Vernacular Worldmaking and the Pluriverse

Stories, Practices, and Identities Between Latin America and the Globe

Rethinking the Americas — Repensar las Américas — Rethinking the Americas

Olaf Kaltmeier
Kirsten Kramer
Nino Vallen
Ann-Kathrin Volmer
(eds.)

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Vernacular Worldmaking: An Introduction

Nino Vallen, Olaf Kaltmeier, Kirsten Kramer, and Ann-Kathrin Volmer

During the past four decades, the meanings of the terms "world" and "global" seemed gradually to be converging. References to "the world" appeared in discussions about phenomena affecting humanity on a global scale, while "globalization" was described as a process that was turning the world into a single unity. These two concepts did not merge without problems. As philosophers and literary scholars pointed out, the tendency to conflate the two concepts reduces the world to a spatial object or an indistinct totality, and ignores the ongoing processes by means of which the spaces of human relationships, meaning, and significance that constitute different kinds of worlds are created (Nancy 2007; Cheah 2016). Similar criticism could also be heard outside the theoretical realm. During the same period, we can observe an increasing number of claims for the recognition of worldly plurality in social, political, economic, and cultural conflicts. In the early 1990s, the Zapatista movement, in their opposition to the Mexican state and North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement, called for a "world that is one in which many worlds fit."[1] Moving between the concrete and theoretical domains, this volume explores the ways in which people involved in different struggles refer to or bring a plurality of worlds into existence.

For these explorations we draw inspiration from the work of the philosopher Nelson Goodman. In his *Ways of Worldmaking*, he criticizes the idea that a singular reality independent of our description exists. Taking a radical constructivist stance instead, Goodman argues that the world is not "fixed and found" but is always in the process of becoming (1978, x). Human beings make worlds through acts of creative composition. They arrange, weigh, and order experience through narrative, visual, and discursive structures that generate and sustain realities, meanings, and truths. Like William James (1909) and Ernst Cassirer (1925) before him, Goodman thus takes a pluralist stance toward the notion of the world, arguing that worlds

[1] In the *Cuarta declaración de la Selva Lacandona* (1996) the leaders of the Zapatista movement wrote: "El mundo que queremos es uno donde quepan muchos mundos. La Patria que construimos es una donde quepan todos los pueblos y sus lenguas, que todos los pasos la caminen, que todos la rían, que la amanezcan todos."

are made with words, numerals, pictures, sounds, or any other kind of symbols. “With false hope of a firm foundation gone,” he writes, “with the world displaced by worlds that are but versions, with substance dissolved into function, and with the given acknowledged as taken, we face the questions how worlds are made, tested, and known” (1978, 7). Goodman leaves the issue of where politics fits into the making and remaking of worlds largely untouched. But this problem of locating the political forms the center of a second strand of thought from which this volume draws inspiration.

Over the past century Latin American and Caribbean anti-imperial thinkers, advocates of liberation and dependency theory, members of the Modernity /Coloniality group, and Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and female activists have all contributed to the emergence of a heterogenous set of positions revolving around the critique of Western modernity. One line of thought with which we engage in this volume has emerged from these actors’ long search for the sources and inspirations of the region’s own critical thought. Such a pursuit has resulted in the production of new ideas about the relationship between social struggles and the production of knowledge. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (1984, 218; 2012) and Aníbal Quijano (1992; 2024), for example, defined in novel ways how the struggle against politically and socially oppressive structures has an epistemological dimension as well. Both argued that the legacy of colonialism continues to shape mental structures that define the ways in which people categorize and hierarchize human beings, their knowledges, and their worldviews, and that these mental structures therefore need to be decolonized. From their calls for the decolonization of knowledge have sprouted numerous other proposals whose traces we find throughout this volume, including the critique of monological universalism—or the propensity to turn the universalisms of the powerful into universal truths (González García 2006, 45–51; Grosfuegel 2008; Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 194–210; Segato 2016, 95). Decolonization of knowledge also calls for the recognition of alternative ontologies and epistemologies that underpin recent projects pursuing the creation of a pluriverse permitting a place for other conceptualizations of Nature, the Human, and the relationship between the Human and Non-Human (de la Cadena and Blaser 2018; Escobar 2012, 2018, 2020; Reiter 2018; Savransky 2021).

It is tempting to classify these two distinct sources of inspiration as European/Western on the one hand and Latin American on the other. However, we believe it is important to recognize the deep interconnections existing between the two regions and the knowledge produced in each. Transatlantic interactions and intercultural conversations have a long and

productive history that have impacted ideas on both sides of the ocean and across the globe—albeit often in unequal ways. The arrival of Europeans in the Americas from the late fifteenth century raised urgent epistemological and ontological questions that impacted both European and Indigenous worldviews, religious doctrines, notions of universal history, and natural historical theories (Barnett 2019; Greene 2020; Herzog 2024; Ramachandran 2015), shaping early ideas about worldly plurality. During the Enlightenment, rebellions and struggles of the enslaved and oppressed in the Caribbean and the Americas also inspired debates over empire, governance, and universal human rights that tied together insurgents, political theorists, and (liberation) theologists on both sides of the Atlantic (Buck-Morss 2009; Dubois 2006, Linebaugh and Rediker 2013). Subsequently, by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, conversations about the dynamics of global integration engaged not only European and Latin American elites, eager to align their agendas, but critics of global capitalism and neo-colonialism as well. Intellectuals and activists crossed paths and exchanged ideas in Marxist and anti-imperialist movements that linked Europe to Latin America, Africa, and Asia (Goebel 2015). Their ideas, in turn, inspired a new generation of critical Caribbean and Latin American thinkers like Aimé Césare (2010 [1956],152), Édouard Glissant (2009 [1990]), and Aníbal Quijano, whose ideas about colonialism and the universal currently enjoy much attention in academic discussions about the plurality of worlds.

In these ongoing conversations, people have returned over and over again to the problem of how to relate the universal and the particular. We can see this tension in recent discussions of globalization or the use of universal categories. In these debates, scholars deploying a decolonial critique of the universal and the defense of particularisms (Ribeiro 2023; Zárate 2023) have collided with others who defend the social and political significance of universal standards (Lehmann 2022, 2023; Táíwò 2022). Similar opposition can also be seen in engagements with the concept of worldmaking itself. In the past two decades, Goodman's work has attracted the attention of scholars working outside of the field of philosophy, including literary studies, media studies, art studies, theater studies, history, and international relations (Clark et al. 2017; Nünning et al. 2010). One part of this scholarship uses the concept of worldmaking to understand the processes by means of which human beings in different places and at distinct moments in time have conceptualized the world as a single whole. These studies examine for example literary, cartographical, artistic, and architectural techniques and symbolisms used to describe or depict the globe as a whole (Juneja 2012; Ramachandran 2015;

2017). Others also study narratives of the global, written both at the core of geopolitical power and outside of it by narrators with their own perspectives of what the global order could or should be (Adelman 2023; Getachew 2020). On the other hand, a growing body of scholarship is now using the concept of worldmaking to analyze processes that are directly opposed to conceptualizations or re-iterations of the global or the "one-world world" (Law 2015). Such work often considers processes of worlding through an emancipatory lens—the worlds beings created serving as alternatives for the oppressed or those who are grappling with stacked inequalities that are the result of global capitalist, racist, or patriarchal forces (Ali and Dayan-Herzbrun 2024; Cadaval Narezo et al. 2023; Chaplain 2024; Zibechi 2024).

A similar division of perspectives also appears in the studies gathered in this volume. The thirteen chapters that follow were originally presented during a summer school organized by the Maria Sibylla Merian Center for Advanced Latin American Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences (CALAS), the German Historical Institute Washington (GHI), and the Collaborative Research Center (SFB) 1288 "Practices of Comparing" at Bielefeld University at the Pacific Office of the German Historical Institute Washington in Berkeley in July 2024. This event brought together established scholars and doctoral students from the fields of history, literary studies, sociology, political science, anthropology, and ethnic studies to discuss processes of worldmaking and the "making of a world of many worlds." Over the course of these conversations the diversity of the ways in which participants interpreted the notion of "world" became clear. During the period between the event and the writing of the present chapters, these differences became even more pronounced, as participants began to engage with new conceptual frameworks or reinterpreted their own research materials through newly discovered theoretical lenses. As a result, we find in this book a timely union of, on the one hand, contributions that link worldmaking to global and universal thinking, and on the other, chapters that perceive worlds more in terms of the social relationships, shared meanings, or imaginaries of possible futures that people produce.

As editors, we derived inspiration from the exchanges that took place during and after the summer school for the title of this volume: vernacular worldmaking. The work of Sally Merry (2006) and Peggy Levitt (2009, 2020), exploring the "vernacularization" of ideas about the constructed nature and plurality of worlds, characterizes the processes undergone by each of us involved in the current book. From the moment of the call for papers, each and every one of us has been grappling with these ideas, translating,

modifying, and altering them to apply them to the contexts in which we are work. For some, this process was easier than for others: they were already more familiar with this theoretical framework or found it easier to relate it to their ongoing research. For others, the process was more complicated, as they did not work in a field or region of the world in which these ideas were commonly discussed. Either way, we believe that these processes of vernacularization matter to the production of the knowledge presented in this book and the larger worldmaking project with which it engages. As vernacularizers of these ideas, we move forward a project that in recent years has become quite popular in academic and activist circles, as can be seen in the growing number of events and publications addressing decolonial thinking and the pluriverse. We embrace the constructivist perspective and the core of hope it entails that people possess some degree of agency to shape their own realities. By characterizing the narratives that they use and practices they deploy as worlding stories and practices, we even enhance their significance and stability. However, as will become clear in the chapters that follow, there are limitations to such a project. We should not ignore the material and political conditions that people face and that ultimately determine the reach of their imaginaries of alternative futures or worlds (Van Gaalen in this volume). Neither should we be blind to the difficulties that people face in truly accepting other epistemologies and ontologies on their own terms (Santisteban and Millaleo) in this volume). Against the background of such problems, we should recognize that it can be attractive to vernacularize ideas about multiple or alternative worlds, but that this should not obscure the political and economic realities of the dominant world.

