes, if nobody tells, people forget and little by little [the memory] is covered by the fear. The people who witnessed the death start forgetting, they are afraid of talking [...]. Since nobody speaks of what happened it is like nothing ever happened. Then, if nothing has even happened, we continue living like nothing matters (Inhabitant of Trujillo, cited in Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2013: 31).

Along with the peasant population, the Afro-descendant and indigenous peoples have been the principal targets of the armed conflict in Colombia. They have been victims of forced recruitment in the fronts of the guerrillas, as well as victims of massacres perpetrated by guerrillas and paramilitary squadrons. They have also often become military targets for the National Army after being framed as collaborators of guerrilla groups. Consequently, not only have they been forced to leave their lands and crops, but their families and communities have disintegrated, with some even joining the legal and illegal armies and killing their own people. The number of registered civilian victims of the armed conflict in Colombia as of 1 October 2016 was 7,936,566 (Registro Único de Víctimas 2016).

Unfortunately, the population has not only been victimised by guerrillas and paramilitary groups, but also by the National Army, which has announced among their successful captures (dead) youngsters who after a series of investigations turned out to be innocent. These youngsters belonged to humble families in the cities and rural areas and had never participated in the conflict and in most cases had never visited the areas where their corpses were found (Semana 2013, Quevedo Hernández 2015, Vanguardia 2016). In 2012, 15,000 peasants from Putumayo participated in a demonstration in Puerto Asís and Mocoa to complain about the violation of human rights in their territory (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2014a: 308-309). They denounced cases of extrajudicial captures and executions of civilians presented by the National Army as guerrilla combatants, though they were actually "*falsos positivos*" (false targets). They also denounced persistent massacres and tortures, as

well as the indiscriminate spraying of glyphosate and other carcinogenic herbicides on their crops (of plantain and yucca).¹³³

The armed conflict and its victims have been concentrated in particular areas of the vast national territory of Colombia.¹³⁴ In Cauca, the production and traffic of cocaine and conflicts among the drug cartels worsened the displacement of the population (López Garcés 2013: 2). Forced displacement not only leads to the loss of the territory, but also to the loss of communitarian and social networks, and ultimately of the sense of being a subject of rights and even a human being (Ruiz 2014: 62). When Yanakuna communities were dispersed into rural and urban areas, the traditional indigenous councils lost their authority and became prey to corruption (López Garcés 2013: 4, 7).

In Caquetá and Putumayo, the Inga and Camëntsá were caught in the middle of a pitched confrontation between guerrillas and paramilitary squadrons over the control of the main epicentres of cocaine production, which exposed them to the indiscriminate and constant aerial glyphosate fumigations promoted by the national government (with the support of the United States) and led to the increased militarisation of their territory (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2015b: 144). These two departments had already suffered the devastating consequences of the Amazon rubber boom, or *rubber fever* (1850s-1930s), and the installation of oil companies (since the 1920s) (Ibid.: 98, 267-275). The population was displaced, the rivers and crops were polluted, and the communities became fragmented as many of their members joined or were forcibly recruited to the legal and illegal armies.

As part of this transformation, traditional agricultural practices were also replaced by the production of coca controlled by the drug cartels: “Everybody was dedicated

¹³³ These fumigations were part of the government’s programme for the eradication of coca plants and elicit crops.

¹³⁴ The areas of coffee cultivation became a target of the armed conflict in 1950 and many of the indebted peasant cultivators of coffee joined the guerrillas (Pécaut 2002: 24). In the 1980s and 1990s, the conflict worsened in the Department of Cauca, in the area of Urabá bordering with Panamá, in the foothills of the Eastern Andes, and in the Amazonian region (Ibid.: 48, 23). These primarily rural areas, inhabited by peasants, Afro-descendent and indigenous peoples, have the highest number of deaths attributed to the armed conflict (Ibid.: 23).

exclusively to grow coca. What can I say? They even cut the plantain crops to grow coca. Be aware of the terrible mistake they made. There was a plantain shortage [...]. They had to buy plantain from Ecuador [...], eggs [...]" (Cancimance 2012, cited in Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2015b: 186, my translation). The population in this area of the country has continuously been displaced and exploited, along with the rubber, oil, and coca in their lands, while having little or no access to health care, education, road networks, sanitation and sewage systems (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2015b: 88). Local leaders, human rights activists, journalists and researchers who expose and denounce the violence of the drug cartels and the legal and illegal armies, as well as the involvement of wealthy families and private national and international companies in the conflict, have also been targeted.

The 1990s were particularly violent, not only in the rural but also in the urban areas. The major cities of Bogota, Medellin and Cali were strewn with bombs, which were hidden in cars, buildings and even letters and stationary items. The cities became the new stages of the internecine war; there, drug traffickers set bombs, plotted attacks, and kidnapped and murdered judges and political and union leaders, as well as journalists, academics, and school teachers – essentially anyone who refused to support their increased meddling in the public and political life of the country (Palacios 2003: 75).¹³⁵ During this time, those who were critical of the corruption and illegal proceedings of the government, the landowners, and the extractive national companies and multinational corporations were also kidnapped, disappeared, tortured and murdered by paramilitary squads and agents of the state (ibid.: 78).

This violence has continued, particularly in the rural areas, which remain the preferred setting for drug laboratories and extractive oil and mining companies. Over the last 15 years, about 53 journalists have been murdered by corrupt politicians, drug cartels, police, national armed forces, guerrillas and paramilitary squadrons (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2015c). According to one source, 26

¹³⁵ Three presidential candidates were murdered between 1989 and 1990 including the popular leader of the Liberal Party Luis Carlos Galán (Palacios 2003: 76).

environmental activists were murdered in 2015 alone (Holmes 2016).¹³⁶ Overall, Colombia has the second largest number of victims of forced displacement after Syria, with about 13 percent of the total population having been displaced (ACNUR 2016). About seven million Colombian citizens have been displaced by the conflict; half of them have left the country in search of asylum abroad (Estrada Mejía 2015: 46).

According to the UN High Commission for Refugees, 3.4 percent of all the people displaced in Colombia are indigenous – an alarming figure, considering that the indigenous population represents 2.74 percent of the country’s entire population (ACNUR 2012: 1). According to the National Organisation of Indigenous Peoples of Colombia, about 41,000 indigenous people were displaced from their lands by the armed conflict between 1996 and 2006 (ACNUR 2006: 3) and forced to resettle in small towns and the major cities of the country (ACNUR 2012: 2). Between 2000 and 2006, 984 indigenous people were reported murdered by FARC-EP guerrillas and the paramilitary squadrons of the AUC (ACNUR 2006: 2).¹³⁷ The violence has crept into the new decade: in 2011, 18 indigenous leaders were killed and about 4,080 indigenous peoples were reportedly displaced from their lands (Ibid.: 1).

The racial component of the armed conflict is not often mentioned in Colombia. Yet, in 2003, Duoduo Diène, the then Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance for the United Nations, warned about the ethnic and racial dimension of this conflict (ACNUR 2006: 1). While there are specificities to the armed conflict and displacement in Colombia, the evacuation and expropriation of lands for the purpose of their exploitation is part of a model that Escobar calls “imperial globality and global coloniality” (Escobar 2008: 20).

¹³⁶ The unionist and activist Gilberto Torres claims he was persecuted by paramilitary squadrons sponsored by the oil-pipeline Ocesa for denouncing the violation of human rights in Casanare and organising strikes in protest of the murder of Aury Sara, another trade union leader (Carson, Gatton, Vázquez and O’Kane 2015).

¹³⁷ AUC stands for Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (United Self-Defence of Colombia).

Armed violence, economic growth and development are not oppositional but intertwined (Bonfil *et al.* 1982, Bonilla 2012); the death of some is what makes possible the economic growth of others. These wars over “territory, peoples, and resources [...] contribute to the spread of social fascism, defined as a combination of social and political exclusion whereby increasingly large segments of the population live under terrible material conditions and often under the threat of displacement and even death” (Escobar 2008: 20).

Developmentalism is a colonial discourse in which economic growth and violence interconnect as two pieces of a common engine. As with previous colonial discourses, developmentalism implied the adaptation to foreign models, to the detriment of the local existing models and the guaranteeing of the well-being of the local populations. As the Colombian philosopher and legal scholar Oscar Guardiola-Rivera explains, developmentalism demanded that the local and agricultural economies of the Global South move towards a foreign industrial economic model that in many cases made the local producers and communities vulnerable to an unfair competition (Guardiola-Rivera 2010).

The Unitarian model of developmentalism and neoliberal capitalism have indeed been parallel to the political interventionism, sabotage and persecution of social movements and leaders in Latin America and all over the Global South (Ibid.). Guardiola-Rivera highlights the particular cases of the murder of the Colombian presidential candidate Jorge Eliezar Gaitán and the Chilean president Salvador Allende (Ibid.). While violence and persecution continues against those who are opposed to becoming passive subjects of neoliberal capitalism, indigenous organisations and grassroots movements in Latin America and the Global South not only continue to resist but also to challenge these models of death and development that lead to the destruction of the environment, but also of the social and communitarian filiations (Ibid.).

Indigenous Organisations Guaranteeing Peace

In Putumayo, the Asociación de Campesinos del Sur Oriente del Putumayo (Association of Peasants from the Southeast of Putumayo), or ACSOMAO, outlined their demands to the national government and the armed groups in five points: 1. To initiate a ceasefire; 2. To stop the violent attacks against the civilian population; 3. To deactivate the landmines in their territory; 4. To regulate the gold mining and oil exploitation as well as control the appropriation of lands by multinational corporations involved in the mining and oil industry; 5. To guarantee the protection of the environment by controlling the exploitation of gold and oil and by suspending the aerial fumigation of crops with glyphosate (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2014a: 309). There have been other demonstrations in the main areas where the armed conflict has taken place. Some of those were armed demonstrations promoted by the FARC-EP guerrilla; however, the civilian population has also protested against these armed demonstrations, as was the case in Chocó in 2011 and 2013 (Ibid.: 310).

The relations between indigenous peoples and the FARC-EP guerrilla have been tense due to persistent episodes of violence and the violation of the autonomy of the *resguardo* over their lands (Ibid.). Various indigenous leaders have addressed letters to the captains of the guerrilla fronts and the ringleaders of the FARC-EP's Central Major State demanding the respect of their territories and their autonomy over them, as well as a cessation of the hostilities (Ibid.: 312). In the department of Norte del Cauca, between 2002 and 2013, there were 70 indigenous casualties, of which 30 percent were the result of murder by FARC-EP combatants and landmines planted by the FARC-EP guerrilla (ONIC, CRIC-ACIN 2013, cited in Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2014a: 312). In these letters, the indigenous leaders express their disapproval of "the militarism of the FARC-EP guerrilla and the useless war" in which various indigenous leaders have been "executed by guerrilla combatants for trivial reasons just because 'they are used to murder'" (Ibid.: 313, my translation).

Indigenous peoples organised in the 1990s to express their nonconformity with the rules of the war and to formally express their neutrality, effectively separating themselves from the guerrillas and other armed groups and claiming their rights to

be respected as civilians. The Consejo Nacional Indígena de Paz (National Indigenous Council of Peace), CONIP, emerged in this context with the support of four major indigenous organisations: Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia (National Indigenous Organisation of Colombia), ONIC; Autoridades Indígenas de Colombia (Indigenous Authorities of Colombia), AICO; Organización Nacional de los Pueblos Indígenas de la Amazonia Colombiana (National Organisation of the Indigenous Peoples of the Colombian Amazon), OPIAC; and Confederación Indígena Tayrona (Tayrona Indigenous Confederation), CIT (Caviedes 2007: 79). In 1994, OIA, Organización Indígena de Antioquia (Indigenous Organisation of Antioquia) declared the neutrality of the indigenous groups in regards to the armed conflict taking place in their region and warned that indigenous peoples would not participate in the war (Ibid.: 8).

Besides these declarations and the organisation of indigenous peoples to defend their right to live peacefully in their territories, several indigenous communities have orchestrated their own conciliatory agreements with the guerrilla groups. In 1996, the Nasa people from Gaitania, Tolima, signed a peace agreement with the FARC-EP guerrilla; this is the only peace agreement that has to date held up (Tascón 2007: 7). Despite the effectiveness of the agreement, the national government did not support it, as it circumvents the government's own commission for dialoguing with irregular armies (Caviedes 2007: 24). The Nasa community of Gaitana was led to initiate this agreement in 1994 in large part because the community had been so affected by the persistent conflict; the number of casualties had increased, leaving behind many orphans and widows (Ibid.: 35-36). A year later, in 1995, the FARC-EP guerrilla joined the dialogues for peace with the community (Ibid.: 37).

Caviedes, a Nasa leader, recalls the victimisation of the indigenous community by the FARC-EP guerrilla in the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, as well as the resulting fragmentation of the community. The elected governor at the time, Caviedes helped to initiate the dialogue with the FARC-EP; he also worked to strengthen the traditional authorities of the community so that they could better control the situation (Ibid.: 49-51). He tells how he presented to the captains of the FARC-EP guerrilla a list of petitions to end the conflict in their territory, at first in the name of

his community, but later with the support of other regional indigenous organisations including the Consejo Regional Indígena del Tolima (Indigenous Council of Cauca Region and the Regional Indigenous Council of Tolima), CRIT (Ibid.: 50):

We who were born after 1969 [...] saw someone of our family dead every week. In this community we are all family [...]. Then the youth started to take arms, [...] the guerrilla combatants [...] killed 70 Indians [referring to the indigenous people], betrayed them and ambushed them [...]. This [situation] lasted from 1989 until 1991 [...]. Then the [indigenous] council approved a law stating that nobody in the community could have arms [...]. In 1993, [...] I was elected governor. At that time, I was certain the war was not convenient. [...] I [told] my dad: “The war is not for me, neither for you, nor for anybody. Besides, I don’t want the people from the community and people from the family ending up dead in the river [...]. I am going to introduce myself to them [the captains of the FARC guerrilla] [...].” [Then] I told them [the captains of the FARC guerrilla] that the indigenous community had disarmed, obeying the traditional authorities, but in response [...] [the FARC guerrilla] [couldn’t] enter the indigenous territory, nor could the National Army, the paramilitary groups, or any armed institution (Ibid.: 42-48, my translation).