Thinking in terms of vernacularization not only helps us to reflect on the processes surrounding the making of this book, but also provides a lens through which we can consider the actions of the figures studied by the contributors to this volume. Most of these subjects move along the frontiers of different worlds, either because of their own geographical mobility or because they find themselves in spaces where different ways of thinking about and being in the world collide. Many also play a role as vernacularizers of ideas and practices, which come to play a role in their own worldmaking projects. Some of these ideas are explicitly global in nature, like capitalism, modernity, colonialism, humanity, nature, or the planetary. Others appear to have a more limited scope, even when they appear in different places around the globe, such as ideas about the positive significance of intercultural dialogue or the role of dance in the making of urban spaces. The chapters provide valuable insights into how these ideas or practices are reinterpreted

and reconfigured in local contexts to make them acceptable and applicable: by relating them to what is known, familiar, or vernacular in a linguistic and cultural sense. By examining evolving everyday stories, practices, and languages, the chapters demonstrate how they help people to comprehend the structures that are producing intersectional inequalities or leading to the destruction of environments and Indigenous ways of life. From there, people may go on to question the logics of these cultural manifestations and contribute to the production of alternative imaginaries of potential future ways of being in the world.

Although we do see in the notion of the vernacular a way to highlight forms of worldmaking from below, the chapters show that in this process the position of the subaltern, in a Gramscian sense, can be relative. Throughout this book we come across politicians, journalists, and artists who occupy more privileged positions in their own societies, but who face marginalization on the stage of global politics or culture. Still, their privileged position impacts their role as vernacularizers and the significance that their worldmaking projects acquire in the circles in which they move. We do not want to define vernacular worldmaking as liberatory worldmaking, even though some of the projects discussed here do improve some individual lives. Instead, vernacular worldmaking helps us think about the ways in which human beings reconsider the tension between unity and diversity, the universal and the particular, through stories, practices, and identities that merge the familiar and the unfamiliar, the old and the new. At the same time, the study of vernacular worldmaking highlights the importance of everyday, lived, and embodied experiences in specific places in defining both what comes to be seen as the global or universal as well as the particular, and what this eventually means for the worlds or forms of being in the world that people define for themselves (compare also Stephanides and Karayanni 2015).

Stories

Stories play an important role in the way in which people engage with and shape their worlds. They help human beings to distinguish patterns, impose order, and give meaning to events and human relationships. They also help to convey, reaffirm, or challenge the assumptions, attitudes, ideologies, values, and norms that a group embraces. Through their narrative qualities, including their plots, actors, and settings, they also contribute to the ways in which people shape the worlds they inhabit or imagine. This appears to be

particularly true when these stories themselves claim to capture the entirety of a world (Blaser 2010; Kennedy 2016). How such claims are made and what knowledge is invoked in the process can differ greatly from one epistemological community to the other. A world order narrative relating to global hierarchies of human beings, a theory of development based on universal scientific claims, or a cosmology explaining the role of human beings in preserving the balance of the cosmos: each of these concepts contribute to building very different worlds. However, these differences are not absolute. What these stories often share is their ability to give sense to the interconnections between the different elements that together form a single whole. Such a claim to wholeness appears to grant these stories a particular power within the communities that tell and relate to them. At the same time, these qualities also seem to make them attractive in processes of vernacularization. Individuals and groups produce local, idiosyncratic variations of these larger stories that reflect particular perspectives and agendas, even while reaffirming their apparent universality.

The four chapters in this section explore the relationship between stories and processes of worldmaking from a literary, historical, and sociological point of view. Gesine Müller, for starters, grapples with the question of how world literature comes to be recognized as such. While debates about this question over the past three decades have considered the "world" in world literature in terms of global circulation or markets, in more recent years literary scholars have come to recognize the worldmaking power of literature (Cheah 2016) and the role that breaks and conflicts, rather than processes of exchanges, play in the making of new worlds (Siskind 2017) as well. Building on this more recent scholarship, Müller discusses Gabriel García Márquez's books as a paradigmatic example of the making of Latin American literature into world literature. She examines the dynamics and concrete production conditions under which this literature was received in India and China, thus providing insights into the processes of translation, adaptation, and vernacularization that underpin the making of world literature. She ends her contribution with a reflection on a new trend of young Latin American authors embracing an "aesthetic of *Welt(er)schöpfung*"—a combination of world creation and exhaustion—that is influencing authors around the globe today.

Interactions between different parts of the Global South also are at the center of Sebastián Díaz-Martínez's chapter on Rubén Darío's writings about modernity and its relation to nationalism, imperialism, and militarization. Having initiated the Spanish-language literary movement known as

modernismo, the Nicaraguan poet Darío (1867–1917) assumed a complex position towards the story of modernization that came to play such an important role during his lifetime. His modernismo presented a new dawn in poetry and literature, advocating for a new appreciation of rhetoric and belief in cultural maturity. Yet, as Díaz-Martínez demonstrates, the movement also engaged more critically with the dominant story of modernity as advocated by the West and those embracing its axioms. Japan played an important role in Darío's critique. Japanese imperialist tendencies were becoming visible to inhabitants of Latin America not only because of its migratory projects but also because of its successes in the war against Russia, which was extensively covered in the Latin American press. Examining publications in the Argentine and Peruvian media, Díaz-Martínez shows how Darío used literary representation to produce a layered image of an old and a new Japan that reverses the order between barbarity and civility. The chapter thus renders visible how Darío used Japan to produce a vernacularized counter-story of modernity that opposed imperialism and militarization and praised cultural development instead.

Contrasting with the previous two chapters, the final two in this section both take a cue from the pluriversal thinking that has come to play such an important role in understanding world-making for emancipatory purposes during the past two decades. Carlos Sánchez-Pimienta departs from the observation that stories about *mestizaje* have long been producing realities, shaping identities, and defining people's perceptions of their being in the world. According to Sánchez-Pimienta, his story could in fact be seen as a local adaptation of modernity's ontological assumptions about the Human, providing a vernacularized version of a story that separates Nature from Culture and the Human from a supposedly inferior Other, while also stressing the linear progression of time towards progress. To question the dominant variation of this story as it is told in Mexico, Sánchez-Pimienta calls for his readers to engage with non-dominant variations of this story on a rational and emotional level to prompt new imaginations and visions on how to practice other possible worlds. Using questions to incite a process of self-reflection, the text thus prompts new processes of vernacularization as readers rethink the meaning of the story of mestizaje from their very own places in the world. Ecem Nazlı Üçok uses a pluriversal lens to study life stories of feminist activists from Turkey and Poland who left their homelands because of the political repression they faced. Nazli Üçok explores what the relevance of these stories is for the forging of bonds of solidarity, the creating of spaces for independent politics, and the envisioning and enacting of shared

alternative worlds. Although the chapter underscores the emotional cost of becoming an activist in a diasporic context, it also shows that the desire of these activists to transform their exile into a plural, relational, and radically hopeful feminist diaspora that can collectively envision and enact new imaginaries for the future.

Practices

Storytelling is one worldmaking practice, but worlds are constituted through an infinite variety of other practices. Such practices can be institutional or informal, embodied or disembodied, mundane or creative, but they all help to shape lived realities or the meanings that people give to things in the world around them. The five chapters in this section each study a different set of practices and their uses in a world of struggle. Erika Rosado-Valencia takes us to Ecuador, where the elites at the end of the nineteenth century pondered how to use a particularly significant worldmaking practice of this era—the World's Fair—for their own benefits. Analyzing the book *El Ecuador en Chicago* (*Ecuador in Chicago*, New York, 1894), she shows how Ecuador's coastal elites engaged with predominantly Western imaginaries explaining how the world ought to function in terms of economic exchange, production, and consumption. The writing of this book was part of a wider effort to produce an image of Ecuador that could counter ideas about its backwardness and highlight its potential for resource extraction and investment instead. By vernacularizing the language of extractivism, production, and consumption, Rosado-Valencia shows, elites legitimized at the same time new practices for the exploitation of nature and the labor of Indigenous and migrant workers.

In his study of the Union General de Trabajadores, Thomas van Gaalen moves our attention to the other side of the story of resource and labor extraction. In 1929, this union mobilized oil workers on the island of Curaçao to fight against Dutch colonial rule. Van Gaalen takes the uprising as a point of departure for a theoretical reflection on the relationship between the practicing of solidarity and (counter-)worldmaking. He observes how scholars like David Featherstone (2012), Robin Kelley (2002), and Diarmaid Kelliher (2014) have strongly associated worldmaking through solidarity with utopianism, imagination, and the agency of marginalized actors. Yet, he argues, such an understanding of the practice of solidarity has two disadvantages. First, it shifts attention away from the laborious and tiresome practices of recruitment and outreach and the associated challenges. Second, the focus on imaginaries can obscure those moments when other world

versions rise within a movement and produce internal rifts. Using the Gramscian notion of the enclosure, Van Gaalen uses a focus on the material needs and options of different groups within a social movement to shift our understanding from solidarity-as-imagining to solidarity-as-repertoire. Focusing on the more grounded set of tactics for the practical application of solidarity, he offers an important reminder of the material contexts structuring the vernacularization of distinct world versions that can produce both alliances and conflicts.

Kaia Santisteban studies a set of relational practices in her study over the uses of *lawen*, the medicinal tradition of the Mapuche-Tehuelche people of Patagonia. She demonstrates how the Mapuche-Tehuelche deploy ancestral medicinal practices as a resource in struggles over medicinal policies, the functioning of biomedicine, and territory. Some use relational practices that stress the unity of environment and health to oppose the pollution and privatization of water. Others have been involved in discussions over the uses of Mapuche medicine and its importance for community members, from which have emerged initiatives like the creation of a hospital in Ruca Choroy, Argentina, where two forms of medicine are practiced alongside each other. In what Santisteban characterizes, with Arturo Escobar (2015), as transitions to the pluriverse, we can recognize the impact of the changing ideas of the importance of intercultural dialogue. Her chapter demonstrates how these ideas have opened new ways for a partial rehabilitation of delegitimized knowledge and medicinal practices, a revaluing of relational connections between nature and human beings, even when a full recognition of the ontological self-determination of Indigenous people and groups remains elusive.