Caviedes argues that the best strategy against the armed conflict was to rebuild the community from the fragmentation that the conflict had caused in the first place. As the community was rebuilt around the traditional authorities and the Nasa laws, its members gradually agreed to not participate in the armed conflict, and to refrain from positioning themselves in relation to the armed groups: the guerrillas, paramilitary squadrons and the National Army (Ibid.: 51). Regarding the Nasa position in the armed conflict, Caviedes refers to the word “*pjwesx*” which in the Nasayuwe language means “firstly we [the Nasa people] think and analyse our mistakes, then come to a conclusion” – and that conclusion, he says, is that “the armed conflict is not our business” (Ibid.). He is aware that most of the time the people in the indigenous communities who get involved in the political parties and armed conflict do not even know what those groups and parties are after (Ibid.).

Along with the strengthening of the traditional authorities, Caviedes explains that traditional medicine is very important for rebuilding the community and guaranteeing peace. He argues that their territory can only be protected by the traditional medicine and spiritual healers (Ibid.: 52). These wise leaders are the ones

who teach the community how to live a good life. For the Nasa people, peace means living together in wisdom: “*Nasa wesx finzenxi*” (Ibid.: 52, 54). Another traditional authority that has been central for guaranteeing the respect and autonomy of indigenous territories has been the *guardia indígena*, or indigenous guard. The indigenous guard monitors the territory, looks after the community and ensures nobody disrespects or disrupts the community or the territory. In this sense, the indigenous guard has become a central instrument for guaranteeing peace while representing the resistance and autonomy of the indigenous peoples (Tascón 2007: 7).

The indigenous guards of Cauca, which can be traced back to at least the 1970s, has been imitated in other indigenous territories, particularly with the purpose of guaranteeing peace (Caviedes 2007: 22). However, the indigenous guards do not simply protect the indigenous territories from intruders; they also represent the collective voice of the community and their autonomy over their territory. The indigenous guard is not armed; instead, its members carry a symbolic cane, the *bastón de mando* (ruling cane) that represents the indigenous autonomy and government within their territories. The cane helps insiders and outsiders identify the members of the indigenous guard, who, it bears stressing, are not there to replace the authority of the indigenous councils but to ensure that that their authority is respected (Ibid.: 70).

Despite the clear indigenous organisation and the constitution of indigenous councils, indigenous systems of justice and indigenous guards (Ibid.: 56-57), the armed conflict in Colombia has claimed a large number of indigenous victims as well as lands. At the same time, indigenous leaders have participated in legal battles to protect and recover some of those lands (Houghton, Villa 2005, cited in Caviedes 2007: 84). Indigenous peoples have strengthened their organisations, demanding and guaranteeing peace in their territories. At the Congreso Nacional Indígena (National Indigenous Congress) that took place in Cota, Cundinamarca, in 2001, the Consejo Nacional Indígena de Paz (National Indigenous Council of Peace) was created and its different commissions agreed to replicate the structure of the indigenous guard of

Cauca all over the country, with the aim of improving the conditions for peace in their territories (Caviedes 2007: 22).

Armed Conflict and Negotiations

The peace negotiations between the national government and the FARC-EP guerrilla that started in 2012 in Havana, Cuba, were the first to lead to a “preliminary” Peace Agreement, in August 2016. The first Peace Commission was created in 1981, during the presidential term of Turbay Ayala (1978–1982). The Law of Amnesty was enacted that same year (Arias: 13). However, it was not until the presidential term of Belisario Betancur Cuartas (1982-1986) that the military attack against the guerrillas was reconsidered, leading to the peace negotiations between the government and guerrillas which permitted their demobilisation.¹³⁸ The ceasefire and dialogues with the FARC-EP guerrilla were broken during this period, as well as during the presidential term of Virgilio Barco Vargas (1986-1990), during which time members of the political party Unión Patriótica (Patriotic Union) – which was supported by the FARC-EP, but defined itself as an independent party – were murdered.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Five different guerrillas participated in these peace negotiations: 1. FARC-EP; 2. M-19, Movimiento 19 de Abril (Movement of April 19th); 3. Ejército Popular de Liberación (Popular Army of Liberation), or EPL; 4. Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (Workers’ Revolutionary Party), or PRT; 5. Autodefensa Obrera (Workers’ Autodefence), or ADO.

¹³⁹ In 1985, the political party Unión Patriótica (Patriotic Union), or UP, was founded. It was supported by the guerrilla FARC-EP and the PCC, Partido Comunista Colombiano (Colombian Communist Party). The recognition of the UP was central in the peace negotiations between the FARC-EP guerrilla and the national government during the presidential term of Belisario Betancur. About 830 of its members were murdered between 1985 and 1992 (Romero Ospina 2012: 282). In 1994, the party lost the juridical status to continue its activities while losing political representation after their elected members were murdered (Ibid.: 345). The UP was subject to constant accusations about the possible involvement and financial support of the FARC-EP guerrilla, and a few of their former members have acknowledged the fact that they received food and resources for their meetings that they could not afford by themselves without external support, probably coming from the FARC-EP guerrilla (Delgado 2012: 375). However, the leaders of the UP had stated that they were not part of any guerrilla, as they had chosen the democratic path to mobilise their social projects (Romero Ospina 2012: 243, 249).

During the presidential term of César Gaviria (1990-1994), peace negotiations led to the demobilisation of various guerrillas.¹⁴⁰ However, the FARC-EP guerrilla ended the talks after their main branch, Casa Verde (Green House), was attacked by surprise by the National Army, on 9 December 1990 (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2014a: 139-140, Pécaut 2002: 21). The peace negotiations between the national government and the FARC-EP guerrilla resumed in 1999, during the presidential term of Andrés Pastrana Arango (1998-2002). These took place in a demilitarised zone in San Vicente del Caguán, Caquetá. The conversations were coordinated by representatives of the FARC-EP guerrilla, the national government, and the Catholic Church.¹⁴¹ During the negotiations, the paramilitary squadrons grew in numbers, and the FARC-EP guerrilla continued its armed operations (Ibid.). The dialogue was broken once again in 2002. During the negotiations, the FARC-EP guerrilla was accused of the kidnapping of Senator Jorge Gechen Turbay and the former Minister of Development, Fernando Araújo, as well as the murder of three human rights activists from the United States and the former Minister of Culture, Consuelo Araújo (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2014a: 208-209).

When the dialogues were broken, the region of Caquetá became one of the major centres of control of the FARC-EP guerrilla. By June 2002 there were 27 Fronts operating in the area and by 26 June all the majors, council members, judges, inspectors and prosecutors were forced to tender their resignation under the threat of execution (Ibid.: 263). At the same time, the civilian population, particularly in the rural areas, became the victims of indiscriminate, large scale and constant kidnappings known as the “*pesca milagrosa*” (miraculous fishing). During this period

¹⁴⁰ These include the Ejército Popular de Liberación (Popular Army of Liberation), the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (Revolutionary Party of Workers), the indigenous guerrilla Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame (Quintín Lame Armed Movement), the Corriente de Renovación Socialista (Socialist Tendency of Renovation), the Milicias de Medellín (Medellin Militias) and the Frente Francisco Garnica de la Coordinadora Guerrillera (Francisco Garnica Front of the Guerrilla Coordinator) (Arias 2008: 22, Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2014a: 139).

¹⁴¹ Despite being invited to take part in the negotiations, the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army) guerrilla never participated and continued their attacks against the civilian population, to the point that the government had to remove them from negotiations (Arias 2008: 26).

the infrastructure of the towns was destroyed with cylinder bombs, and the use of landmines resulted in the increased isolation of the rural population (Ibid.: 268).

In 2002, Álvaro Uribe Velez was elected president and framed the nation's military crusade against the guerrillas as part of the international fight against terrorism (Ibid.: 269).¹⁴² It was at this time that the war in Colombia stopped being an internal conflict and the possibility of an agreement with the guerrillas was lost. Nevertheless, a board of negotiation was formed in 2004 to initiate dialogues between the paramilitary squadrons and the national government; in 2006, 31,671 paramilitary members demobilised with the support of an Organisation of American States (OAS) Mission, and the captains of the paramilitary squadrons were extradited to the United States (Presidencia de Colombia 2005, Arias 2008: 27). This demobilisation was highly criticised because it provided conditions for impunity and non-reparation (FIDH 2007).¹⁴³ Moreover, during the presidential term of Uribe Velez (2002-2010), there were allegations against the National Army in regards to the violation of the human rights and the extrajudicial capture and murder of civilians presented as guerrilla combatants. The investigations and legal suits pertaining to this and other irregularities continue to this date.

The 2005 Ley de Justicia y Paz (Law of Peace and Justice) – enacted to support the demobilisation of the paramilitary squads – did not guarantee victims' rights to know the truth about the crimes perpetuated by the paramilitary squads. Therefore, many victims had to use other legal mechanisms in order to demand the guarantee of this right. Many victims submitted suits for immediate consideration (*tutelas*). After processing several of these suits, the Constitutional Court pronounced sentences in

¹⁴² The presidential term of Uribe started with a state of siege, the Constitution was reformed to enable the presidential re-election, and the military forces directed by the Ministry of Defence and its Minister Juan Manuel Santos, received the sponsoring and military support of the United States.

¹⁴³ The reports indicate that only 8 percent of the demobilised members had to respond to the Law of Justice and Peace and those who did were judged in audiences where their testimony was free. According to the International Federation of Human Rights, the Permanent Committee for the Defence of Human Rights, and the Colombian Collective of Lawyers, this has allowed neither the authorities nor the relatives of victims to know the location of those who were disappeared or to find all the bodies of those who were brutally murdered by the paramilitary squadrons (FIDH 2007).

favour of the victims, and the need to reformulate the legal proceedings regarding the crimes that took place as part of the armed conflict became evident. This situation has led victims' organisations – including Movimiento de Víctimas de Crímenes de Estado (Movement of Victims of Crimes of the State) or MOVICE, Colombia nunca más (Colombia Never Again), and Hijos e Hijas por la Memoria y Contra la Impunidad (Sons and Daughters for Memory and Against Impunity) – to strengthen their mutual ties (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2015a). Despite the persecution and murder of various leaders of these organisations and their supporters, their constancy led to the adoption of the Law of Victims 1448 in 2011: “The defenders of Human Rights and the victims have carried a double struggle [...]: One for justice and the respect of Human Rights, and another for the acknowledgement of the defence of human rights as a legitimate and necessary activity” (Ibid.: 78, my translation).¹⁴⁴

In 2013, during the presidential term of Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2018), the negotiations between the government and the FARC-EP guerrilla led to an agreement on six points of discussion: 1. Access of use of lands (in regards to unproductive lands, propriety rights, agricultural borders and natural reserves); 2. Programmes of territorial development; 3. Infrastructure and the adaptation of lands; 4. Social development (in regards to health, education, housing, and the eradication of poverty); 5. Promotion of the agricultural production and social economy (considering as well technical assistance and subsidy and loans); 6. Policies in regards to food access (Mesa de Conversaciones 2013, cited in Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2014a: 331).¹⁴⁵

On 24 August 2016, after three years of negotiations and a provisional ceasefire by the FARC-EP guerrilla (which began on 20 December 2014), the peace agreement

¹⁴⁴ This new law amplified the dispositions of the Law for the Population Victim of Forced Displacement of 1997; it created the institutional conditions to guarantee the financial reparation of victims, their humanitarian assistance, the restitution of their lands and properties, their social rehabilitation, and the guarantee of non-repetition of the violence and crimes to which they have been subjected (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2015a: 114). Additionally, there were some attempts to reformulate the penal justice system in regards to the national army, though these failed to be approved and enacted (Ibid.).

¹⁴⁵ The Board of Negotiations has since then released various public statements, which are available on its official website.

between the FARC-EP guerrilla and the national government was signed. The document was released to the public, and citizens were invited to revise its six points: 1. Access and use of lands (unproductive lands, propriety legalisation, agricultural borders and areas of natural reserves); 2. Political participation (creation of a political party); 3. End of the conflict (ceasefire, disarmament, reintegration in civil and political life); 4. Resolution of the illicit-drug problem; 5. Agreement on the victims of the conflict (truth, justice, reparation and no repetition, amnesty and special treatment); 6. Implementation, verification and endorsing (calendar of implementation, international supervision, creation of a Verification Commission and an Ethnic Chapter negotiated with the Comisión Étnica para la Paz y la Defensa de los Derechos Territoriales (Ethnic Commission for Peace and the Defence of Territorial Rights) (Alto Comisionado para la Paz 2016, Mesa de Conversaciones 2016a).¹⁴⁶

Struggles and the Participation of the Ethnic Commission for Peace in the Havana Peace Negotiations

The Misak poet and activist Edgard Velasco Tumiña was an active member of the Comisión Étnica para la Paz y la Defensa de los Derechos Territoriales (Ethnic Commission for Peace and the Defence of Territorial Rights), jointly created in May 2016 with the Consejo de Paz Afrocolombiano (Afro-Colombian Council of Peace), the Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia (Indigenous National Organisation of Colombia), ONIC, and the Autoridades Tradicionales Indígenas (Indigenous Traditional Authorities). The leaders from these organisations struggled to participate in the Dialogues of Peace that have been taking place in Havana, Cuba, since 2013.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ The final document of the peace agreement, along with a didactic notebook, were made available online in Spanish, in five indigenous languages (Ri Palenge, Iku, Uitoto, Namtrik, and Nasayuwe) and in the creole language of San Bacilio de Palenque (Ministerio de Cultura 2016).