The last two chapters in this section grapple with migratory experiences and the different practices by which people seek to alter these experiences. In her chapter María Belén López studies migrant women who face a range of environmental problems in the Reconquista Area of the Greater Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area. Belén analyzes how these women engage in the filling of wetlands, the organization of cleaning and waste recycling cooperatives, and the collective raising of children. Weaving rural migrant knowledge, forms of urban community organizing, and gendered care into an embodied environmental criticism and call for environmental justice, these practices help make new worlds that confront the workings of structures that contribute to their marginalization and the degradation of their environs. Diana Duarte Bernal, finally, explores the relationship between dance and worldmaking, using her observations of an African Dance Marathon organized in Santiago

de Chile in 2021. Opposing anti-migration protests, the dance marathon brought together natives and migrants to demand recognition for injustices and inequalities affecting the latter. Duarte underscores the significance of this event in fostering intersubjective experiences that transmit affect and knowledge between migrants and non-migrants, and as such a locus of interchange shape our world.

Identities

Identity-making and world-making are two intimately related processes. Although stories and practices are crucial to the making of both, several of the chapters focus specifically on the problem of identity or ways of being in the world. In the first chapter of this section, Giovana de Souza Possignolo studies the collective *Nós, Mulheres da Periferia* (NMP), a collective of Black female journalists in the peripheries of São Paulo, Brazil, who produce independent media focused on the experiences of marginalized women in Brazil. Souza Possignolo reveals how the NMP reimagines what the periphery is and what being from the periphery means for the participants' own identities. Examining engagements with decolonial feminist ideas and practices in the movement's manifesto and actions, the chapter provides a powerful story about women facing structural marginalization, racism, and sexism who turn their peripheral positionality into a source of pride. As a place of identity, memory, and resistance, the periphery becomes a locus from where they challenge exclusionary worlds and the stories that help to construct them. Linking lived experiences to transversal conversations about feminism, decolonization, and worldmaking, the chapter illustrates how the vernacularization of these ideas contribute to the development of the transformative perspectives that these women use to reshape urban spaces and the identities of those inhabiting them.

Jésica Franco addresses how early career scholars in Mexico negotiate their identities in academic writing. Franco explores on the one hand how these researchers engage with discourses and practices that reproduce dominant norms about writing. On the other hand, she discusses how such engagements produce tensions in intercultural dialogues in which, for example, academic expectations about what constitutes knowledge collides with that of the Indigenous community to which the writer themselves belongs. Franco's carefully crafted analysis illustrates how both matters impact how authors understand and perform their identities in the texts they write. In so doing, she contributes not only to the reflective dimension of this

book, but she also makes a strong case that a commitment to making personal identity part of our writing signals a growing recognition of plural epistemologies within academic spaces. Giving room to and understanding identity negotiation, she concludes, are vital to shaping a more plural and equitable academic world.

The final two chapters grapple with the question of identity in the context of the Indigenous movements in Bolivia and Chile, respectively. Jesús Llusco Mamani offers important insights into the complex nature of overlapping identities (*identidades traslapadas*) produced in relation to the *waxt'a*, a material and ritual representation of the Pachamama in Andean practices. Llusco Mamani considers the ritual and the objects used to perform it through the lens of critical state theory, by which he characterizes the state as *illusio*. He contrasts an occidental form of anthropomorphization of the nation with the Aymara understanding, according to which the nation is understood as a diverse configuration of non-human beings, in the sense of the Pachamama. Although Bolivia's 2009 Constitution drew on Indigenous concepts of relational practices between humans and nonhumans, Llusco Mamani argues that it never really questioned the state's colonial structures and anthropomorphic nature itself. Using the concept of overlapping identities, he argues for a new way of analyzing how people historically have built relationships with the Pachamama with help of the waxt'a both to expose tensions and contradictions and to work towards a new environmental pact for a de-anthropomorphized nation-state. Salvador Millaleo discusses the promise and collapse of Indigenous constitutional recognition in Chile in the period between 2021 and 2022 while grappling with the ways in which members of the Constitutional Convention adopted repertoires of global identity politics to transform the state's Eurocentric and homogenizing order. According to Millaleo, this decolonial vision is in part to blame for the profound defeat of the Indigenous movement, as it emphasized particularism and distinct identities over the need to construct spaces for intercultural dialogues. By examining the political struggles surrounding these two paradigmatic attempts to remake a world of states into a system with room for truly relational views of the world, these two chapters add further depth to our discussion about the making of a world of many worlds.

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Stories

World Literature and World Making: Latin American Literatures (1959 to Today)

Gesine Müller

On March 6, 1983, Gabriel García Márquez was waiting patiently on the tarmac of New Delhi's Palam Airport, in the plane that had brought him, along with Fidel Castro, from Cuba to a summit conference of the Non-Aligned Movement in India. According to protocol, the Cuban revolutionary leader had to be the first to leave the plane—but all of a sudden Indira Gandhi herself climbed the stairs to the plane, marched right past Castro, and called out: "Where is García Márquez?" From then on, García Márquez reported later, he and Gandhi were "inseparable," and "by the third day I felt as if Indira had been born in Aracataca" (Martyris 2014)—Aracataca being of course García Márquez's Colombian home village, which made its way into world history as "Macondo" through his novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

What comes across here as just a little anecdote is in fact part of a sphere related to the construction processes of world literature, the forces that stand behind works that circulate on the global stage, the forces that cause a novel to leave its more immediate sphere of influence and to become a part of world literature. Here in the West, where García Márquez, the Colombian Nobel Laureate for Literature, has been canonized as a model author from the Global South under the strong influence of exoticizing readings, it is easy to forget how familiar and almost commonplace García Márquez's narrative worlds may appear not only to Indira Gandhi or even Salman Rushdie but also to millions of other Indians.

The concept of world literature must itself be understood, to begin with, as a construct, rather than a supposedly objective canon of works of especially high aesthetic quality: a construct that must of necessity hide the fact of its constructedness. My goal in this article is to direct the gaze to the dynamics and very concrete production conditions of globally circulated literature, along with the associated processes of worldmaking, without unthinkingly reproducing the same power relationships in the process.

Not only in the theoretical debate about world literature that has shaped cultural studies over the last twenty-five years in a way that hardly any other

debate has done, but also in my exchanges over the years with writers, publishers, literary critics, and literary archivists, one thing has become clearer and clearer: any definition of the concept of "world literature" that is undertaken too quickly and based on theoretical approaches only will not be very useful, especially when we look at the processual nature of the creation of the concept. Instead, the discussion always becomes productive when we focus on the most pressing questions arising from the current debate, and above all the oh-so-simple-sounding but equally hard-to-answer question: how is world literature actually *made*?

World Literature Debate and Critical Perspectives on "World"

But how can theoretical positions be tested using demonstrable processes of selection and circulation? Is it possible to design a cartography that does not rely solely on the canonizing institutions of a world literature that is shaped in the West? To what extent can Latin American literatures be treated as the paradigmatic example of how world literature is constructed? What kinds of world-making processes are relevant to these questions?

To answer these questions, we need to look as far beyond the classical model of relationships between the center and the periphery as we can. Taking Gabriel García Márquez as an example, I will elaborate on several paradigms of circulatory structures, paradigms that account for literary circulation processes within the Global South that scarcely been studied to date.[2] However, before we turn to the global reception of Gabriel García Márquez, I would like to give a brief overview of the broader debate around world literature and the extent of its links to questions of worldmaking. Indeed, the discussion of the concept of world literature is among the controversies within cultural studies that are particularly closely bound up with questions of global interlinkages in a polycentric world. Most of the leading theoretical contributions to the question of world literature attempt to enter the contemporary diagnostic discourses on the symptoms of crisis in globalization—discourses that call the institutional, economic, and cultural hegemony of the Global North over the South broadly into question. (Of course, these theoretical contributions themselves have persistent hegemonic implications.) And now, following up on this question, recent contributions

[2] Exceptions regarding Latin American literatures in India are the work of Maurya (2015) and the research area on this topic at the Institute for Latin American Studies of the Freie Universität Berlin (https://www.lai.fu-berlin.de/disziplinen/literaturen_und_kulturen_lateinamerikas/forschung/Fokus_LA_Indien/index.html).

to the debate bring up the issue of whether the concept of world literature has been too closely connected with the political and economic dynamics of globalization and must therefore, of necessity, lead to a dead end.

Within debates about world literature, the last two decades have seen an increasing clamor among scholars who, each in their own way, are trying to analyze the paths of circulation that literary texts traverse on their way towards canonization. In considering this highly productive and heterogeneous field, it becomes clear that almost all of the relevant contributions in the context of a new theorization have built their respective approaches around two fundamental issues of global literary phenomena. World literature is no longer seen as a static canon comprising a series of singular, authoritative works but rather as a complex and dynamic process in the sense of historically varying reception processes around the world. Thus Pascale Casanova, for example, in *The World Republic of Letters* (2004), conceives of the concept of world literature, with an eye to Pierre Bourdieu, as an independent global literary field within which literary capital is generated not through the particular aesthetic processes or ideological conceptions of specific texts but rather as the networked interaction of concrete historical, material, and economic factors and discursive practices (Casanova 2004, 17–21). David Damrosch, who sees world literature primarily as "a mode of circulation and reading" (2003, 5), and Franco Moretti (2000; 2003), make similar arguments. The other fundamental issue that unites these studies is a recognition of the insoluble problem posed by the sheer abundance of material and the associated ability to operationalize the object of analysis, a problem that confronts every research project that addresses "world literature": Moretti writes: "we are talking of hundreds of languages and literatures here. Reading 'more' seems hardly to be the solution" (Moretti 2000, 55).

The answers that the various theorizations have attempted to give to these two central problems confronting any approach to world literature must be viewed critically because they do not implement the knowledge that they themselves have formulated of the importance of circulation processes within global literary fields and the problem of the quantities of material on the level of concrete analysis. Neither Damrosch's attempt at an illumination of these processes using nine examples in *What is World Literature?* nor Moretti's concept of a "distant reading*"* (2013), which attempts to limit the material to be accessed by shifting the perspective of the investigation to the level of literary histories, ultimately sheds light on the question at hand here: How do global literary selection and circulation processes, going beyond individual

works and authors (Damrosch 2003) or the formal characteristics of individual genres (Moretti 2013), actually operate? For Emily Apter (2008), world literature is characterized by the fact that it homogenizes the world, under the influence of the hegemonic cultures and economies, and suppresses its cultural diversity. An essential feature of this understanding of world literature is its translatability, which is primarily defined by market conditions and thus, as a purely economic measure, makes up a component of global capitalism. The global literary system, for Apter, presents itself as a universe in which national galaxies compete with each other to determine the universal shape of a world literature (2008, 593).

Newer literary-sociological approaches such as those of Sarah Brouillette (2014, 2016), Stefan Helgesson (Helgesson and Vermeulen 2016), and Ignacio Sánchez Prado (2018a, 2018b), insofar as they also take into account the asymmetrical power relationships of the global book trade, are central to a way of looking at the literature that focuses on the concrete processes of the development of world literature and manages not to further cement in place the outdated logics of center and periphery. According to Brouillette, the important thing here is not the fact that world literature is a consumable product shaped by market demand, but that the entire system of literary production is fundamentally determined by capitalist social relationships. These relationships only allow a small number of individuals to participate in the process of producing and circulating literature (Brouillette 2016, 93). Thus, world literature is by no means an instance of seamless global circulation but rather shaped by an international social differential, which is the reason why access to literature and the literary trade is limited.

Even an investigation that is more strongly oriented towards concrete material must therefore always keep in mind that it has to go beyond the well-known recognition that the denominating centers continue to be located in the United States and Europe, although in some cases works then proceed to be disseminated, in a second phase, via the postcolonial centers of the erstwhile colonial powers, such as Mumbai or Cape Town. What is significant here are the circulation processes within the Global South, which I will, as far as possible, programmatically address. I use the much-discussed and problematized idea of the Global South, that has become even more important in recent years, through the work of theoreticians such as Boaventura de

Sousa Santos (2009),[3] as a geopolitical and epistemological construct to denote regions of the world that, for the most part, have a colonial past and are located outside of the "old" established centers of Western thought. They can, ultimately, be anywhere on the globe:

> The "Global South" is not an existing entity to be described by different disciplines, but an entity that has been invented in the struggle and conflicts between imperial global domination and emancipatory and decolonial forces that do not acquiesce with global designs. (Levander and Mignolo 2011, 3; see also Müller, Locane, and Loy 2018, 3)

As we conceptualize the term Global South, it is important to attend to another aspect, as expressed by Jean and John Comaroff:

> "The Global South" has become a shorthand for the world of non-European, postcolonial peoples. Synonymous with uncertain development, unorthodox economies, failed states and nations fraught with corruption, poverty and strife, it is that half of the world about which the "Global North" spins theories. (2012, 113).

In 1988, Ketaki Kushari Dyson already pointed to the dangers of reducing the idea of the Global South to a "Third-Worldism" (8).

The central question, which is also so formative for the theoretical debate, is: Which concept of the "world" is actually being referred to? Think, for instance, of the discussions about non-national or transnational concepts such as "parastate," "translingualism," "diaspora," "majimboism," "postcolonial deterritorialization," "circum-Atlantic," "refuge islands," or the "Global South" (Apter 2008, 582). The inadequacies of the available alternatives to the concept of a national literature are often noted.[4] The current theorization of world literature rightly problematizes the fact that the "world" as a referential framework has overly positive connotations.[5] Given this

[3] In the context of issues to do with world literature, mention should be made here of the two volumes edited by Ignacio López-Calvo (2007, 2012) and the special issue of *The Global South* for which Caroline Levander and Walter Mignolo were responsible (2011).

[4] In addition to Apter (2008), see also Venkat Mani, who has, rightly, questioned whether world literature should in fact be seen as a liberation from national literature. Famously, he answers this question of the binary perception of literature in the negative, whether that is a binary of permanent vs. ephemeral, homogenizing vs. heterogenizing, comparative vs. assimilationist, universal vs. particular, original vs. translated (Mani 2017, 33).

[5] Mariano Siskind even goes so far as to proclaim "the end of the world" (Siskind 2019 *passim*), in the sense of the "very stable notion of world as globe produced by hegemonic discourses of cosmopolitanism and financial and consumerist globalization" (206–7). In particular, he considers optimistic to utopian views of the world to be failures, and asks how we can adequately

background, I believe that we must also, more intensively and with recourse to the material, look into the question of the degree to which we have concepts that go beyond an affirmative understanding, shaped by global economies, of the "world."

In his book *What Is a World? On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature*, Pheng Cheah (2016) takes a closer look at this question. Taking the work of Hegel, Marx, Heidegger, Arendt, and Derrida as a foundation, his concern is to undertake a conceptualization of the world, using chronological concepts, that will create a normative basis for a transformation of the globalized capitalist world. This is also expected to lead to a radical rethinking of world literature: existing theories of world literature, in his opinion, suffer from the fact that they see the world as an analogy for the global market or that they underestimate the possibilities of literature as a world-shaping factor. What Cheah proposes is literature as a world-shaping power, as an observer in the processes of worlding, and as an active participant in these processes.

While Pheng Cheah, in his noteworthy work, also thinks in terms of a programmatic process of worlding, Mariano Siskind's reflections on world literature start from the fundamental premise that "the world doesn't exist" (Siskind 2017, 47): that there is no world in the sense of existing symbolic and material structures on which the processes of circulation or transcultural aesthetic imaginaries could build: "The world . . . cannot be assumed to be a structure that predates the critical or aesthetic interventions that have to posit it in contingent and idiosyncratic ways" (48). What he outlines, instead, is an internally differentiated and uneven whole that is not identical to itself (49). As a result, for Siskind, the "world" of world literature is also formed primarily not through successful communication or harmonious processes of exchange ("connections, dialogues, collaborations, influence and borrowings") but rather through breaks and conflicts ("unsolvable tensions, unevenness, antagonisms and exclusions"; 49).

The theoretical frame of reference constituted by the "world"—or to be more specific, the tendency in the debate to imagine world literature as a seamless, all-encompassing system of circulation—is rightly problematized in this process, but this problem cannot be dealt with in the context of a philosophical materialism alone, nor with purely programmatic postulates. The decisive move is, rather, to connect it back to the actual, material

deal with the immense loss entailed by "the symbolic closure of the horizon of universal justice and emancipation" (211).

processes taking place in the literary field. Ignacio Sánchez Prado also emphasizes the significance of material practices for the constitution of world literature, within the tension that he has diagnosed between ideal (the idealization of cosmopolitanism) and practice (literary-sociological approaches) in contemporary debates over world literature (Sánchez Prado 2006, 2018b). His approach, which focuses specifically on Latin America, combines the analysis of concrete cultural production with a critical look at global cultural circulation processes.

How, then, can a methodological approach that intentionally aims to include the economic factors of the production of world literature avoid the trap of misunderstanding literature as a streamlined product that moves seamlessly through the pipelines of global reception? As already mentioned, the question of the "making of world literature" must, from the outset, deal with the fact that a positive understanding of the world is problematic in itself. On the other hand, the emphasis on the literatures of the Global South, both on the level of content as well as on the level of successful or failed South-South connections within literary production and reception, can make visible the fundamental inconsistencies of the "overlapped, palimpsestic worlds that constitute the material and symbolic grounds of world literature" (Siskind 2017, 49).

Latin America

For these purposes**,** Latin America can be seen as an ideal research subject, given that the Latin American literatures have very much been the pioneers and representatives, within the Western literary marketplace, of other literatures that have (previously) been seen as peripheral. In 2017, the writer Ilija Trojanow reported that he had noticed, while researching the canonical lists of major Western media such as the *BBC* and *The Guardian* on the topic of world literature, that Gabriel García Márquez was almost always the only author listed from the Global South, underscoring the paradigmatic character of Latin America in the context of questions of world literature. But the Latin American literatures are not only significant, in this context, as forerunners or representatives of literatures from the Global South in the traditional centers of denomination. Latin America represents, in a very particular way, the problems and possibilities of a global perspective on the cultural and, especially, the literary processes of circulation. The construction of Latin America as a geographical, cultural, and political space has been proceeding, ever since the continent was conquered by Europeans, against the background

of external processes of projection and denomination, and global economic dimensions have played into these processes in a decisive way. The "invention of America" (O'Gorman 1958) by the "West" is something that Walter Mignolo, too, highlighted, showing the extent to which America "was an *invention* forged in the process of European colonial history and the consolidation and expansion of the Western world view and institutions" (Mignolo 2005, 2). The literatures of the region have always been shaped by a tension between these tendencies towards external projections coming from the West, and the search, from within Latin America, for a political and cultural continental "identity."

In addition, the time period of the increasingly global reception of the region's literature can be determined quite precisely, beginning in 1959 and going through various phases since then, which also contributes to the uniqueness of these literatures, compared to the rest of the world, in terms of their suitability as an object of analysis (see also Loy 2017). For the purposes of understanding the workings of the global processes of literary construction and circulation, the literatures of Latin America from 1959 to today occupy a paradigmatic position.[6]

Gabriel García Márquez: Worldwide Circulation and South-South Dynamics

To delve deeper into the question of world making and world literature making, I would like to illustrate my approach with a case study on the most renowned Latin American author of all, Nobel laureate Gabriel García Márquez and his seminal novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.[7] The novel's international circulation passed primarily through Spain (Barcelona) and France, a typical, well-researched trajectory for literature from the Latin American Boom. In this chapter, I would like to focus on its reception in the United States, India, China, and the Arab world, each to a varying extent.