¹⁴⁷ One of the reasons why the conversation has taken place outside the Colombian territory was the regretful and violent impact of the previous military clearing of a zone for carrying out negotiations between the national government and the FARC-EP guerrilla. Another important change was that before starting the negotiations, a clearer agenda (on 6 points to be discussed) was set.

The Comisión Étnica para la Paz y la Defensa de los Derechos Territoriales was finally acknowledged by the presidency, the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace (Alto Comisionado para la Paz) and the FARC-EP guerrilla in 2016 (ONIC 2016b, Velasco Tumiña 2016). Overall, this Commission discussed concerns regarding the restitution of lands, the countermanding of indigenous justice by transitional justice and the political representation of indigenous and Afro-descendant communities (Velasco Tumiña 2016). The members demanded as well that the indigenous guards and the Cimarron Guard – of the creole community of San Bacilio de Palenque – be put in charge of guaranteeing the appropriate implementation of the agreement in their communities, which was accepted by the Board of Negotiations (Contagio Radio 2016). One of the central topics of discussion was the protection of victims' rights, particularly in regards to their right to know what actually happened to their disappeared and murdered relatives, as well as their right to justice, reparation and the guarantee of non-repetition.

As mentioned in the previous section, in regards to the demobilisation of paramilitary squadrons and the Law of Peace and Justice of 2005, many victims submitted claims to Amnesty International because many of the perpetrators did not accept their responsibilities, received reduced penalties (as little as five years of imprisonment), and received financial aid from the government – and, more importantly, because information regarding their crimes and the fate of the disappeared and murdered victims remained secret (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2016: 17). The human rights claims of victims and organisations created the conditions for what became the Law of Victims in 2011, which recognised their right to know the truth and to reparation, as well as the legal responsibilities of all armed actors including the legal and illegal armies (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2014b). The peace agreement, signed on 26 September 2016, continued this trend, offering reduced penalties to FARC-EP members who confessed their crimes, which has facilitated the elucidation of what happened to the victims of the armed conflict, and provided economic compensations to their victims.

The Comisión Étnica para la Paz y la Defensa de los Derechos Territoriales was particularly concerned with the autonomy of the peoples in the territories that had

been overtaken by the FARC-EP fronts and their restitution. It was also concerned with the issue of representation and authority in relation to the formation of political parties by former members of the FARC-EP guerrilla. This has been an issue of special interest for indigenous leaders, given that indigenous peoples want to have representatives of their own in their territories and communities – representatives who are independent of the political platforms of the FARC-EP guerrilla, and whose agenda is deeply connected to communitarian processes, rather than to external political strategies or intentions (Velasco Tumiña 2016).¹⁴⁸

Velasco Tumiña explains that, in keeping with the cosmology, ways of living and thinking of the Misak people, the traditional authorities do not conceive of their leadership in terms of power, control or dominance, but in terms of collective work and service to the community (Ibid.). Leadership in these terms is not so much about the individual or the political party or platform, but about the community that is built in the daily practice of living together and supporting one another (Ibid.). While indigenous groups are ready to welcome those who left and joined the FARC-EP guerrilla, they do not want them to take leadership of the community by imposing a dynamic of power and control that does not represent the interests and ways of thinking and living of the community (Ibid.).

Another central point of discussion presented by the Comisión Étnica para la Paz y la Defensa de los Derechos Territoriales was territorial peace and the redistribution of lands, pertaining to indigenous collective lands and lands considered “unproductive”, “vacant lands” (Ibid.). These territories are traditionally dedicated to spiritual purposes and the communities are not willing to part with them; this stance runs counter to the aims of the programme of redistribution of lands for peasants proposed by the FARC-EP guerrilla. Additionally, in regards to post-conflict justice and the reintegration of former FARC-EP combatants to civil and political life, there were

¹⁴⁸ There are members of the FARC-EP guerrilla who were born in indigenous communities but who left for years and even decades. These individuals do not have the communities’ recognition and lack the trajectory of traditional leaders (Velasco Tumiña 2016). In contrast, the leaders with a longer trajectory in the communities are more aware of their internal dynamics, cosmologies and traditional figures of leadership, and therefore more prepared to contribute to the community (Ibid.).

important discussions about how indigenous justice would coexist in the communities along with the transitional justice that is part of the process of amnesty (Ibid.).

Due to the complexities of the concerns of indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples and in order to guarantee their consideration not only during the negotiations but more importantly during the implementation of the Peace Agreement, the Commission submitted an Ethnic Chapter on 12 August 2016 (ONIC 2016b). This Chapter was the result of the conversations in Havana, Cuba, as well as the meetings of leaders of the indigenous and Afro-descendant communities all over the national territory. The Chapter formulates a series of principles for guaranteeing the defence of the rights of the ethnic peoples of Colombia (ONIC 2006c), and proposes that a Technical Commission be formed for observing the respect of those rights during implementation of the Peace Agreement (Velasco 2016, El Pilón 2016). Furthermore, the Commission has worked on a “pedagogy of peace” for socialising and defining the conditions of the Peace Agreement with the communities (Velasco 2016).

In the particular case of the Misak people, this pedagogy of peace follows the principles of the *Mø røpik misak* (traditional medicine healer of the Misak people). These are the principles of spiritual healing, oriented by the traditional spiritual and medicine healers of the communities (Ibid.). When Velasco Tumiña participated with his community in negotiations and peace agreements in their territory, he explains that there was always a ritual preceding the negotiations (Ibid.). The rituals prepared the conditions for the negotiations and the possibility of building peace within the community and outsiders (Ibid.).

The traditional governments of indigenous communities are deeply articulated with their spiritual leaders, who work together for the community rather than in their own name and for their own benefit (Ibid.). This is one of the major differences and difficulties that indigenous peoples encounter when they try to communicate their principles of autonomy and self-governance to institutions, government officials, guerrillas or any other armed groups. Leadership is collective and governing is also

healing; peace is understood as a collective project that needs to be built on an adequate terrain previously prepared and ritualised, to ensure the healing that is necessary for good government, leadership and community life.

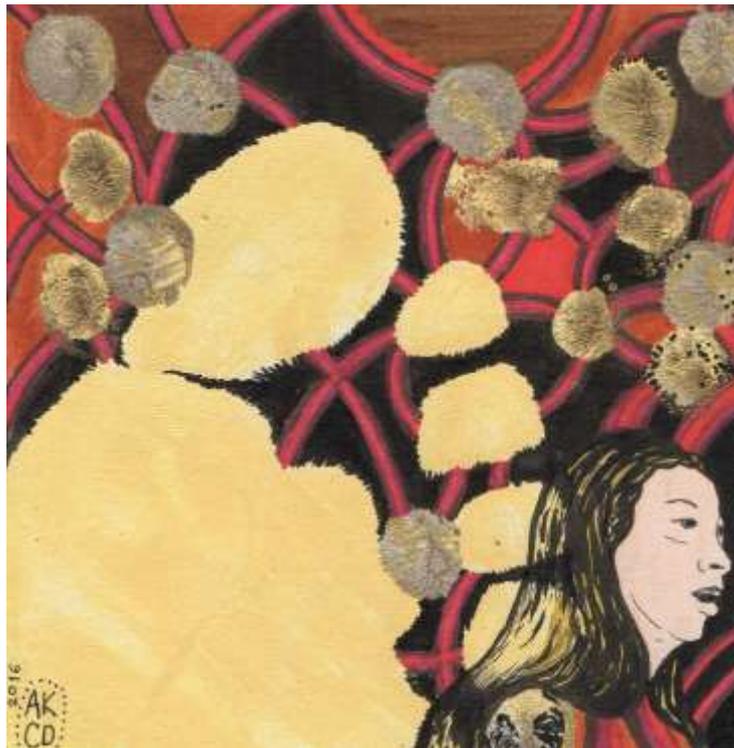
Unfortunately, a few days before the signing of the Peace Agreement between the national government and the FARC-EP guerrilla, the Ethnic Chapter had not yet been included; indigenous peoples had no other option than to remain attentive to the response of the government in a permanent assembly, and announced they would occupy the highways until the Board of Negotiations would take them into account (El Pilón 2016). On 24 August 2016, the day the Peace Agreement was supposed to be signed in Havana, Cuba, the indigenous peoples were impatient; the Ethnic Chapter had still not been included. Despite the disappointment, the Commission and indigenous organisations such the ONIC and the CRIC, along with the Mesa Permanente de Concertación Indígena (Permanent Board of Indigenous Concertation) declared they would support the peace process: “Count on us for peace, never for war” (ONIC 2016a: 1, my translation). Finally, the inclusion of the Ethnic Chapter was announced.

The delegates of the FARC-EP guerrilla supported and agreed with most of the considerations of the Ethnic Chapter but called for further discussions on the subject (Semana 2016). The main points of disagreement were related to the redistribution of lands and the application of indigenous justice to the demobilised combatants (Ibid.). There are concerns regarding where the indigenous territories end and where the peasant land reservations would start (Ibid.). Another concern expressed in the Ethnic Chapter was the status of traditional crops of coca and other sacred plants as illicit drugs and the implementation of differential programmes in regards to the eradication of coca crops (Ibid.).

Walking Together in Agonistic (Po)ethics and Plural Healing

If you do not want
your spirit to die from starvation
walk with your people.
(Jamioy Juagibioy 2010: 149,
“Acbe yent” sangaftac jtsanan”
[Walk with your people], my translation).

The Camëntsá poet Jamioy Juagibioy invites his people to walk with their people so their spirits do not die. Being Camëntsá in this sense is being with the Camëntsá – walking, moving and with them, becoming Camëntsá, producing the Camëntsá community. Walking together has been an important part of indigenous peoples’ struggles as well as their ways of rebuilding and creating new community filiations that resist the multi-layered violence and colonial legacies to which they have been subjected in Colombia.



The above illustration by Katalian Castro evokes this call by Jamioy Juagibioy to walk together, fortifying and rebuilding the bonds that hold together the community, as the threads of the “*chumbes*” (traditional Katmetshä textiles) that are drawn on the background.

Walking has been a way for indigenous and other organisations in Colombia to denounce violence, manifest their disapproval, make known their proposals for transformation. On 2 October 2016, a slim majority (50.2 percent) of Colombians voted in a Plebiscite to reject the Peace Agreement. Despite this negative outcome, the Ethnic Commission for Peace and the Defence of Territorial Rights, together with Afro-descendant, indigenous, and victims' organisations, as well as students, academics, human rights activists, journalists and regular citizens, have expressed their support of the agreement through demonstrations and petitions. They have also continued to use educational strategies to discuss the agreement and to counter the campaign against it, mobilised by Uribe Vélez and his political party, Centro Democrático (Democratic Centre). Juridical actions have also been taken (leaders of the "no" campaign are being sued for distorting the facts about the negotiations) and open town councils (*cabildos abiertos*) have been created for discussing the Peace Agreement and involving the participation of civil society (Álvarez 2016, Caracol Radio 2016, Redacción Judicial 2016, Paz a la Calle 2016b).

On 27 and 28 August 2016, the Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte del Cauca (Association of Indigenous Councils of Norte del Cauca), ACONC, called a meeting in La Alsalcia, attended by some 400 members and leaders of the Indigenous Councils of the region (Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte del Cauca 2016). The following week, the ONIC, the CRIC, the Mesa Permanente de Concertación Indígena, and the Comisión Étnica para la Paz y la Defensa de los Derechos Territoriales met with the delegates of the Board of Negotiations who had been in Havana, Cuba, including representatives of the UN and the guarantor countries (Cuba and Norway) (CRIC 2016). This dialogue brought together representatives of the 123 indigenous councils, 10 indigenous peoples and 11 associations of indigenous councils of Cauca (Ibid.).

The purpose of these events was to clarify any doubts concerning the Peace Agreement and to discuss the specificities of its implementation in relation to a range of issues, including: the future of indigenous territories, the reparation of victims, the return of children and youngsters who had been forcibly recruited, the reintegration of former combatants, the removal of landmines, the process of demobilisation in

transitional territories, the political participation of the demobilised in the indigenous territories, and the concerns in regards to the indigenous and transitional justice (Ibid.).

Along with these two meetings, the indigenous peoples of Cauca were invited to “walk the word, the thought and the action in order to continue weaving together the peace, understood according to [their] experience and wisdom” (Mesa Permanente de Concertación Indígena 2016: 1, my translation). During this long walk across more than five municipalities of Cauca, different indigenous delegations played their traditional music with flutes, drums and guitars; they were also invited to paint and weave in the name of peace (Ibid.). Participants were invited to discuss the ways in which their life, territory and autonomy should be guaranteed (Ibid.). There are various important elements in the pedagogy of peace that the indigenous peoples have proposed and continue to carry out in their communities, despite the negative results of the October 2016 Plebiscite.

One important element of this pedagogy of peace is the understanding that communities need to go through a healing process in order to be rebuilt. A second important element is the understanding that conviviality and living together as a community does not exclude the collective traumas, social conflict, and pain occasioned by the armed conflict. Understanding that healing and trauma are part of the community-building project implies also understanding that peace and dialogue are only possible if there is some kind of preparation of adequate conditions. Healing implies that former victims become agents of action oriented by a wish of peace. Understanding the wish of peace as a mobilising force, however, does not mean that that peace and healing will be easily accomplished.

The support of the peace process by the indigenous peoples and their leaders responds to a wish for peace, but also acknowledges that there a number of difficult discussions to develop, because the parties involved do not agree and approach the process from different angles. Here, a (po)ethics of peace involves a wishful attitude, along with a disposition of life and conviviality and the awareness of an inevitable struggle. The (po)ethics of peace are, in this sense, agonistic, indicative of what

democracy might be like in a country as conflicted and complex as Colombia. The Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gómez has argued that the construction of peace demands the transformation of our conceptions of democracy and peace. Democracy cannot be confused with unanimity and the lack of disagreement; instead, we need to move towards the understanding of democracy as agonistic (Castro-Gómez 2016). In an agonistic democracy, pacification is not the norm; it is the encounter of adversaries with differential positions and demands and who engage, dialogue, and even dispute, but do not eliminate one another (Ibid.). Moreover, this chapter suggests that the plural (po)ethics of peace – developed, lived and experienced by indigenous poets, leaders and their communities – are not only agonistic, but also healing.

The (po)ethics for peace developed by the indigenous community leaders during the negotiations in Havana and in dialogue with their communities are rooted in agonistic and healing experiences that enable the construction of conviviality and peace. They enable the rebuilding of communities according to principles of respect and dignity that deeply understand, value and respect difference as disagreement, and that do not intend to eradicate it, but to dialogue and walk around it. These (po)ethics engage with an understanding and appreciation that are not simply rhetorical or conceptual as is so often the case with the superficially celebratory discourse of multiculturalism. In contrast, the understanding of difference and disagreement as well as the wish for healing and rebuilding carried in the (po)ethics of peace is rooted in the pain of lived experiences and the slow healing of open wounds.

(Po)ethics are not a univocal, fixed state; they are in movement, even walking, towards a plural ideal of respect and dignity that motivates rethinking, rediscovering and rebuilding traditions and ancestral pasts. The ultimate purpose of (po)ethics is to create adequate conditions for peace in the present and to make possible a different future in which we can acknowledge one another's existence. This acknowledgment has enabled new articulations, materialised in the coming together of indigenous and non-indigenous peoples on the streets to discuss how to construct peace collectively, beyond the negative results of the October 2016 Plebiscite.

Students, neighbours, academics, journalists and members of civil society have gathered in the name of a collective project of peace, denouncing the manipulation of the mass media and the misinformation at the centre of the campaign against the Peace Agreement (Molano Jimeno 2016, Paz a la Calle 2016a, Redacción Paz 2016). They have also acknowledged the need to dialogue with those who rejected the agreement while holding firm on key issues (for instance, the right of the victims to reparation, the commitment of non-repetition of the crimes committed, and the truthful exposure of the crimes) (Paz a la Calle 2016b, Quevedo 2016). They have also demanded, along with victims' organisations and the Ethnic Commission for Peace and the Defence of Territorial Rights, that the negotiation of the Agreement remain public, and does not lead to a secretive and convenient agreement among the elite (Chato 2016, Paz a la Calle 2016a)

On 12 October 2016, in remembrance of the continuous violence to which indigenous peoples have been subjected in the country, indigenous peoples from across the country – including many of the poets mentioned in this thesis (such as Fredy Chikangana and Edgar Velasco Tumiña) – walked towards Bogota's Bolivar Square. There, they were received and accompanied by a multitudinous congregation of supporters displaying the sign "you are not alone" and messages in indigenous languages such as: "*Come cáatantino comeci fjimo ite*" ("a person's life is in her heart", translated from Uitoto), "*Faicanoaide*" ("Let free, forgive", translated from Uitoto), "*Ta'e chixana*" ("I live in peace", translated from Sáliba) (Paz a la Calle 2016b, 2016c, my translation).



The above illustration by Katalina Castro evokes this demonstration in which students received and accompanied with placards written in indigenous languages numerous members of indigenous communities who demanded the guarantee of peace in their territories and the respect of their peoples' rights and dignity.

Since 3 October 2016, the shared pain and trauma of the Colombian victims of the conflict has found a singular and plural voice that has allowed many experiences of the violent armed conflict to be collectively acknowledged. Large demonstrations have taken place in Colombia but also overseas. In particular, the emergence of the Campamento por la Paz (Camping for Peace) and its occupation of Bolivar Square with the support of artists such as Doris Salcedo (*El Espectador* 2016, *El Tiempo* 2016), has served to make visible the massive interest in the end of the conflict with the FARC-EP guerrilla and the support to the peace dialogues started with the ELN guerrilla in Quito, Ecuador, on 3 November 2016.

The pressure of civil social and social organisations has been fundamental in maintaining the peace negotiations which led to the release of a second peace agreement. This second agreement was produced in response to most of the demands of the leaders of the campaign against the endorsement of the first

agreement. While it is more specific to the FARC-EP guerrilla, it lost the initial intention to enable the revision of former cases of transitional justice related to other armed groups, guerrillas and paramilitary squadrons. This second agreement also removed the responsibility of lawdowners, private corporations and enterprises in the financing of illegal armies. Finally, it reduced the participation of international juries, who could guarantee the transparency of the processes of justice related to the armed conflict (Mesa de Conversaciones 2016b). While some of the leaders of the campaign against it have expressed their approval, others, particularly Álvaro Uribe Velez, have continued with their position of delaying its implementation while privileging their personal and political interests, and preparing a presidential campaign for elections that will take place in 2018.

Final Considerations

Overall, this chapter has affirmed the importance of (po)ethical indigenous language practices and the ways in which they enable creative resistance and the rebuilding and creation of community filiations and ethics. It has also highlighted the potential of these (po)ethical practices to be translated while remaining in connection to local experiences and allowing plural dialogues. (Po)ethics live in the language practices, the community filiations and ethics in which they are built, yet they can be translated, but only through agonistic translations. This is through the plural acknowledgement and feeling of one another's existence and pains, producing a plural and visceral disruption that truly challenges the naturalisation of violence and dehumanisation of the present world. The following chapter considers in more detail the impact of agonistic translation and (po)ethics for creative resistance and challenging colonial legacies and violence – not only in Colombia, but in the wider scope of the Global South and the interconnected world system.

Chapter 6. (Po)ethics and Agonistic Translations for a World of the “You”

One day
I will speak (I will say)
I am not alone among us
I am here at your sight
searching in the birds' nest,
searching in the songs of the *gorrión*
undressing sweet words
/ in the night
waking up the one with no memory,
blossoming,
blossoming,
blossoming...

(Chikangana n.d, “Vivir” [To Live]
cited in Festival de Poesía de Medellín 2015:1, my translation).

Chikangana wants to build bridges with his poetry between the indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, to create another world of dialogue (Chikangana 2016).



The above illustration by Katalina Castro evokes Chikangana’s poem and its narration of the journey he has followed in search of the memory and language of his people, which is the search to live and blossom as a community with strong bonds, capable of rebuilding and creative resistance.

In his poem “Vivir” (To live), he envisages this dialogue, which is already taking place among indigenous poets and *oralitores* from North, Central and South America as well as other regions of the world. This dialogue, he says, will allow us to see one another, and discover, or better, to remember that we are not alone. “To live” is an invitation to wake up and remember that we need to come together. The agonistic translation of (po)ethical practices such as those of Chikangana, Jamioy Juagibioy, Velasco, Apüshana, Muchavisoy and Ortiz demands not simply a change of code, but more importantly allowing an openness to being disturbed and awakened from the naturalisation of violence. It also requires acknowledging their call to transform this world of death.

This final chapter discusses how (po)ethical practices can dialogue and be articulated with agonistic translations to construct pluriversal (po)ethics. It explores how the poetical, ethical and political dimensions of these practices can be translated in order to enable plural dialogues. It also considers how the agonistic translation of (po)ethical practices can make possible the emergence of alliances and filiations that foster collective and creative resistance beyond the borders of Colombia, in the Global South and in the interconnected world system.

The chapter discusses the ways in which the agonistic translation of (po)ethical practices and the creation of a pluriversal (po)ethics can provide conditions for articulating creative practices of resistance to colonial and epistemic violence. It also analyses the way these agonistic translations enable the collective creation of a world of the “you”; that is, a world where many worlds, knowledge practices and ways of living can be possible. Finally, it considers the way (po)ethical practices and their agonistic translations enable plural acknowledgement of one another’s existence and pains, challenging the naturalisation of violence and the dehumanisation of our present world.

Acknowledging One Another's Agony and the Decolonial Attitude

The ultimate purpose of (po)ethical practices is to create adequate conditions in the present for an emergent acknowledgment of one another's existence and the creation of a new world of the "you" that defies dehumanisation and praises the dignity of all peoples. In order to produce a new world of the "you", it is necessary to first recognise the need to transform the present world. This implies recognising the violence and the dehumanisation that shapes this world along with the agony and pain that they cause, as well as engaging with the transformation of this world of death. Our present world is traversed by coloniality; this is the continuation of colonial (power) relations that classify and segregate peoples, knowledge practices and ways of being and relating. Coloniality is mobilised not only at the level of discourses, or institutions, but more complexly at the level of subjectivities and affects. It shapes perceptions, feelings, emotions and affects. It produces populist discourses of hate and fear that justify and promote a "permanent state of exception" (Agamben 2008). These discourses make dehumanisation natural and create conditions for the acceptance of the "non-ethics of war", which justifies "eliminating and slaving certain subjects – e.g., indigenous and black subjects – as part of the enterprise of colonization" (Maldonado-Torres 2007: 246-247). Affects and politics are not separated, but they intercept one another (Protevi 2009). It is from this intimate yet public level of affects that (po)ethical practices can challenge coloniality and enable the construction of an agonistic pluriversal (po)ethics.

The agonistic translation of (po)ethical practices has the potential to allow us to acknowledge one another's existence. It can help us to wake up and recognise the pain and agony that coloniality produces. Waking up is also the first step to developing a decolonial attitude that challenges coloniality. This attitude emerges from a disgust towards the violence of coloniality and the "world of death" it creates (Maldonado-Torres 2006a). It also leads to a personal and collective "ethical-political stance", which is a commitment to transform that world and create a new one (2008: 61). A decolonial attitude acknowledges that colonial hierarchies and dehumanising frameworks affect our perceptions, feelings and presuppositions about other beings, their knowledge practices and ways of being. This awareness stems not only from the

recognition of local singular experiences, but it also from considering the operation of coloniality and the way it has shaped experiences of violence and dehumanisation on a global scale.

Three contemporary scenarios are particularly useful for tracing the overlapping dynamics of hate and fear. These are the campaign against the Peace Agreement in Colombia, the campaign for Brexit in the United Kingdom, and Donald Trump's presidential campaign in the United States. These three campaigns have exacerbated the fear of economic decline among those who take their right to live under better life conditions for granted, in contrast to those who are supposedly "less deserving" of financial assistance. These three scenarios imagine society divisively and oppositionally, as a struggle between those who "deserve" and those who "do not deserve" to be treated as citizens. Those who identify with the first group are encouraged to perceive those placed in the second group as a threat that needs to be eliminated or removed. Whether the "enemy" is imagined outside or inside the nation's borders, it is often constructed through the manipulation of affects, particularly hate and fear. These two emotions are at play in the overgeneralisations that are made about immigrants in the United States and the United Kingdom, as well as in the overgeneralisations that have been made of the armed conflict in Colombia.

In these three campaigns, the "enemies" have no face; they are quickly dismissed as "irrational savages" who have nothing to say. The historical conditions that have placed them in this particular relation to "decent people" (*gente de bien*, as is said in Spanish) are ignored. This attitude of disdain overlooks the pain and trauma of immigrants who have left their countries of origin in the Global South, escaping violence and scarcity; it also overlooks the asymmetries of power that structure relations between the Global South and the Global North. Publicity may enlist the masses in the dream of conspicuous consumption and the search for social status that goes with it. At the same time, little attention is paid to the violent and asymmetrical exploitation that sustains the economic growth of a reduced number of corporations and multinational companies. The obvious correlation between the increased availability of consumer products in the Global North and the exponential

impoverishment and dehumanisation of “faceless” masses in the Global South is mostly unmentioned.

The mass media in Colombia has also left little room for the critical discussion of the armed conflict and its roots in the concentration of lands and power in the hands of a few families. Nor has it fostered critical discussion about their creation of private armed squadrons to persecute indigenous peoples, Afro-descendant communities and peasants, forcing them to vacate their lands and silencing anyone willing to denounce these atrocities. It is even more rare to find open discussions that seriously consider the violence in countries of the Global South as *useful* for the economic growth of the Global North and its extractive multinational corporations, or for the transnational drug cartels producing and commercialising illegal drugs all over the world (Escobar 2008).

While the violence that is inherent to the economic growth and development of both the Global North and the Global South is dimmed, the mass media cannot stop paying attention to fantastic evil creatures that resemble those imagined by fifteenth- and sixteenth-century colonial chronicles and medieval narratives (Gómez Wey 2008, Borja Gómez 2002). The war between “good” and “evil” and the preservation of some lives over others is rooted in a colonial understanding and division of the world. Coloniality continues to classify humans and non-humans, children of God and soulless creatures, just as it did in 1492 on the eve of the conquest of America, but also before, in Al-Andalus and during the Crusades (Grosfoguel 2013b).