United States

The novel's triumph in the Anglophone world began in 1970 with Gregory Rabassa's translation, which was promptly selected by the *New York Times*

[6] I thank Benjamin Loy for his important suggestions in this context.
[7] The following remarks on the global reception of Gabriel García Márquez are based on lines of argument that I have already developed in part in previous articles. See, for example, Müller 2018a, 2018b, 2019, 2022a, 2022b, 2023.

as one of the twelve best novels of the year. Apart from an exoticist interpretation that viewed the novel as a microcosm of the entire "foreign" world of Latin America, significant attention was given to the depiction of archetypal universalisms and anthropological constants. This facilitated the novel's integration into a network of universalist world literature. Because Gabriel García Márquez was canonized in the United States, the country became the primary driver of its reception in the Anglophone Global South.

India

In India, the first reception of *Cien años de soledad* took place in English. The first translations into regional Indian languages followed the enormous surge in popularity and reputation that García Márquez enjoyed after he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1982; these translations were undertaken from English into Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, Malayalam, and Tamil (Maurya 2015, 252).[8] Indradeep Bhattacharyya (2014) describes the astonishing increase in sales of Gabriel García Márquez's books after his death in 2014: his works were on display in all of Kolkata's major bookstores—Kolkata also being the site of the world's largest annual public book fair—and were soon sold out.[9] Bhattacharyya also draws parallels with the developments in the Indian book market after the Nobel Prize award in 1982.[10] As he tells it, the reception of García Márquez in India appears to be characterized by two sudden upswings, one following the Nobel Prize and one following the author's death. But the cautious story of García Márquez's reception in India already began in the early 1970s:

> Way back in 1971, when Manabendra Bandyopadhyay introduced him in the comparative literature syllabus at Jadavpur University, nobody had heard of the author, but he noticed an instant liking among students for *One Hundred*

[8] The four-volume *Bibliographic Guide to Gabriel García Márquez* (ed. Nelly Sfeir de González) includes the following translations for the years from 1949 to 2002: Malayalam: *Cien años de soledad* (tr. Kottayam, India: Di. Si. Buks, 1995), *El amor en los tiempos del cólera* (Vi ke Unnikrsnan, tr. Kottayam, India: Di. Si. Buks, 1997, 1998); Gujarati, *La mala hora* (Nirañjana Taripathi, tr. Amadavada, India: Gurjara Grantharatna Karylaya, 1991).

[9] See Bhattacharyya (2014): "Ranjit Adhikary, sales manager of Supernova Publishers, Penguin's exclusive distributor in eastern India, said: 'Demand for Garcia Marquez's books has shot up exponentially. Every day we receive orders for at least 90-100 copies of each title. The two books most in demand—*One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Love in the Time of Cholera*—are out of stock. They will be back in circulation next week.'"

[10] "College Street bookseller Suvojit Saha said, 'Demand for Garcia Marquez's books had shot up in 1982. It has again peaked after his death. We are sending away customers as there is no supply. We had about 30 titles; we sold out last Saturday'" (Bhattacharyya 2014).

> *Years of Solitude*. "The first sign was that students read the text themselves, which was definitely not the case with someone like Joyce," Bandyopadhyay said. (Bhattacharyya 2014)

One key to Gabriel García Márquez's success in India, then, can be found in a certain literarily staged familiarity and the associated "readability" that appeals to every reader, regardless of their level of education or cultural background, with its orality and fairytale-like character.

> *El realismo magical* [sic], "magic realism," at least as practiced by Garcia Marquez, is a development of Surrealism that expresses a genuinely "Third World" consciousness. It deals with what Naipaul has called "half-made" societies, in which the impossibly old struggles against the appallingly new, in which public corruptions and private anguishes are more garish and extreme than they ever get in the so-called "North," where centuries of wealth and power have formed thick layers over the surface of what's really going on. (Rushdie 1982)

As this quotation from Salman Rushdie makes clear, the global establishment of magical realism on the basis of the shared experiences of a Global South is of critical importance for the reception of Gabriel García Márquez in Indian literature. Magical realism, as an aesthetic form, became the mantra of what was then called the Third World, immediately applicable as it was to other marginalized and socially segregated places, forms, and spaces—the reception of the later India Boom was also influenced by it. Mariano Siskind's (2012) study leads the way in examining the worldwide diffusion of magical realism as a postcolonial form of expression, giving Gabriel García Márquez and the "globalization of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*,"[11] or to be more specific the material and concrete process of the global circulation of the novel, a central role in this development (867, note 80). For "Macondo is the mediation between the idiosyncratic hyper-localism of the Colombian tropical forest and the general situation of the continent. Macondo is the village-signifier that names the difference of Latin America, and later, perhaps of the Third World at large" (854). Siskind describes the magical perspective, with respect to a specific subaltern sociocultural experience of colonialism and of other forms of local or global oppression, as a particular

[11] Worldwide, the number of writers in postcolonial situations whose work was significantly influenced by García Márquez's novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is large. In addition to Salman Rushdie and Toni Morrison, who have already been mentioned, we should also list Latife Tekin (*Dear Shameless Death*, 1983), Ben Okri (*The Famished Road*, 1991), Mia Couto (*Sleepwalking Land*, 1992) and Mo Yan, whom I will discuss in more detail later (cf. Siskind 2012, 857–58).

intraliterary characteristic of the postcolonial variation of magical realism, which began with *One Hundred Years of Solitude*: "the narrative and interpretative horizon opened up by García Márquez by rendering visible the relation between the universality of (colonial, postcolonial, capitalistic) modern history, and the particularity of local forms of oppression" (2012, 855). In other words, it is the universalistic dimension of magical realism in the context of the Global South that Indian readers find so fascinating in the texts of the Colombian writer, paired with the specific entanglement of reality and fiction, as the García Márquez translator Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee explains: "Take *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, for instance. The sweep of the novel startled me. At that time, Latin America had seven-eight military dictators who exercised ruthless power. It could be the story of any of them—their despotic rule as well as their helplessness" (Bhattacharyya 2014).

The success of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) is another factor not to be dismissed in García Márquez's success in India. In numerous reviews and interviews, Rushdie himself professes his admiration for his Latin American colleague; for example, in retrospect, he emphasizes the enormous impression that reading *One Hundred Years of Solitude* made on him and the feeling of familiarity that he experienced with it:

> And of course when I did read it, I had the experience that many people had described of being forever lost in that great novel. Unforgettable. I think all of us can remember the day when we first read Gabriel García Márquez; it was a colossal event. One thing that struck me, . . . was the incredible similarity between the world he was describing and the world that I knew from South Asia, from India and Pakistan. It was a world in which religion and superstition dominated people's lives; also a world in which there was a powerful and complicated history of colonialism; also a world in which there were colossal differences between the very poor and the very rich, and not much in between; also a world bedeviled by dictators and corruption. And so to me, what was called "fantastic" seemed completely naturalistic. (Rushdie 2007, cited in Siskind 2012, 860–61)

In scholarly circles, as well, we can observe that the reception of Gabriel García Márquez in India picked up speed after the publication of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and the awarding of the Nobel Prize to García Márquez. In Hyderabad, for instance, the first "International Seminar on García Márquez and Latin America" took place in 1984.[12] Then, beginning in the

[12] A selected collection of the lectures can be found in Bhalla (1987). Analogously to the developments after the Nobel Prize in 1982, after García Márquez's death the English and

1990s, a broad field of research into postcolonial fiction and magical realism opened up, within which García Márquez, along with Rushdie and some others—and particularly García Márquez's influence on Indian literature—played a prominent role.[13]

In Indian literature, or at least in its internationally circulating literature, the traces of García Márquez's literary aesthetic are truly remarkable. The connections between the works of García Márquez and Salman Rushdie, already mentioned above—especially in terms of magical realism—are well-known and have been intensively studied all around the world. Amitav Ghosh (*The Circle of Reason*, 1986) and Arundhati Roy (*The God of Small Things*, 1987) are also a part of this group. Comparisons between Roy's novel and García Márquez are as common as they are a part of the commercialization of Roy's work. Responding in an interview to a question about his literary models, Ghosh, for his part, names García Márquez as the most important source of inspiration for his work (Aldama 2002, 87).

In summary, the reception of García Márquez in India can be characterized as having gone through several stages. What prepared the ground was surely the slow dissemination of magical realism on a global level, advanced by the awarding of the Nobel Prize to Miguel Asturias in 1967, the year in which *Cien años de soledad* was published. When the novel was translated into English in 1970, worldwide success swiftly followed, and in 1971 it was already on the syllabus in India's comparative literature programs. As of the 1980s, the significant influence of Gabriel García Márquez's work on Rushdie and other "postcolonial" writers could be clearly seen. When García Márquez was awarded the 1982 Nobel Prize in Literature, that acted as a further catalyst for these developments, strengthening scholarly interest in García Márquez's work from a postcolonial perspective, which is linked with magical realism. This tradition lives on in countless Indian fiction writers who also have international visibility (beginning with Ghosh and Roy). And finally, when García Márquez died, in 2014, the

Foreign Languages University in Hyderabad organized a further seminar on his work, on March 25, 2015, entitled "Márquez and Literatures of India." The program can be viewed online at http://efluniversity.ac.in/images/Documents/schedule.pdf.

[13] More recently, Christopher Warnes (2009) and Taner Can (2015) have also written about magical realism in the English-language postcolonial novels. Both of them extend an invitation to take a new look at magical realism, which they consider to be central to English-language postcolonial fiction, for example in the work of Salman Rushdie, Shashi Tharoor, Ben Okri, and Sly Cheney-Coker. On the question of the relations between Latin America and India, in particular, Susanne Klengel and Alexandra Ortiz Wallner have developed a new paradigm, which uses the label *Sur/South* to provide an alternative to the concept of the Global South, and which brings up the question of new Orientalisms (see Klengel and Ortiz Wallner 2016).

interest in his work and the allusions made to it by Indian writers grew very intense once more.

China

Gisèle Sapiro (2016, 84) writes that in countries in which the economic realm is subordinated to the political realm, and the institutions that determine cultural production and the organization of the intellectual professions are run by the state, such as in Fascist or Communist countries, the production and circulation of symbolic goods is highly politicized. This could be the headline for the reception of García Márquez in China.