In the name of the security and protection of an anonymous, faceless, general population, the populist discourses of the political right often serve to re-victimise those who have been harmed by colonial violence more severely: indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants and peasants in Colombia, immigrants and people of colour in the countries of the North. They are left to die of starvation, poor health, debt, and bankruptcy, with minimal or no access to health services. They are also “killed” by the destruction of their lands and the impoverishment of their living conditions (Nixon 2011). They are often transformed into potential enemies,

strangers to be mistrusted as unclear and unproven allies of the enemies of the nation. Their re-victimisation goes hand in hand with their dehumanisation and even their demonisation, which justifies their persecution and even their elimination.

Coloniality produces dehumanisation – the “*damnés*”, the “wretched of the earth” that Fanon spoke of. It condemns to death directly or indirectly, as it places some lives in the zone of “not-being” (Fanon 1965). The “*damné*” subject emerges in a world of death “structured on the basis of the lack of recognition of the greater part of humanity as givers, which legitimizes dynamics of possession, rather than [...] exchange” (Maldonado-Torres 2007: 259). “Ever-menacing death” is omnipresent in the zones of non-being which are created for the maintenance of the colonial world (Fanon 1965). This death is “experienced as endemic famine, unemployment, a high death rate, an inferiority complex and the absence of any hope for the future” (Fanon 1959: 52, cited in Maldonado-Torres 2007: 254-255).

Overall, coloniality’s *technologies of death* continue to produce and maintain the dehumanisation of various groups and peoples the world over (Maldonado-Torres 2007). Coloniality promotes the invasion of their territories as a necessary condition for the “success of the expanding logic of capitalism all over the world” (Ibid.: 64, my translation). Racialised and impoverished populations are counted only as a collateral effect of, never as the condition for, the expansion of capitalism. In the meantime, the world and humanity is divided in two, separated by “retaining walls between the privileged zones and the formerly called Third World” (Ibid., my translation).

Chikangana’s disgust towards a world of death makes him initiate through his (po)ethical practices a call for the creation of a new world. Through his poetry, Chikangana sings against “the historical violence, the acculturation, the whitening, the social and political segregation” (Ceballos Ramírez 2015: 42, my translation). He expresses his repulsion towards the operations and effects of coloniality. Chikangana’s (po)ethics are affirmative of life. They are affirmative of the knowledges and practices of those who have been dehumanised and whose death has become natural, or simply an unfortunate collateral effect, of the interests pursued by multinationals and landowners.

Colonial subjects not only need to construct a new world, but to construct themselves anew, for they have been constituted by the violence and dehumanisation of coloniality (Fanon 1986). This is a project of the “you”, singular and plural (Nancy 2000), located and global. This project must denounce the measures and “solutions” of the colonial system that encourage the continuation of patronising interventions in the lives of indigenous peoples in the name of democracy, development or civilisation. It must also make visible the internalisation of coloniality, the desire to occupy the position of the coloniser and first-world consumers, the identification with the “needs and projects” of the privileged minority that benefits from the exploitation of the world, its natural resources and its people. This identification with the privileged consumers of the Global North, and/or with the landowners and elites of the Global South results in a split of consciousness.

This “double consciousness” motivates those who have suffered the violence of coloniality to maintain colonial relations while wishing they could one day change roles, become the exploiters and stopped been the exploited ones (Du Bois 1969). This split makes both the colonial subjects who have suffered the dehumanisation of coloniality, and the ones who have benefited from the dehumanisation of others, accept the effects of coloniality as an irrevocable fate. Double consciousness produces the acceptance of some sort of “natural” inferiority and makes possible the justification of ongoing forms of dehumanisation and death. The violence of coloniality makes dehumanised subjects experience a contradiction between their experiences, values and points of view, on the one hand, and those of the colonial world which insist on their “inferiority” on the other (Maldonado-Torres 2006b: 12).

If the “double consciousness” of the colonized subject emerges in the tension between [...] two forms of seeing oneself, the “double consciousness” of the normative self is brought to the fore by the contrast between the first person point of view of the normative subject and the “cry” of suffering and ethical revolt of the colonized, that is, between a form of seeing and one of listening” (Ibid.)

The effects of coloniality have not faded but intensified in our time. The horror and repulsion towards the world produced by coloniality create an “urge to counteract [this] world of death and end the naturalised relationship between master

and slave in all its forms” (Maldonado-Torres 2008: 67, my translation). A “decolonial attitude” results from the disgust towards the violence of coloniality and is the condition of possibility for the emergence and praxis of decolonial interventions (Maldonado-Torres 2008). In order to challenge coloniality, it is necessary to “see clearly” and know “clearly” what colonisation is, to be aware of “hypocrisy” of the positions that present themselves as antidotes to (Césaire 1972: 32, 33) and yet maintain “the colonial world of death” (Maldonado-Torres 2008: 69). This capacity to see clearly and feel the violence of coloniality is liberating to the extent that it produces a transformation of colonial subjects and enables decolonial intervention.

The quest for decoloniality is “about making visible the invisible and about analysing the mechanisms that produce such invisibility or distorted visibility in light of a large stock of ideas that must necessarily include the critical reflections of the ‘invisible’ people themselves” (Maldonado-Torres 2007: 262). This requires being prepared to face opposition and derision when denouncing and proposing alternatives to what has for a long time been accepted as “the normal world” (Ibid 2006a: 8). Moreover, it demands awareness of the ways in which our desires and our feelings participate in the maintenance of or the rupture from coloniality. Because, after all, coloniality has the capacity to make the colonial subjects desire to continue participating in the colonial order of the world. In this sense, decoloniality needs to take place in the level of desires and affects, which have the power to disrupt the existing hegemony (Gramsci 1971) – which in this case is the hegemony of coloniality.

While affects and feelings are often dismissed in the name of rationality and impartiality, the truth is that they are present and even exploited to persuade and gain the support of the masses. Moreover, certain affects such as those of fear and hate have been shaped by colonial power relations that encourage dehumanisation and the non-ethics of war instead of promoting the radical transformation of the world of death in which we live. The (po)ethical practices of poets and activists with whom this research has been dialoguing challenge the naturalisation of death as a natural response of fear and hate. Through their (po)ethical practices, they call for the acknowledgement of pain and trauma and its collective healing. These practices acknowledge tension and trauma but do not promote the resolution of conflict

through the elimination of the other; rather, they encourage agonistic dialogue and healing. This means recognising and accepting disagreement, yet respecting and dignifying one another's existence.

A Pluriversal World Challenging Colonial Totalitarianism and Dehumanisation

While postcolonial theorists such as Bhabha, Spivak and Said have situated colonialism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, other authors who have inscribed themselves in what they call a *decolonial* project locate the simultaneous emergence of coloniality/modernity in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.¹⁴⁹ From this perspective, the conquest of Al-Andalus by the Crown of Castile constitutes the testing ground of colonial techniques such as forced conversion, ethnic genocide or cleansing, the expropriation of lands, and settler colonialism (*encomienda*) (Grosfoguel 2013b). Later, these colonial techniques were used in the colonisation of the Americas, Africa and Asia. These colonial techniques dehumanise and produce colonial subjects. They produce what Fanon calls a zone of non-being (Fanon 1965). In this zone of non-being, entire populations are stripped of their human dignity and transformed into non-humans, located in a permanent state of exception.

One of the conditions of possibility for the production of zones of non-being, and the colonial/modern system, was the constitution and institutionalisation of the principle of intolerance to diversity as a menace to unity that led to Unitarian Christianity and Christendom (Grosfoguel 2016a). Following the Jamaican theorist Sylvia Wynter's work on the theological and biological foundations of racism, dehumanisation and coloniality (Wynter 2003), Grosfoguel maps the shift from

¹⁴⁹ In the early- to mid-twentieth century, Caribbean authors such as Fanon, Césaire, and De Bois formulated important ways in which colonialism has justified the destruction of life in the colonies and the dehumanisation of colonial subjects. Their critique was later taken up by Latin American authors such as Maldonado-Torres (2007), Mignolo, Walsh (2008), and Quijano (2000) (to name a few), who have been denouncing the fallacies of development and civilisation through theories of dependency and liberation theology, and in dialogue with a great number of anti-colonial, anti-racist and anti-imperial movements such as the Zapatistas, the Black Panthers, and Indigènes de la République, to name a few (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 2008).

diversity within unity towards *unity with no difference* around the conversion of Constantine. Constantine transformed Christianity so it did not challenge the Roman Empire, enabling the persistence of its imperialism (Grosfoguel 2016a). The Emperor was equated to the One, the absolute, God, and the centralising hierarchical institutions of Christendom were created (Ibid.).

This, according to Grosfoguel, is how “the empire becomes sacred and the outside evil”; from here emerges the dualism of good and evil, which places difference as a “menace to the unity of the empire” (Ibid.). This universalistic totalitarian civilisation was rooted in the affirmation of a selected group and the undermining of outcasts (Ibid.). To this day, the dehumanisation and the naturalisation of that dehumanisation has been produced according to certain markers such as religion, reason, language, or skin colour (for Grosfoguel, race is ultimately the “organising principle”) (Ibid.). The justifications to remove the humanity from these populations have varied in history but they have operated in the same way, by excluding populations from the “human race”.

The persecution of Muslims and Jews in Al-Andalus was justified by the Castillian Crown’s presupposition that these peoples practiced the “wrong” religion, and so had to be forcibly converted, as the peoples in America also later discovered (Ibid.). However, during the conquest of America, indigenous peoples were also defined as soulless animals and therefore treated as non-human beings (Ibid.). Later on, the criteria of having the “right” religion or having a “soul” would shift towards having the right skin colour, the right economic system, the right kind of political organisation, and so on (Ibid.). Challenging this colonial totalitarianism requires challenging and destroying the structures of power and institutions that make this dehumanisation acceptable, but it also involves the transformation of the logics that have been internalised at the level of subjectivities and in the very experience of being (human) (Ibid.).

It is necessary to “redefine the human, [to] take and relocate the category of human” because the totalitarian universality of the category of human is exclusive (Wynter 1995: 114). The notion of human that currently circulates in the world

system has been inherited from what one could call a “colonial humanism” which has created zones of non-being, where people are stripped of their humanity (Ibid.). A new humanism needs to be anti-imperialist, anti-racist, anti-sexist and accepting of life; it also needs to be inclusive of multiple affects and voices, cosmologies, ways of being and living creatures of all kinds. This new humanism needs to go beyond anthropocentric views that define nature as the opposite of human modernity and development.

For the Nasa people in Cauca, and for many other indigenous peoples in Colombia, it is impossible to own the land; for them there is no such thing as legal ownership. The relation to the land is based on care and connection with the community, its traditions, ancestors and territories. This is an understanding that clashes completely with supposedly self-evident universal validity of the written word and private ownership in the West (Gómez 2000: 24 *cited in* Ferreira 2007: 149). For many indigenous peoples in Colombia, and many communities all over the world, there are ways of relating to animals, plants and non-human beings that are shaped by care, respect and communion, rather than exploitation and profit.

These ecological relations generate “a particular way of behaving in relation to those non-human beings.” However, this does not mean that indigenous peoples do not hunt animals or cultivate crops to guarantee their survival (Urbina Ráangel 2015: min. 48, my translation). Ecological imaginations also need to be decolonised from the romantic and violent idealisation of indigenous peoples as “good savages”. The Misak poet and activist Velasco Tumiña explains that when his people and other indigenous peoples talk about the protection of mother earth and the protection of sacred sites, they are not implying that they will leave those sites to keep them pristine and untouched; instead, they are emphasizing the respect towards nature at all times, even when benefiting from natural resources, plants and animals in their daily lives (Velasco Tumiña 2015).

In Velasco Tumiña’s view, ecological discourses can be very tricky and misleading. They seem to pursue the same objectives that the communities and peoples are pursuing, yet they tend to allow foreign experts to intervene in ways that invalidate

the peoples' right to autonomy and self-determination. He, like other indigenous leaders, is sceptical of measures that encourage "the isolation of protected areas and national parks where nobody can enter" (Ibid.: min. 40, my translation). He believes it is hypocritical to argue that the way to protect nature is to vacate some lands, forbidding people's entrance, while exploiting and polluting others without control (Velasco Tumiña 2015). There is no sense in protecting some areas while destroying others because everything is connected (Ibid.). World environmental summits are also hypocritical, in his view, because they just invite indigenous delegates to show them off, without ever arriving at real agreements to control the devastating actions of mining, oil and transgenic companies all over the world (Ibid.).

In order to create a new world that challenges coloniality, dehumanisation and environmental destruction, it is necessary to decolonise notions of what it means to be human as well as notions of ecology. Overall, creating a new world demands challenging universalism and totalitarianism. It implies provincialising Europe (Chakrabarty 1998) and moving away from the notion of the universal (which disavows its locality and particularity) to the pluriversal (a plural network of locals which recognise their locality and interconnection) (Dussel 2000). This shift permits epistemic diversity and the constructions of "knowledge ecologies" (De Sousa Santos 2003, 2014). Moreover, the transformation of the present colonial and epistemic violence "demands responsibility and the willingness to take many perspectives, particularly the perspectives and points of view of those whose very existence is questioned and produced as insignificant" (Maldonado-Torres 2007: 262).