In the early 1980s, in the aftermath of the painful cultural revolution, the newly crowned Nobel Prize winner García Márquez became a literary and cultural figurehead for the "New China." The background context for this can be outlined very quickly: the 1980s marked an unusually successful and productive phase for literature in China, after the most important writers of twentieth-century world literature had been translated and made accessible in China in the 1970s: writers like Franz Kafka, James Joyce, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, Kawabata Yasunari, Mario Vargas Llosa, and also Gabriel García Márquez, who had not fit, prior to that, into the framework of a model socialist literature. García Márquez's literature, in particular, gave great support to intellectuals. As one Chinese critic noted, "It was as though a pal from your own village had become a millionaire"[14] (Ye 2015, 29), because in China García Márquez was still considered a "third-world artist."

The Nobel Prize also marked the beginning of the major reappraisal of García Márquez's oeuvre in the Chinese literary marketplace: in 1982, Yiwen Chubanshe (Translation Publishers of Shanghai) published an anthology of his works from 1950 to 1981, and in 1987 two different versions of *El amor en los tiempos del cólera* were published, as well as the famous poetological interview *El olor de la guayaba* (The smell of the guava), with Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza (Ye 2015, 29). In 1983–84, interestingly, there was at the same time an official campaign directed against magical realism because of its anti-socialist "mind pollution." Because of that, China had to wait until 1994 for a complete translation of *Cien años de soledad*. And it was not until 2011 that the first authorized edition appeared on the market.[15] There were

[14] "Es como si un compadre del mismo pueblo se hubiera convertido en millonario".

[15] All previous editions of *Cien años de soledad* in China had appeared without the official permission of the author. Chen Mingjun, the head of the publisher Thinkingdom House, finally acquired the rights for a million dollars (see Flood 2011).

indeed two editions of the novel published as early as 1984—one based on the Spanish original, and the other translated from the English (Ji 2015, 358)—but both of them were drastically shortened, as the novel had been criticized as being obscene and representing superstition (see Ye 2015, 29).

The 1980s was also when China's Xungen literary movement was formed, which looked to the roots of Chinese civilization and strove for an artistic style that would harmoniously combine tradition and modernity. Han Shaogong, one of the main protagonists of the Xungen movement, noted in 1985 that: "Literature has its roots. Literature has to be deeply rooted in the ground of the people's traditional culture. If not, the Tree of Literature will never bloom" (Han 1985, 2, cited in Ye 2015, 30). Chinese writers found points of connection in García Márquez's poetics, and a real enthusiasm for Latin American culture broke out (Gálik 2000, 161). But entirely new translation strategies had to be developed, because there was no established literary movement in China that could be compared with magical realism (Ji 2015, 358).

Mo Yan (b. 1955) is the most internationally recognized of the Xungen writers, and he won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2012. His 1986 story cycle 红高粱家族, *Hóng gāoliang jiāzú* (*Red Sorghum*), very closely follows García Márquez's magical realism narrative style. And in his 1996 novel 丰乳肥臀, *Fēng rǔ féi tún* (*Big Breasts & Wide Hips*), he not only deals with the obsessions of the protagonist that give the book its title, but also rewrites China's extremely varied twentieth-century history. With a sharp eye for the peculiar, he deconstructs the official historiography of the Chinese revolutionary age (see Siskind 2012, 857). The events are reflected in Yan's Chinese counterpart to Macondo, the provincial universe of his fictionalized birth city, Gaomi, in the province of Shandong. The author confesses in an interview, "I was born here, I grew up here, my roots are here" (Ye 2015, 30). Thus, it is no coincidence that Mo Yan was recognized by the Nobel Prize committee for his "hallucinatory realism" (Flood 2012), which can be seen as an adaptation of the twentieth-century Latin American poetics of magical realism. García Márquez's influence on Yan's writing can also be seen in the fact that the theme of center and periphery always enters into Yan's narratives.

Mo Yan once commented that his experience of famines during his childhood constituted a formative learning process for him, which he calls "thinking about life through my stomach and knowing the world through my teeth" ("pensar la vida con el estómago y conocer el mundo con los dientes"; Ye 2015, 30). The literary embodiment of such experiences of privation is

similar in the work of Yan and of García Márquez, an embodiment that can be understood as the expression of a specific literary aesthetic of the Global South. This can be seen, for example, in literary stagings of the consumption of inedible things. In Yan's story "Iron Child," for example, because there is nothing to eat, the protagonist eats steel rods; in *Cien años de soledad*, meanwhile, unrequited love turns Rebeca into a geophagist, an earth eater. Fan Ye interprets this behavior as a transcultural posture of dissent and a silent protest by the marginalized against their oppressors (2015, 31–32). In one of his "Confessions," Mo Yan records the poetological and ideological influence that García Márquez and Faulkner had on him, in the process categorizing García Márquez as a Western writer:

> In the year 1985 I wrote five novellettes and more than ten short stories. There is no doubt that where their world view and artistic devices are concerned, they were strongly influenced by foreign literature. Among Western works the greatest impact came from García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and William Faulkner's *Sound and Fury*. (cited in Gálik 2000: 161)

World literature and World Making

Gabriel García Márquez is without a doubt a world literary figure, one who finds the same kind of enthusiastic response in both the Global North and the Global South. To this day, he seems to be the only writer from the Global South to appear in Western rankings of world literature, as the writer Ilija Trojanow (2017) pointed out after looking through the canonical lists that had been published in Western media such as the *BBC* or *The Guardian* on the topic of world literature. The reception of García Márquez as a now-irrevocable part of the Western canon of world literature can be understood as the reassurance that space has been made for the thoughts and memories of marginalized voices, without having to leave the framework of established Western thinking. This is the context in which we should understand Mo Yan's matter-of-fact categorization of García Márquez as a Western writer.

Our rather unconventional perspective on the global reception of García Márquez in the Global South has demonstrated that a South-South perspective has heuristic potential, which is nourished by the question of the possible existence of decidedly "Southern" aesthetics and forms of representation. This seems to be even more significant when we look at the literary modeling of shared historical experiences within the Global South, experiences that reach from colonial history through integration into the

economic, social, and cultural transformation processes of global modernity.[16] In examining the case of García Márquez, we have also seen how strongly the concepts of detachment from traditional dynamics of center and periphery, and of following transnational perspectives, which are highly relevant today in the course of the debates over world literature in cultural studies, are anchored in Latin American literary production. In the last decades it has proven true again and again: whenever there is a demand for a reorientation of world literary concepts, Latin America is never far away as a guide. One need only think of the wave of reception in the United States of Roberto Bolaño as a brilliant commentator on the derailed processes of globalization, focused on his novel *2666*; or of the enthusiastic reception of the young Aura Xilonen by Western publishers after she made her debut in 2015 with a novel that drives linguistic and national borders to the point of absurdity.

This pioneering role has recently seen a reprise. Over the past fifteen years or so, a new trend in Latin American literatures has emerged, with its aesthetic of *Welt(er)schöpfung*—a combination of world creation and exhaustion—setting a global example. Aura Xilonen also fits into this trend. These predominantly young authors have in common a specific literary reflection on our current post-global world and the symptomatic crises of asymmetric globalization: armed conflicts, epidemics and pandemics, and new waves of refugees and migration have shaped a growing exhaustion of the global project, as have global phenomena of alienation and the ecological consequences of human life and economy, which can no longer be ignored. Furthermore, as manifestations of relativism and ethno-nationalism have unmistakably shown us in recent years that—in the words of Markus Messling—"The circulation and the interleaving of people, data, and goods of all varieties have ... not necessarily generated a corresponding universalistic consciousness" (Messling 2019, 11). In regard to the literatures of our era, this suggests tension between local contexts and a universal horizon that needs to be formulated afresh. The task of rethinking processes of worldmaking in our current, post-global era has grown ever more urgent. Today, there are unmistakable cracks in the foundation of what was previously a hegemonic vision of the world from a Western perspective.

[16] This perspective brings up the question of whether Gabriel García Márquez could not also serve as an example of how cultural products contribute to the creation and recreation of narratives of the global, thereby reaching a transnational readership. Compare Héctor Hoyos's reading of Borges and Bolaño (Hoyos 2015, 4).

In light of the portrayals of globality, exhaustion, and fresh creation in the Latin American literatures of the last fifteen years, and with a view to the ongoing debate over world literature, we can observe a highly productive artistic confrontation with crisis-ridden realities in imagined spaces. This can also serve as a role model for those outside Latin America, renewing our perspective on the possibilities of "world literature" in the post-global period beyond asymmetrical constellations of power. The Latin American perspective is a decisive one given that writers there, more than anywhere else, have been responding to the asymmetries of globalization processes in works of literature that enjoy worldwide circulation via strong connections to Western markets and narrative forms. Hence, Latin America can be considered a paradigmatic space for experiencing the contradictions in post-global world creation and exhaustion. We are seeing a new potential for multipolar dynamics by which the literary work appears as a paradoxical representation of worlds that are exhausted and yet also undergoing renewal. Especially given current reactionary anti-globalist trends, such alternative perceptions of the world are enormously valuable.

A materially oriented investigation into world literature must therefore address the selection mechanisms and specific conditions of the emergence of global processes of literary circulation and reception and, at the same time, take into account not only an idea of the world that is shaped by the economic and cultural-hegemonic asymmetries within a global market order but one that is also, increasingly and on a much more fundamental level, proving to be unequal (and asynchronous), contradictory, and internally conflicted. In the connection of these two dimensions of the "world" there lies a great deal of critical potential to release the concept of world literature from its rigid frameworks and to open it up to its own internal ruptures and incongruities.

In his appeal for rethinking world literature, Pheng Cheah (2016) argues that the very model of a capitalist market that girdles the whole globe yet obstructs worldwide community is countered by a model of the world derived from the narrative literature of the post-colonial South. With this in mind, all the different literary portrayals of the ambivalence of exhaustion and creation now emerging in Latin America should be treated as methods for keeping alive "the worlding force" (Cheah 2016, 210).

Fiction opens up ambivalent, dynamic, and complex spaces that always also entail aspects of contemporary vacancy, stagnation, or imminent exhaustion. The concept of *Welt(er)schöpfung* makes it possible to illuminate aspects of post-global aesthetics that are articulated in these literary texts and oriented towards new constellations of World Making.