In this sense, the engagement with knowledge practices attempts to make evident the perverse effects of coloniality and pursues ways to challenge it. This implies producing knowledge that does not stop at the desire to discover new truths and understandings of the world, but goes on to challenge colonial and epistemic violence (Maldonado-Torres 2006b: 5). Though it is radically inclusive, this notion of pluriversality – and of the knowledge practices and ways of being and relating that go with it – do not imply the negation of disagreement as a "constitutive phenomenon of experience" (Castro-Gómez 2015: 59, my translation). A new

decolonial, ecological and pluriversal humanism is based on the idea of the possibility of dialogue, on the basis of the dignity and value of those who live, know and relate in ways different from our own.

Creating a new world is not changing the balance from one side to the other and maintaining a system of oppression in which a few benefit from the exploitation and dehumanisation of others. The goal is not to determine who is superior or inferior, but instead it is “to touch the other, to feel the other” so we can all be free and “build the world of the ‘You’” (Fanon 1986: 231-232). Creating a new world implies truly transforming the whole structure of death sustained by coloniality and creating a decolonial praxis in which one another’s dignity is acknowledged and embraced. This world of the “you” requires a receptive generosity, which basically involves breaking away from colonial dynamics of dehumanisation. It implies a taking a stand for “love, ethics, and justice” instead of for “the non-ethics of war” (Maldonado-Torres 2007: 260).

If coloniality is the “radicalization and naturalization of the non-ethics of war,” which dehumanises and enables the elimination and enslavement of some populations (Ibid.: 246-247), how can coloniality and its non-ethics be dismantled? (Po)ethical practices recreate new memories for the communities that have been resisting coloniality while contesting their dehumanisation and even more the naturalisation of their dehumanisation. In these (po)ethical practices, they are not defined as silenced voices or powerless victims of capitalism or coloniality. Instead they are (self-)defined creators of meaningful stories and practitioners of ways of being that are not subsumed by colonial and epistemic violence.

The *damnés* consigned to the zone of non-being produced by coloniality are not defeated (Maldonado-Torres 2007: 257). They continue to be agonistic adversaries who have learnt the foreign languages, histories and knowledges that have justified dehumanisation, epistemic violence and genocide. Even when in some cases they have forgotten their languages, they have created a new one, along with new traditions and new (po)ethical practices for making foreign verbs speak their voices. These (po)ethical practices are not restricted to indigenous peoples in Colombia, or

even to Latin America. They are simultaneously local – shaped by the particular experiences, languages, territories and memories that are inscribed in bodies – and global – available to all those who have a body capable of feeling. (Po)ethical practices not only offer strong words to dispossessed communities, but also allow them to revisit and renew their perceptions, sensibilities and memories.

A way of challenging dehumanisation and the non-ethics of coloniality is collecting stories and awaking the memories of those who have been dehumanised. It is necessary to listen to those who have been made the “nobodies” (*los nadies*) of the world in a “merciless race of the life” of a few winners at the expense of those who were “born to lose” (Galeano 1998: 22, my translation). Collecting those memories and microhistories, while “walking along many roads” and “talking with those ‘nobodies’” (Ibid.: 23, my translation), is a way to build dialogues and acknowledge one another’s existence. It is also a way to challenge the memory of power that “worships inheritance and absolves crimes” (Ibid.: 23, my translation):

The memory of power does not remember: it worships. It justifies the perpetuation of privilege from the right to inheritance; it absolves the crimes of those who rule and offers alibis to their discourse. The memory of power, which the education centres and mass media propagate as the only one possible, only listens to the voices that repeat the boring litany of their own sacralisation (Ibid., my translation).

The exchanges of life stories, experiences, words of knowledge and power have enabled poets and activists such as Velasco Tumiña, Ortiz, Muchavisoy, Apūshana, Chikangana and Jamioy Juagibioy to rebuild and create new community filiations and affects with different poets and peoples in Colombia, but also abroad. The dialogue produced by their (po)ethical practices has allowed different peoples to see one another and discover, or better remember, that they are not alone at the mercy of coloniality. (Po)ethical practices enable communication among different sectors of the Global South, which speak different languages, have different knowledge practices and cosmologies, but come together in their experiences and efforts to resist and challenge their dehumanisation and the naturalisation of the violence. While coming from different trajectories, (po)ethical practices can be woven into a pluriversal (po)ethics for a new world where many worlds are possible.

(Po)ethical practices acknowledge the localities of their experiences and the locus of their voices, but they do not isolate them. Creating a world of the “you” is not an individual task; it cannot remain an isolated struggle. Ultimately, the creation of a world of the “you” lies in the possibility to feel one another’s pains, traumas, experiences and strengths to build communities of affects and filiations. In order to creatively resist and challenge coloniality, it is necessary to create conditions for dialogue and mutual healing, as well as the acknowledgement of plurality. This resonates with the singular-plural conceptualised by Nancy as a “radically plurality of being” (Devisch 2013: 88), a singular that is already a plural being in which all sort of beings – “inanimate, sentient, speaking, thinking, having weight, and so on” (Nancy 2000: 85) – form a multiplicity of interconnected worlds. (Po)ethical practices are also singular and plural, multi-vocal and articulated to communities of affect, filiations of friendship and caring. Jamioy Juagibioy’s poem “Espiritëng quenatsmëng” (We are spirit) chants to a plural body formed by all singular beings and acknowledges their value:

Everything our hands touch
has spirit.
Life is only the abyss
between the natural state
and the returning path.
Before we were nothing,
today thousands of hands touch
our body.
Tomorrow the abyss
will scream our absence,
we will have started the path
towards the place where life and spirit
will finally be forever
just one body.
(Jamioy Juagibioy 2010: 50, “Espiritëng quenatsmëng”
[We are spirit], my translation).

Agonistic Understanding of Communities Against Romantic Idealisations

(Po)ethical practices, as jointly singular and plural practices, cannot be isolated or separated from the communities in which they are produced. They have both an individual and a collective voice. Ideas of ownership and authorship are radically different from the communal voice the elders speak in the indigenous communities. When the elders speak only those who listen can repeat, but never claiming as their own or as their private property what they narrate. Narrative life is “a practice that places the individual’s life within the narratives of the individual’s people”, and this narrative life includes not only alphabetical words but also ways of relating and creating narratives through “stories, textiles [...], music, dance, and all kind of movement leaving traces” (Uzendoski 2015: 6-7, my translation). For the Camëntsá poet Hugo Jamioy Juagibioy, it is clear that his grandmother and the elders of his community are the greatest poets (Rocha Vivas 2015). During one of his presentations at Duke University, organised by Rocha Vivas, Jamioy Juagibioy invited his grandmother Pastora to expose her *chumbes*, or traditional textiles, while he read his poems. He explained the *chumbes* have been inspirational for his poetry (Ibid.).¹⁵⁰

It comes as no surprise that Jamioy Juagibioy dedicated his book, *Bínýbe oboyejuayëng* (Dancers of the Wind), to his parents, the elder women of his community and the “dancers of the wind.” He acknowledges that his voice is also the voice of his ancestors who come to join the community in the celebration of *Bëtsčanaté*, or *La Fiesta del Perdón* (Celebration of Forgiveness) that opens every year as a new circle. Jamioy Juagibioy describes his books as an offering, a gift to the Camëntsá people, to be offered in this important celebration (Rocha Vivas 2013: 96). Rocha Vivas, a close friend of Jamioy Juagibioy’s, explains that “*Bínýbe oboyejuayëng* is a celebration of the physical and symbolic return to the community, to the mother earth, to the beautiful word of the elders and the Camëntsá people” (Rocha Vivas 2013: 96, my translation). As a gift, the book offers not only the written words of

¹⁵⁰ The *chumbes* indicate the level of wisdom of the carrier. There are two distinctive kinds of *chumbes* worn by women and men from Camëntsá and Inga peoples in the Valley of Sibundoy, in Putumayo, Colombia. The *botoniaska* is worn around the waist by women, and *llaugtu* is a woven crown worn on the head by men (Chicunque and Chicunque 2011; Agreda 2005, Jacanamijoy Tisoy 1993).

Hugo Jamioy Juagibioy's poetry but also the paintings of his brother Juan Andrés Jamioy, and the translations of Hugo Jamioy Juagibioy's poems into the Camëntsá language by the *taita* Camilo Jamioy (Ibid.).¹⁵¹

Chikangana's poems have been well received by the Yanakuna people in their efforts to rebuild their traditions and rebuild a community to stand together against the violence that is inflicted on them, not only on the symbolic and epistemological level, but also in the material and physical level. Chikangana has searched, found and created a Kichwa language through which he continues to live and create along with his community, despite the material violence they have experienced and continue to experience. Writing poems or composing songs, as he often calls them, is Chikangana's way of finding strength with his community to face death, violence, displacement and dehumanisation (Chikangana 2016).

The communities of affect that (po)ethical practices produce are multi-vocal, plural and yet articulated as singularities. It is fundamental to break down the notion of community while debating its problematic idealisations, imaginaries and expectations of homogeneity, harmony and consensus. An agonistic understanding of community departs from the acknowledgement of one another's existence and a co-belongingness that subsumes neither singularities nor disagreement. When the poets and activists write the stories they learnt in their communities and assume certain positions of leadership to advocate for the rights and dignity of their peoples, they often have to face tensions with some of the members of the communities or the organisations in which they work.

As already mentioned, some indigenous poets, such as Verichara, have gone silent, mainly because of tensions with their communities (Rocha Vivas 2015). The Inga poet and linguist, Muchavisoy, who has participated in programmes of bilingual education and linguistic research for the revitalisation of languages in different indigenous communities in Caquetá, confesses that assuming a role of leadership is challenging and that tensions arise with less supportive members of the community (Muchavisoy 2016). Similarly, the Misak poet and activist Velasco Tumiña has had to prove his

¹⁵¹ *Taita* refers here to a *sabedor*, or wise spiritual leader, usually an elder person, or *abuelo*.

leadership and commitment when working in his community but also in other organisations. Some of the members of these organisations have questioned his experience mainly because of his young age. However, he has also had the support of experienced and respected leaders who know his knowledge of and commitment to the different struggles and needs of the different indigenous communities with whom he works (Tumiña Velasco 2016).

Beyond these obvious challenges, (po)ethical practices are in constant struggle with the foreign verbs and translations that allow them to circulate in broader spaces and connect with wider communities. Foreign languages fail to convey all the meanings and symbols that are inscribed in the languages of the poets' communities. Nonetheless, this struggle also stretches the limits of those foreign verbs and the imaginations they convey for Hispanic readers. Poetry, the poet Hurtado Vivas says, is rebellious. It violently disrupts the oppressive power of grammaticality and formalism in the language that is self-defined as literary (Hurtado Vivas 2015: 57, 62). Poetry challenges "the ways of feeling and thinking" and "the moral, political, sexual categories that have been inscribed in the bodies" by institutions; it also challenges the languages and cognitive and sensitive frameworks shaping social life (Ibid.: 61, 62).

Poets fight with language but cannot get rid of it (Ibid.: 64). They are adversaries in an agonistic relationship. For Vivas Hurtado, the indigenous elders are poets who suffer in their bodies an intense pain that is healed in the conversation, in the poetry (Ibid.: 65) – or in (po)ethics, as I have preferred to name these practices to make explicit their ethical dimensions as well as their deeply felt corporality. As Minh-ha writes:

"Writing the body" is that abstract-concrete, personal-political realm of excess not fully contained by writing's unifying structural forces. Its physicality (vocality, tactility, touch, resonance), or edging and margin, exceeds the rationalized "clarity" of communicative structures and cannot be fully explained by an analysis. It is a way of making theory [...] a politics of everyday life [...] (Minh-ha 1989: 44).

(Po)ethics create new communities of affects as they enable the experiences of dehumanisation and coloniality to rub shoulders with the experiences of others and to build networks of empathy, care and support. By creating these new communities, they go beyond particularism and become pluriversal; and, through their agonistic translation, they translate the pains, struggles and strengths from one community of feeling to another. In this sense, they could respond to what Castro-Gómez (2015) has called a “concrete universal”, in opposition to an “abstract universal”, such as the one of Eurocentrism that hides the locality of Europe and takes it as universal. Just as it is necessary to redefine humanity and relocate its plural universality, it is important to appropriate “the *abstract* universality that whites have reserved to themselves, and make it *concrete* through its ‘point of exclusion’, the element this universality has left outside” (Castro-Gómez 2015: 125, my translation). What was left outside was precisely the body that allow us as human beings to feel one another. As Frantz Fanon suggests: “Superiority? Inferiority? Why not the quite simple attempt to touch the other, to feel the other, to explain the other to myself? Was my freedom not given to me then in order to build the world of the You?” (Fanon 1986: 232).

What is universal to these (po)ethics is the body that feels and transmits feelings, the body capable of experiencing pain and having the potential to feel the pain of someone else. This is a human body, but not an isolated, anthropocentric body. Instead, this body is an ecological articulation, and more precisely, an affective relationality that creates filiations and communities. This body feels and connects with others, not simply as a cog in an abstract, incomprehensible machine, but as a leaking, feeling and ever changing body. A human, feeling body shaped by an ethics and a way of living that involves responsibility and care. Feeling one another’s pain is something our bodies are capable of doing, as they experience our own pains. However, for this to happen, as Minh-ha argues, there has to be “a minimum of willingness to reach out to the unknown” (Minh-ha 1989: 85).

One may wonder if this willingness or attitude could be simply an individual or local task, which might or might not succeed at transforming the power relations of coloniality: “the true decolonial struggle does not reject [...] universality in the name of cultural particularism or local histories, but it takes the universality from the

monopoly exercised by the white dominators and takes it ‘further’” (Castro-Gómez 2015: 131, my translation). Building on Laclau’s work, Castro-Gómez proposes to “*universalise* particularity [...] through antagonism,” instead of submitting to universality (Ibid 2015: 272, my translation). This implies understanding particularities within a relational system of forces (Ibid 2015: 274). Instead of fighting hierarchies in the name of difference and particularity, it is therefore necessary to fight in the name of (universal) equality (Ibid.: 282-283).

Universality is not an *a priori* but a collective construction; Eurocentric modernity/coloniality is only one way of articulating the relations between universal and particular in which a particular Europe is claimed as the only (and most desirable) model to be followed and imitated (Ibid.: 283, 287). Eurocentrism is sustained by a particular hegemony and the only way to dispute a hegemony is by producing a new *ethos* that articulates particularities in a collective *populus* – a new totality fashioned by a political subject that responds to the demands motivating its emergence and that has the potential to become hegemonic (Ibid.: 296, 364, 366, 369). This is a *concrete* universality produced through “the particular contents that have been negated by the abstract universality” that has been hegemonically dominant for centuries (Ibid.: 278, my translation). Could this place be occupied by the agonistic politics of (po)ethics, which is always local and universal, singular and plural, and which not only resists coloniality but creates traditions, memories, filiations, communities of affect and ways of being?

(Po)ethics are located, rooted and embodied in individual and communitarian experiences; however, their pain and struggle against the dehumanisation and invalidation of peoples, knowledges and ways of being connects to a global project to challenge and creatively resist coloniality. Acknowledging not only the locality but also the universality of (po)ethics is fundamental in order to listen to their dialogue with other calls to end the dehumanisation and the destruction of ways of living in the name of civilisation, modernity, progress, profit and so on. (Po)ethics can be felt even when they are mobilised through foreign verbs and colonial languages functioning as lingua franca among the peoples of the Global South spread all over the world and yet dialoguing and even finding ways to walk together. In these

(po)ethics, these peoples are not silenced voices or powerless victims of capitalism or coloniality; instead they are creators of meaningful stories and practitioners of indissoluble ways of being.

(Po)ethical practices are embodied in singular and plural communitarian practices. They are local and potentially universal in the capacity of reaching other bodies and their lived experiences and feelings. Reaching out through others and mediating between their communities and the world beyond them has motivated Chikangana, Apūshana and Jamioy Juagibioy to publish books. None of them are interested in selling books to anonymous readers, instead they aim to share them, if possible, through personal interactions that facilitate and permit the exchange of stories and feelings. Their books are treated according to a particular understanding of the word. They are not simple words to be exchanged, they are also valued as truthful and powerful. They are not meant to be owned by consumers. Instead, they are meant to be shared and to enable further encounters. In a similar way, (po)ethical practices are possible in the encounter with others. Velasco Tumiña has learnt that he cannot construct knowledge or work in the defence of human rights disconnected from the communities (Velasco Tumiña 2015). The only way of doing his poetical, ethical and political work is by maintaining a permanent dialogue with the communities. He understands his (po)ethical practice as living with the people, rebuilding communities and producing knowledge and strategies of peace and justice together with them.

Through their (po)ethics, Chikangana, Apūshana and Jamioy Juagibioy have been writing and telling their stories inside but also outside their communities. This has allowed them to denounce the daily normalised atrocities that take place in their villages. Their (po)ethical practices have enabled them to highlight the ethics, the strength, the dreams and hopes in which they were raised and which they also want to defend. Their (po)ethics demand and promote commitment and awareness (Rocha Vivas 2010: 32, Ceballos Ramírez 2015: 42). As Rocha Vivas and Ceballos Ramírez have noted, these narrators and singers prefer to refer to their stories as pieces of advice and words of power, because they have the power or the potential to move listeners

and readers from within, affecting their perceptions, feelings and memories of their lived experiences (Ceballos Ramírez 2015: 42).

Chikangana foresees the power of (po)ethics not only in finding strong words and in making a powerful language for the dispossessed communities and peoples of the world, but also by extending the perceptions, sensibilities and memories he and others have revisited and renewed through his songs (Chikangana 2016). His songs, his poems, he believes, have the potential to wake up the ones with no memories, the ones who have not yet been sufficiently shocked and disgusted with the death machine of ongoing coloniality which manifests in racism and sexism, as well as in the dispossession, displacement, exoticisation and demonisation of communities. Chikangana's (po)ethics denounce the direct and vicarious destruction of communities and their right to exercise their self-determination.

(Po)ethics for Walking towards a World of Many

We are the fire in the stars irradiating from the blue firmament,
announcing the new time,
we are here weaving the circle of the yellow butterfly,
sowing water in deserted places,
at last, we are the spirits of the bird
in dreamy ponds
(Chikangana 2010: 19, cited in
Ceballos Ramírez 2015: 93-94, my translation).

Chikangana refers to a "we" – an intimate and collective community, a network, a circle, linked by a set of actions founded in a (po)ethical vision of the world. This is a world of many, a world of collective work to preserve and make many lives and dreams possible. On a first reading, we can say this community is specific and refers to the Yanakuna people. Chikangana's poem refers to the Yanakuna people for whom the "rivers symbolise the memory" (Ceballos Ramírez 2015: 94, my translation). In his poem, he refers to the "sowing water" that permits the growing of the Yana memory as well as the survival of the Yana community whose "identity has been rediscovered,

reactualised and readopted” (Ibid., my translation). Yet, a second reading seems to suggest that the community to which Chikangana refers is not exclusively the Yanakuna people, but a wider community.

What brings together this wider community is a common project and common ethics which affirms life in its multiple forms. This project and this ethics can be extended to the peoples of the Global South who resist and defy the colonial destruction of life and dehumanisation in their territories. It can also include those who have been to a certain degree privileged and protected from the death machine of coloniality (for instance, in the Global North) but who, despite this protection, are disgusted by its violence, because they aware that it is the condition of possibility for their comfort.

Chikangana’s “we” is a community that is not necessarily fixed nor unique, but multiple and contingent, produced under certain circumstances and according to certain common interests and ideals. It is possible to refer to this “we” as ecological in the sense of being interconnected, complex, not limited to a particular location. This “we” embraces the multiplicity of voices silenced by coloniality: including not only human beings, but also spirits, animals and rivers, which are alive in symbolic and cosmologic territories. This “we” in which Chikangana’s “I” is inscribed is also a collective voice; a walking word, it traverses paths. “The *walking word* is the word that becomes strong while the territory is traversed,” it is also the word shared in rituals around the fire, “in the home where knowledge emerges” (Ceballos Ramírez 2015: 107, my translation).

A world which is affirmative of life requires “multiplying the landscape of knowledge production,” including “many more sites of knowledge production than in the past and the many networks in between those sites” (Escobar 2008: 306). In this sense, it is important that Chikangana’s (po)ethics circulate in poetry encounters and academic institutions, where they can serve to “unsettle the megastructures” and hierarchies of knowledge of these spaces (Ibid.). The question of how to understand and define indigenous languages and indigenous language practices has been a constant co-traveller in this research journey. So too has the question of the positionalities and ethical implications of those understandings and definitions.

These two questions are central concerns for this research, particularly because they acknowledge the importance of considering wider landscapes of knowledge production and concrete practices defying language coloniality and epistemicide.

This research is not so much a (descriptive) study of indigenous languages, but an engagement with indigenous language practices, which are interwoven with indigenous cosmologies and knowledges. The initial query about the revitalisation of indigenous languages has shifted towards the practices in which these languages come to life and are meaningful for indigenous peoples. The *archaeology of the word* along with *oralitura* (discussed in Chapter 4) are both approaches that have emerged from within indigenous language practices, allowing for the creation of new scenarios and practices of indigenous languages. Both are communitarian approaches ruled by ethical practices of conviviality that value the exchange of traditional knowledges and stories of life and origin of the peoples. They are not simply empirical or theoretical methods. Instead, they are experiences of affect and life traversing the bodies of those who get involved with them and inhabit them to the point of transforming themselves and being born again in relation to others.

Through their (po)ethical practices, Jamioy Juagibioy, Vito and Chikangana have found particular ways of engaging with their communities and of producing new narratives, ethics and traditions. Their practices stem from a lived experience of deep transformation of the subject of knowledge. This subject of knowledge is in constant dialogue with other subjects of knowledge, rather than occupying the privileged position of a detached observer fixated on an exterior phenomenon or object. (Po)ethical practices are never detached, instead they are deeply involved. They allow and even demand *double translations* that produce transmutations on the levels of affects, ethics and being. (Po)ethical practices involve an ethical engagement which is generative of traditions and ethics, of beautiful ways of being, living, conversing and sharing. (Po)ethical practices involve the body of their practitioners, their experiences and deepest feelings, and imply studying or rather living language through narratives that recover words, meanings, and memories through the body. (Po)ethical practices demand curiosity, but not detachment.

(Po)ethical practices also involve an attitude that resonates with the decolonial attitude (Maldonado-Torres 2008). Living (po)ethically is a way of resisting in a world of violence, rebuilding a creative resistance while calling others to follow this resistance with dignity, through deep emotions and feelings. For indigenous peoples in Colombia, this (po)ethics brings together communities and empowers them to fight against material and economic dispositions. (Po)ethics are experiential. They require a journey, and they imply the walking word (*palabra andada*).

The word of (po)ethical practices is concrete and material. It traverses the body but also inhabits different bodies such as those of the plants of wisdom, the animals, the bodies that dream, dance, speak and remember, as well as the sacred and cosmological territories. Therefore, (po)ethical language practices are not simply literary or linguistic; they are also ethical and political. They convey extended notions of language, orality and writing as they create living archives and even (po)ethical ways of living. In North Potosí, traditional leaders “make speak” (*parlachi*) the ancient inscriptions (*qillqa*) (Platt 1997: 196). In oraliture, just as in (po)ethics, writing and orality are not in opposition. Instead, they are in a continuum, which is constantly becoming, adopting forms and circulating.

Oraliture and the *archaeology of the word* have served to create new spaces and scenarios for the use of indigenous languages, but they have made possible the creation of worlds of the “you” within indigenous communities, bringing generations together. They have also served to create connections with communities all around the globe through poetical exchanges and the circulation of poetry not only in magazines, reviews and journals, but also in festivals and collective ceremonies. Indigenous (po)ethical narratives are not only living, communitarian, ongoing archives of knowledge and ethics but also methodologies of research, as Chikangana demonstrates in his work. They are valuable approaches to be considered by communities all over the Global South interested in sifting through their memories, finding their languages and words of power and becoming anew, as communities of belonging and resistance against colonial violence.

(Po)ethics challenge destruction, dehumanisation and death. They also enable healing and create new articulations that go beyond the self-determined boundaries of indigenous communities. The Inga poet Pedro Ortiz has, along with the poet Alexander Vallejo, from the city of Pasto, created the Festival of Literature of Valle de Sibundoy. Together, they have also created literary workshops and spaces for wood carving and textile weaving that are open to both indigenous peoples and non-indigenous peoples. These spaces have brought the mixed community together beyond the limits of indigenous identity and indigeneity. They have enabled the people of Putumayo to heal together from the violence they have suffered collectively as a result of the armed conflict.

This year, along with the Festival of Literature of Valle de Sibundoy, there was an exhibition of paintings, *Pinta Putumayo*, which reunited the work of artists from different municipalities, as well as the Inga and Camëntsá *resguardos* of Putumayo. The artists talked about their work with the visitors during the exhibit. Some of the paintings were dedicated to the Peace Agreement signed between the government and the FARC-EP guerrilla. They expressed hope of living in their territories without fear, no longer witnessing episodes of violence and massacres. Other works were dedicated to the specific symbolism of the Inga and Camëntsá peoples, their clothes, sacred plants and rituals. These spaces create possibilities for dialogue and facilitate the emergence of (po)ethical practices as they enable the exchange of emotions and experiences and the imagination of new possibilities of being and becoming.

Agonistic Translations and (Po)ethics as Lingua Franca

Counter to the colonial model of language unity and univocality that associated multivocality and the plurality of the languages of America with the biblical myth of the fall of Babel, (po)ethics embrace the plurality of languages. They maintain multivocality while producing an agonistic form of translation that functions as a lingua franca for communicating experiences of colonial and epistemic violence and producing networks for collective and creative resistance. While the colonial understanding of language was founded in the fear of multiple tongues and the

search of a unique language that could express the totality of knowledge, (po)ethics do not fear translation nor do they ignore its impossibility. (Po)ethics are possible because of the existence of multi-vocality and the possibility of partial translation. Translation enables a partial and incomplete understanding of others, but it also creates the possibility to feel and acknowledge their existence.

In the myth of the fall of Babel, God's punishment expresses the impossibility of communication and the endless aspiration to come back to one language while facing the multiplication of tongues. All languages are local; there is no transcendental original or "universal language", and there is no pure state of nativeness to go back to. God, the one who cannot be named and who has only one name, pronounced his name to break the tower, imposing his univocality over the people and condemning the people to multi-vocality (Derrida 1985: 167-169). God's punishment was to impose and forbid translation, simultaneously (Ibid.: 170). Translation is impossible and necessary because there is not "a universal language."

(Po)ethical practices are "in-between" praxis and experiences of life that go beyond the ideas of *mestizaje* or mixture. They create singular-plural communities of affects that embrace difference instead of advocating for its dissolution. They can be translated while acknowledging the experience of pains, traumas and conflicts. This translation enables these experiences to be lived personally and through the stories of others, who become significant and proximate through the affective exchange of stories and memories and through the creation of common projects for creative resistance. Agonistic translation is not peaceful, it "disturbs, or ought to disturb, the underlying reality that these differences signal, for they occupy the place of the unconscious of every language" (Venn 2006b: 83).