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Re-Orienting Rubén Darío: Japanese Imperialism, Modernization, and the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) in Darío's Chronicles

Sebastián Díaz-Martínez

Between 1880 and 1930, many Latin American countries developed export-oriented economies within a neocolonial order. This period of technological and financial transformation also attracted foreign partners to invest and participate in Latin American economies (Halperín Donghi and Chasteen 1993, 191). Latin American countries established various relationships with Western and Eastern industrial, military, and technological powers. During this period, the region's intellectual and cultural circles expressed, through their writings, a desire for modernization. They looked to imperial powers as models, pathways, or potential allies in their pursuit of technological and economic development. To this end, they praised various cultural traditions, celebrated or lamented specific military events, and portrayed imperial powers both as alternatives and threats that *oriented* the region's future.

In the framework of this neocolonial order, one actor that has often gone unnoticed was the Japanese Empire during and after the Meiji Restoration. Following the end of the Tokugawa Shogunate and the onset of the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Japan embarked on an extensive modernization initiative encompassing both its civil and military structures. As a result of this transformation, Japan adopted and, in some instances, refined colonial practices that had been pioneered by European and North American powers.[17] The imperial gaze of Japan's ruling elites expanded beyond East Asia and came to include several Latin American countries, including Peru, Brazil, and Mexico, which became targets of several imperialist projects.

[17] Scholars have extensively examined how Japan drew on European and U.S. models in its modernization and imperial expansion. Paine (2017) highlights the Iwakura mission, whose members—including future Prime Minister Itō Hirobumi—studied Western institutions and later contributed to drafting the Meiji Constitution (6). Moore (2013) notes that the technocratic agenda of the Japan Engineers' Club was shaped by the U.S. New Deal and Nazi economic policies, promoting labor-management cooperation, bureaucratic efficiency, and intensified colonization in East Asia (10).

During the first half of the twentieth century, Japan emerged as a key player in global transportation technologies, facilitating state-sponsored migration across the Pacific as a strategic tool of imperial expansion, including toward Latin America. Japanese interoceanic infrastructure developed along two routes: the "South America West Coast route" and the "South America East Coast route (Greenstein 2023, 38). The development of both oceanic routes allowed Japan to extend its influence through Latin America. Recent advancements in the field of transpacific studies have revealed how Japan's modernization process was debated in Latin American intellectual circles. Partially, this was a response to the migratory movement and creation of Japanese settlements all over the region that were the result of Japan's migration-driven expansion.[18] After a first group of 790 Japanese laborers arrived to Peru in 1899 (Greenstein 2023, 31), a state-supported wave of migrants began settling in Latin American territories, many of them facilitated by migration companies funded by imperial capital and inspired by the Enomoto colony established by Japanese settlers in 1897 in southern Chiapas, Mexico.[19] Sidney Xu Lu (2019) has demonstrated how this mass-migration was influenced by Japanese Malthusian expansionism, the belief, that is, that "… as their empire was suffering from the crisis of overpopulation [produced by the rapid modernization of the country], Japan naturally deserved the right to export its surplus people overseas" (24). This belief justified and legitimized to the public opinion Japan's migration-driven expansion in the context of domestic and international policy.

The growing connections between Latin America and Japan, including the establishment of migration companies and routes and the arrival of new settlers, marked the beginning of an independent relationship between the two regions that did not depend on European or U.S.-American mediation. They also reflected Japan's desire to participate in the neocolonial order that was being debated in Latin America from the 1880s to the 1930s. For example, in the case of Mexico, Víctor Kerber Palma (2021) has extensively examined Japan's influence during the Mexican Revolution. According to Kerber Palma, the constitutionalist revolutionaries perceived Japan as a balancing power in response to U.S. interventionism. Practically, for every

[18] According to Lu (2024, 65), the Japanese state played a central role in promoting and managing Japan's overseas emigration, eventually leading to the formation of the migration state (80). Lu has extensively explored the role of Japanese migration to Latin American and other territories military annexed (as Manchuria, Korea, Taiwan).

[19] The Enomoto Colony was founded by the former Japanese foreign minister Emonoto Takeaki, who founded the Colonial Association (Shokumin Kyōkai) in order to facilitate the empire's migration-driven expansion (Iacobelli and Lu 2024, 1)

Mexican government at the beginning of the century, Japan became a leitmotif regarding an alternative model of modernization beyond Washington's control (18).

The construction of these interoceanic infrastructures not only led to Japanese migrants settling in Latin America but also enabled some Latin American travelers to visit Japan. Among them were writers from the *modernismo* movement who published their experiences in Japan during the Meiji Restoration. Prior research in Latin American cultural studies has analyzed the *modernista* writers who journeyed to Japan, like José Juan Tablada, Efraín Rebolledo, Arturo Ambrogi, and Enrique Gómez Carrillo (Tinajero 2004; Hagimoto 2018). According to Morán (2009), Japan and China served as a source of inspiration for the literary movement of *modernism,* which sought to engage with cosmopolitan currents in literature. This movement aimed to create a distinct identity by contrasting the outside world with the inside world of Latin America. The writers of *modernismo* achieved this by appropriating the Asian stereotype, particularly the Chinese stereotype, which represented a complete otherness and the limit of rationality itself. (Morán 2009, 296–97).

The Nicaraguan writer Rubén Darío was one of the most prominent figures in the Latin American cultural scene and representative of the modernista movement during the same period in which Japan was rising as an imperial power. In his writings, Darío frequently reflected on the new interconnections, mediated by technology, that were reshaping the world. Following the outbreak of Japanese aggression in 1904, Darío's perception of the Asiatic nation shifted dramatically. While in *Azul…* (Valparaíso, 1888), references to Japan appear alongside mentions of China in an ambiguous and interchangeable manner, his early evocations of the Far East take the form of *chinerías* (chinoiserie) and *japonerías* (japoniserie)—terms associated with inexpensive decorative objects, mostly ceramics and porcelain, that had circulated in Europe and Latin America for centuries. Over time, however, Japan came to be seen by Darío as an industrial, military, and expansionist power, especially in light of its growing geopolitical assertiveness in the early twentieth century. Through Darío's non-fiction literature, we can gain insight into how Japan was viewed as a rising power and the conflicting perspectives on whether it acted as a liberating ally to European colonialism or as a new colonial force that threatened regional sovereignty. Darío's impact on the cultural studies of Latin America is highly regarded, as evidenced by the numerous analyses of his works from various

perspectives and theoretical frameworks.[20] Particularly important for this research are two topics that have garnered significant critical attention: Darío's relationship with Japan and his anti-imperialist stance in both his fiction and non-fiction works, which many scholars recognize as a response to the United States' Pan-Americanism policies (Sanhueza 2019; List 2013; Gutiérrez 2017; Piña-Rosales et al. 2017). With the rise of Japan as an imperial power, it became evident that its competitor in the race for control over the Pacific would be the United States. Darío, as I will argue later, was aware of this new tension between empires, and marked a transformation in his portrayal of Japan.

Darío's engagement with modernity offers a complex reflection on the cultural and political imaginaries of the early twentieth century, navigating between symbolic participation in global modernism and critical distance from its imperial foundations. Iris Zavala argues that modernity in Latin America placed particular emphasis on culture and politics, promoting a belief that progress, technology, and industrialization were inextricably linked. This gave rise to what she terms the "industrial imaginary," a framework in which cultural production served to advance capitalist modernization by symbolically linking civilization with industrial progress (Zavala 1992, 5). While this formulation is useful for understanding broader trends in *modernismo*, this chapter approaches Darío's work as articulating a more ambivalent and geopolitically situated vision of modernity: how the rise of the Japanese Empire reinforced Darío's anti-imperialism.

This reinforcement, along with the reorientation in his perspective on Japan, was triggered by a specific event: news of Japan's victories over Russia following the February 1904 attack, which Darío received through the Latin American press in which he himself published. This shift in perspective, however, was not unique to Darío. The Russo-Japanese War was a pivotal event in a broader global transformation, positioning the Japanese Empire as the sole non-Western Great Power (Paine 2017, 39). During this period, interactions between Japan and Latin America underwent a profound

[20] Rubén Darío has been one of the most widely discussed writers virtually since the emergence of literary and critical studies in Latin America. Over several decades, his texts and cultural productions have been the subject of extensive examination, resulting in edited volumes, scholarly dossiers, and even specialized conferences. For the purposes of this chapter, in addition to the previously cited works that approach Darío from an "Orientalist" perspective, further recommended readings include the studies by Ignacio López-Calvo (2009, 2010), Erick Blandón (2011), Graciela Montaldo (in Darío and Montaldo 2013), Mariano Siskind (2014, 2015), Roberto José Ortiz (2015), Andrew Reynolds (2018), Mónica González (2022), Pablo Gavirati (2022) or Andrés Felipe Ramírez Zuluaga (2023).

reorientation, driven by the expansion of economic, political, and cultural exchanges. Japan's military victories in Asia, along with the development of independent technological production under the "New Order in East Asia" (Moore 2013, 26), played a central role in this shift. Its consolidation as an imperial force through expansionist policies did not go unnoticed by Latin American cultural and intellectual circles. In particular, Darío's response to the Russo-Japanese War reveals how he navigated the emerging global order through a Latin American lens—one shaped by the historical asymmetries of empire and the aspiration for cultural sovereignty. Rather than fully embracing the promises of capitalist modernity, Darío positions Japan's imperial rise as a counter-image to Western domination, while remaining skeptical of the civilizing rhetoric underpinning both Eastern and Western empires.