For the translation of (po)ethics to be effective, it needs to break down colonial subjectivities and enable their new configuration. However, there is always something that remains untranslatable, something that will be lost, because no translation is ever perfect or can produce an exact replica of the original. This is a dilemma that is at the heart of translation:

The dilemma brings to light also the undecidable character in translation, for every translation sets out with the ideal of perfect translatability, thus with the assumption of a universal language into which every particularity can be transposed. Yet it flounders because the difference between the particular and the universal repeats the differences between cultures, traditions, biographies, dialects, registers and codes (Ibid.).

Agonistic translation implies exchanging memories and affects, as well as engaging in the construction of a community of affects and filiations that shares experiences and pains, and fosters their collective healing. Agonistic translation is possible when (po)ethics become a lingua franca in which it is possible to connect and identify the pains and traumas as well as the creative resistance to coloniality. This (po)ethics is a creole language, which is always plural and enables the singular and plural community that it creates to communicate as a plurality. In this sense, it is very similar to Anzaldúa's description of the Chicano language as a creative composition:

[F]or a people who cannot entirely identify with either standard (formal, Castilian) Spanish nor standard English, what recourse is left to them but to create their own language. A language which they can connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the relatives and values true to themselves – a language with terms that are neither *español ni inglés*, but both (Anzaldúa 1987: 77).

This understanding of (po)ethics as singular *and* plural redefines hybridity, not as the elimination of localities but, on the contrary, as the embrace of multiple localities and provincialities that challenge the imitation of an idealist White, pure, universal, modern, developed, West and its interventionist agenda of modernisation and development. As a matter of fact, defending the unity and singularity of indigenous language practices is an unfortunate way of falling into the trap created by coloniality that demonises localities and embraces one language practice as the absolute universal. On the contrary, if the singular is no longer conceived in opposition to the multiple, and the local is no longer opposed to the global, then (po)ethical language practices can be conceived as singular and plural, local and global, always located and yet in dialogue. They are hybrid, but not in the sense of eugenic cleansing that promoted the *mestizaje*, or mixing, of races and identities in Latin America for pursuing the colonial ideal of Western whiteness.

(Po)ethics are plural and they do not erase disagreement or tension. They acknowledge that indigenous identities are multiple and recognise that many of the traumas and pains suffered by their peoples have also been suffered, though differentially, by other peoples, including Afro-descendants and peasants in Colombia, as well as other peoples in other countries and regions. When understanding (po)ethics as a plural, located, and embodied language of experiences of violence and creative resistance, there is no need to erase the positionalities of its bodies as indigenous, peasant or mix-raced peoples. Because of this pluriversal understanding of (po)ethics, singular and plural ethics, affects and filiations are highlighted and praised within their embodied locality and universality.

In other words, from this perspective, hybridity is not a matter of establishing to what extent one is indigenous, or peasant, or white, or black. Hybridity is the co-existence of this conflicting, unstable multiplicity in which many forces project and clash. Hybridity is a place of tension and instability, not a place of resolution. The multiplicity is not a summation of forces leading to a particular result. The words indigenous, peasant, mixed, *mestizo*, creole and black that circulate in the discourses and struggles of “identity” locate the bodies of these (po)ethics, but they do not necessarily erase the multiple, ongoing processes of healing and becoming that these bodies go through in making a new world of the “you”. This is why (po)ethics emerge from a necessary and wishful tension of singularity and plurality, locality and universality.

Agonistic Translation and the Unresolved Singular Plurality of (Po)ethics

Coloniality produced a particular subjectivity in Latin America: the *criollos*. This subjectivity was constituted by the desire of being acknowledged as “White” Spaniards and occupying the position of the colonisers. The desire to be “White” carried an ontological failure: because the *criollos* were born in America and not in Spain, they would never be acknowledged as “White” by the Spaniards who were at the top of the colonial hierarchical power structure. The *criollos* occupied a lower position, below the White Spaniards, even if the *criollos* were able to prove their

“unmixed” Spanish origin. The only way the *criollos* could be at the top of the hierarchy was by achieving independence from the Spanish Crown and, at the same time, maintaining the colonial structure that equated racial origin to social status and power.¹⁵²

The *criollos* were trapped in the “political and economic structure inherited from the colonial order” (Morales 2008: 492) and appropriated it to the extent that they attempted to maintain it long after independence in order to preserve their privileges (Rabasa 2008: 71). In Latin American countries, including Colombia, the elites maintained a desire to imitate an idealised image of Europe or the United States as models of “development”. The word *criollo* in Spanish, which can be compared to the *pied-noirs* produced by French colonialism, is often translated as “creole” in English as if they were equivalents, but they have different connotations and genealogies that stem from the particularities of Hispanic, British and French colonisation.¹⁵³

As a synonym of whitening, “*criollo*” should not be confused with “creole”, which opposes ideals of purity and embraces plurality. For instance, the creolisation of languages acknowledges a plurality and a tension that cannot be solved or diluted by identifying an original that would result in a pure unity. Traditionally, creole

¹⁵² The *criollo* subjectivities that emerged in the context of the colonisation of America are a particular case of hybridisation perpetuating inequality. The *criollos* claimed that their “right” to rule in America under the idea of their “whiteness” and “blood purity” made them legitimate Spanish descendants born in America. Despite the fact that the *criollos* mobilised the broader population of the colonies towards wars of independence, once the Spanish Crown had departed from the colonies, the *criollos* took control and maintained the colonial system based on blood purity and family alliances. When preparing the terrain for wars of independence, the *criollos* presented themselves as “colonised” and persuaded indigenous, black and mixed *mestizo* people to join forces in order to defeat the Spaniards; however, once independence was achieved, they clung to their “whiteness” and “closer relation” to the European “civilisation” (Morales 2008: 492-496).

¹⁵³ The mobile positionality of the *criollos* “determines a schizoid identitarian vis-à-vis the [...] Indianness, while in the private sphere he exercises his *mestizaje* without restrictions” (Recinos 2002, cited in Morales 2008: 496). “[T]he dominant culture, created by the *criollos* on the basis of the destruction of pre-Columbian cultures and the marginalisation of their colonial residues, constitutes a differential *mestizo* culture, which means that it differentiates itself not only from Spanish culture but also from the autochthonous cultures, to the extent that the *criollo* *mestizo* subject emerges as an exceptional anomaly in relation to other colonizing experiences such as the British colonisation of India and Arabia or the French colonisation of Algiers” (Morales 2008: 492, see also Cadena 2005).

languages have been considered as the exception to what would be a linguistic norm or tendency (singularity, unity). Expressions such as patois, “demi-language” and “half language”, which are used mainly outside academic circles, express a deficiency, incompleteness and lack, condemning creolisation as “an illegitimate, a bastard language” (Anzaldúa 1987: 80):

Deslenguadas. Somos los del español deficiente. We are your linguistic nightmare, your linguistic aberration, your linguistic mestizaje, the subject of your burla. Because we speak with tongues of fire we are culturally crucified. Racially, culturally and linguistically somos huérfanos – we speak an orphan tongue (Ibid.).

Anzaldúa’s refusal to translate the Chicano language into English or Spanish and maintain the Chicano language, as a creole language, is a poetical, ethical and political stand. She defends the beauty and aesthetics of the Chicano language, the plural identities and ways of being it represents and the double position of those who are in the border between two languages and two nations. She refuses to accommodate and simplify this complexity in the name of translation, at least in the name of unidirectional translation:

Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate (Anzaldúa 1987: 81).

Chicano language practices imply the transformation and re-composition of their two sides: both English and Spanish become something else in Spanglish, and the tension between English and Spanish cannot be resolved by choosing one over the other. Similarly, in (po)ethics the singular and the plural, local and the global, cannot be dissolved, but they are always articulated. In this sense the agonistic translation of (po)ethics must feed its double nature, because (po)ethics, just as language, is always taking place and becoming in its plural, located, and embodied practices.

Final Considerations

(Po)ethical language practices are always located, inevitably positioned in specific ethics and communities of affects, singular and collective bodies marked by power-knowledge relations and particular experiences in regards to coloniality. However, this specificity is what makes them universally plural, or pluriversal. It is the weight of their corporality as (po)ethical language practices that makes them at once agonistic, healing and transformative. It is their affective dimension that can create networks inviting others to walk together and embrace their poetic, ethical and political dimensions.

The experience in Colombia of *Paz a la Calle* (discussed in Chapter 5) is agonistic. It has moved Colombians to express their pain about the continuation of the armed conflict with the FARC-EP guerrilla, their regret for the manipulation of the mass media, their disagreement with the campaign against the endorsement of the Peace Agreement, and their respect and empathy towards the direct victims of the armed conflict. While those who walk together have not necessarily agreed on what peace means for Colombia, there is a collective feeling of disapproval of the many forms of violence taking place in the country and the creation of a *populus* that might challenge the dehumanisation that enables and maintains this violence.

The agonistic translation of (po)ethics becomes more urgent and necessary in this context, for it enables the acknowledgement of one another's existence and pains. Furthermore, the agonistic translation of (po)ethics is fundamentally important for challenging the naturalisation of violence and dehumanisation of our present world. Only when the present is felt as repulsive and unbearably painful, is it possible to create a world of the "you"; or, as Chikangana proposes in the poem that opens this chapter: to wake up from the forgetfulness and remember that we are not alone but connected, and that only together we can blossom again and return to the world of life and challenge the current world of death produced by coloniality.

(PO)ETHICAL INVITATIONS

Final Remarks

Within academic spaces new dialogues have started to emerge that aim to break down the abyss between what is called “academic” and “non-academic” knowledges, between Western and non-Western knowledges. It is a responsibility of academics engaged in the creation of a world of the “you” – a decolonial world where many worlds and forms of life are possible – to open spaces for “the perspectives and points of view of those whose very existence is questioned and produced as insignificant” (Maldonado-Torres 2007: 262). As new ecologies of knowledge emerge in the conversations among plural, heterogeneous knowledges, we can construct an epistemology of diversity, or what Sousa Santos calls “post-abyssal thinking” (Sousa Santos 2010: 31-34).

This conversation about decolonial and ecological perspectives on indigenous (po)ethical language practices has searched for ways to defy the monolingual colonial epistemology that has reduced indigenous languages to alphabetical and grammatical normalisations and defined them as “incomplete” languages which require the intervention of external experts to survive and become complete. While considering various (po)ethical interventions and practices, I have dialogued with authors and theories derived from postcolonial, decolonial and ecological perspectives as well as critical theory. Only considering critical theory and non-indigenous perspectives would have biased this research and reinforced a violent colonial epistemology. As Coulthard warns:

[By] ignoring or downplaying the injustice of colonial dispossession, critical theory [...] not only risks becoming complicit in the very structures and processes of domination that it ought to oppose, but it also risks overlooking what could prove to be invaluable glimpses into the ethical practices and preconditions required for the construction of a more just and sustainable world order (Coulthard 2014: 12).

This research has attempted to produce new articulations without letting the voices of the Global South and indigenous poets get lost. While breaking the abyss between different epistemic traditions and knowledges, this research has also

acknowledged and engaged with a plurality of heterogeneous knowledges. It has considered the continuous interactions and dynamics established among them, but without compromising their autonomy, as Sousa Santos warns in his invitation to post-abysal thinking (2010: 32). Overall, this research journey has attempted to chart a detour from the colonisation of indigenous languages in Colombia, pursuing a constant dialogue with other voices. It has made the writing itself a multiplicity formed by conflictive compositions and ruptures.

This research has engaged with two major tasks: 1. Making explicit the way in which understandings of indigenous languages and indigeneity have been produced within a colonial setting; and 2. Proposing an alternative understanding. This understanding involves a redefinition of language revitalisation, insofar as it moves away from attempts to maintain or recover indigenous languages. Instead, it focuses on the poetical, ethical and political dimensions that shape indigenous language practices and make possible the healing of trauma as well as the rebuilding of filiations, affects and ways of living and being. The alternative, (po)ethical understanding proposed by this research challenges the colonial and reductive models of literacy and grammaticality while also acknowledging the complexities of indigenous language practices in regards to their broad notions of writing and orality, and more importantly their poetical, ethical and political dimensions.

This alternative notion of (po)ethical language practices not only engages with orality and writing in a broader perspective but conceives both as a praxis which not only enables communication but also – and perhaps more importantly – fosters the recreation of traditions, community filiations and affects that are fundamental for indigenous peoples. Those traditions, filiations and affects are not simple heritage and folklore but the threads that hold together indigenous peoples' ways of living and resisting the world of violence that surrounds them. In this sense, the vitality of indigenous languages is at the core of indigenous peoples' ethical, political and poetic existence and the aspirations that mobilise them to construct alternative presents and futures.

(Po)ethical practices have the capacity to denounce the violence of ongoing coloniality and to make it not only rational and effectively apprehensible but

affectively and viscerally unacceptable. They make dehumanisation and the politics of death not only explicit and obvious, but repulsive and unbearable. Mobilised through (po)ethical practices, the shared experiences of the communities of the Global South and the victories they have achieved resisting coloniality have the power to not only persuade but to convince larger communities of the world system of the need for constructing a new world where all lives are respected and dignified. The embodied enactment of strong and beautiful ways of thinking, speaking and acting is what makes the creation of alliances possible, sustaining communities of affect all over the globe, so they can create and engage with alternatives and detours from today's ongoing coloniality.

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