The *Modernistas* and the Russo-Japanese War

As part of the professionalization process of writers at the turn of the century, many *modernistas* published regularly in newspapers and magazines not only on Japan's civil and military restructuring, but also on its military victories in East Asia.[21] Especially the intense coverage of the Russo-Japanese War (1904–5) came to play a key role in the articulation of imaginaries of modernity. Several publications across Latin America covered the conflict, adding visual materials that were acquired from European sources. On August 14, 1904, for example, some months after the start of the conflict, the Peruvian magazine *Actualidades* (1903–18) published an article called "*Una coincidencia*" (A coincidence). The coincidence of which the article speaks was the simultaneous occurrence of the birth of the Tsarevich "Alexis" (Alekséi Nikoláyevich Románov), the first male son of the Tzar Nicholas II and last Tsarevich of Russia, and the sinking by Japanese forces of the Russian battle squadron ship bearing the same name in Port Arthur. The magazine editorial wrote about this dramatic occurrence: "El 'Czarevithch', buque de la escuadra rusa, se hallaba despedazado por las bombas japonesas, i huía arrastrándose, penosamente, sobre las aguas, como un león herido, a agonizar i morir al amparo de un puerto" ("The 'Tsarevich' flagship of the

[21] The acquisition of territories through military interventions was a crucial tactic in Japan's quest for global dominance, especially following the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–95), which was a manifestation of the intensifying competition for expansion between China and Japan (Xu Lu 2019). The Meiji Restoration aimed to safeguard Japan's security and independence amidst the growing influence of Western powers and Russian imperialism (Paine 2017, 8).

Russian squadron, lay shattered by Japanese bombs and fled, crawling painfully on the water like a wounded lion, to agonize and die under the protection of a port") (*Actualidades* Aug. 14, 1904, 5). The article's tone was typical for the coverage of the conflict, which often assumed a Russian perspective while reporting on the imminent Japanese successes.

News stories about the war often shared editorial space with other types of texts written by Latin American modernistas writers. In the edition of *Actualidades* of May 5, 1906, Rubén Darío published a review of Enrique Gómez Carrillo's *De Marsella a Tokio: Sensaciones de Egipto, la India, la China y el Japon* (From Marseilles to Tokyo: Sensations from Egypt, India, China, and Japan). The modernistas took note of Japan's extensive modernization, early efforts to establish independent relations in Latin America, and victories throughout East Asia. Modernization, encompassing technological, social, cultural, and institutional advancement, was a central concern for the modernistas. According to Browitt and Mackenbach (2010, 2), writers of this movement, such as José Martí, Enrique Gómez Carrillo, Amado Nervo, and Rubén Darío, captured moments of intense transformation from French modernity as well from the United States in its imperial rise.

The extensive coverage of the Russo-Japanese War's testifies to the significant impact of this war on the ways in which Latin American portrayed Japan as an imperial force. This representation underscores the influence of Japanese imperial aspirations on cultural and intellectual productions in the region. During the past three decades, scholars have approached the cultural exchanges between modernistas and Japan and Asia in general by discussing the relevance of orientalism in a Latin American context. Julia Alexis Kushigian was one of the first to analyze the presence of Asia as an elaboration of an open discourse toward Oriental values in his *Orientalism in the Hispanic Literary Tradition: In Dialogue with Borges, Paz, and Sarduy* (1991). Kushigian may play a vital role in bringing the concept of Orientalism to the Latin American transpacific corpus, but it has been evaluated by Iván A. Shulman (2002, 231) who rejected Orientalism as a "escapist sign." Shulman argues that Latin American authors, in developing their orientalisms, avoided power discourses that incorporated or controlled Oriental spaces; instead, they sought to affirm their identity through discourses against power (238).

In the context of the neocolonial order, wherein Latin America sought external influence for its modernization efforts, Darío carefully examined Japan's recent history and its impressive progress in economic, political,

social, and military development. Unlike contemporaries like Gómez Carrillo, Tablada, or Ambrosi, Darío had reservations about Japan's modernization approach as a potential model for Latin America. He was influenced by the European context and concerns about Japan's rise as a dominant force in Asia. Exploring these contexts allows us to reconsider the critical approach to Darío's view of Japan, recognizing it as a complex political stance regarding the modernization path that, in his opinion, Latin America should pursue. Darío's perception of Japan was not merely an "empty signifier," a mysterious and exotic space waiting to be explored. Instead, the views he presented of the Asian empire reveal a political stance shaping his interpretation of the war and the integration of Latin America into an increasingly capitalist and modernizing order. The Russo-Japanese War served as a pivotal moment in Darío's understanding of Japan's role in the global geopolitical landscape. To substantiate this claim, I will analyze three of his chronicles, and one republication: "Gibraltar" (1904), "Articles de París" ("Articles of Paris"),[22] and "Viejo y nuevo Japón" ("Old and New Japan," 1904), which was later republished with significant changes under the title "Bajo las luces del sol naciente" ("Under the Lights of the Upcoming Sun," 1922).

Darío's Critical Reception of Japan

The earliest recorded reference in Darío's work to the Russo-Japanese War appears in the chronicle "Gibraltar," published in the Argentine newspaper *La Nación* on April 18, 1904, a few months after start of the conflict. The chronicle recounts Darío's journey to Gibraltar, which he undertook in early 1904. His discomfort with the colonial order in this British overseas territory is evident from his first impressions that stress how every aspect of daily life is defined by English rule. In the second segment of the chronicle, Darío recounts a song performed by a Malagueñan singer named Paquito. According to Darío, the song's poignant melody evokes Spain's decline as an empire, with the annexation of Gibraltar serving as a shameful reminder of the country's regrets and betrayals. Darío highlights that while English control dominates everything in Gibraltar, the Spanish language remains in use, insinuating its role as a focus of resistance. In his depiction of the territory, he touches upon two key facets: colonialism, particularly with regard to the imposition of British culture and the extensive militarization of

[22] This series of articles Darío published in *La Nación* covering a wide range of topics related to his experiences and impressions in Paris.

the region. The constant description of heavy weaponry in the low batteries and up the mountain maintains a tone where the promise of war appears to be omnipresent. This description invites reflection on how Latin America imagined possible paths toward modernization under the shadow of colonial and imperial domination. In Darío's depiction, Gibraltar is not merely a geographic reference, but a symbolic space—one that reflects the threat of foreign military intervention as a condition tied to modernization. Darío questions whether progress necessarily comes at the cost of sovereignty, suggesting a critical stance toward imperial models of development.

In the sixth part, Darío reproduces a dialogue he had with a character called Mr. Evans,[23] the colonial secretary. In the fictional dialogue, Mr. Fox—a wealthy British friend of Darío who travels for leisure—exchanges opinions with his fellow countryman. Their conversation also touches upon the implications of the war, which is not explicitly named but can be inferred—through later references—to be the Russo-Japanese War. Darío states that the colonial authorities believe the population of Gibraltar to be sympathetic towards Japan due to the longstanding rivalry between England and "the Bear." Although England will not become involved in the conflict, he clarifies that the country is prepared militarily for any possible scenario. It seems that the reference to the war in this chronicle is not an accessory. Darío insists constantly that he is writing from a colonial space surrounded by military forces. Therefore, the war is being read from the struggle between the expansion of militarism and colonialism, the central issue addressed by the text. Darío finishes the conversation with Mr. Fox looking at the Spanish coast, where he sees the Spanish cities that he deems as "lifeless" as Gibraltar, deprived of all animation because of the threat of military expansion in the age of coloniality. As the band in the background practices national anthems of several countries, signaling the rise of nationalism, Mr. Fox expresses his fear for the future: "Las sombras nocturnas se adelantan" ("The nocturne shadows come forward"), referring to the proximity of future conflicts.

Six months later, on Wednesday, November 2, 1904, Darío published a text of his special series for *La Nación*, "Articles en París" ("Articles in Paris"). The text is divided into three sections, each titled and with no relation between them. In the second section, entitled "Japoneses en París" ("Japanese in Paris"), Darío examines the process of Japan's modernization. The method he adopts in so doing involves on the one hand the romanticizing of a mythical past, often drawing from European or Japanese literary sources,

[23] Reference to Frederick Evans, the Colonial Secretary of Gibraltar (1901–14).

while simultaneously criticizing Japan's modernization process. He believes that the country's adoption of Western capitalist, militarist, and expansionist strategies is a symptom of spiritual corruption. On the other hand, the article also chronicles the expansion of the Japanese community in Paris, highlighting their increasing numbers and cultural integration. It observes that the Japanese students have begun to adopt a more Western fashion sense. Darío notes:

> But, since some time, they have acquired in their gestures and looks a convincing importance. It seems that they eagerly want to make us Westerners see that *Ça y est*. [That is it]. And that each of us individually have a little Manchuria. (Darío, November 2, 1904, 3)

According to Darío, Japan's successes in the war against Russia had a noteworthy influence on the perception of the Japanese community in Paris, especially in the Latin Quarter. This triumph enabled them to position themselves as members of a burgeoning power amidst racial divisions. Despite the war still going on, the Japanese already envisioned themselves as victorious. Darío perceived the emergence of a new global colonial power that could reorganize the geopolitical divisions previously established by European control. With his reference to Manchuria, a territory recently annexed by Japan, he marks the new role the Japanese adopted as a colonial administration of territories acquired by force from the European nations. In contrast to "Gibraltar," it seems that Darío already has a position on the war and recognizes the potential threat that Japan's expansionist policies could pose to the region.

At the end of the chronic, Darío returns to the Japanese students in the Latin Quarter. For him, the glorious times of "Outamaro" (the Japanese pinter, Utamaro) are over: "tiempos en que todavía no se andaba en automóvil, ni se soñaba en el peligro amarillo" ("times when people did not yet drive in cars, nor did the dream of the yellow peril") (3). As he wrapped up his account, he observed a growing fascination with Japan among Europeans. Specifically, he noted that a French newspaper was currently recruiting Japanese scholars to delve into their country's intellectual landscape. Darío explains that this recruitment responded to a growing interest among European reader publics in understanding the ideas, perspectives, and knowledge produced in Japan, recognizing it as a nation capable of generating intellectual and technological innovations. After this, he closed his chronicle with this question: "¿A qué ir a despertar el nido de dragones?" ("Why go wake up the dragon nest?") (5). The statement confirms Darío's conviction about the widespread influence of Japanese triumphs. It

suggests that their success transcended boundaries and permeated various realms and domains, indicating the far-reaching impact of their accomplishments.

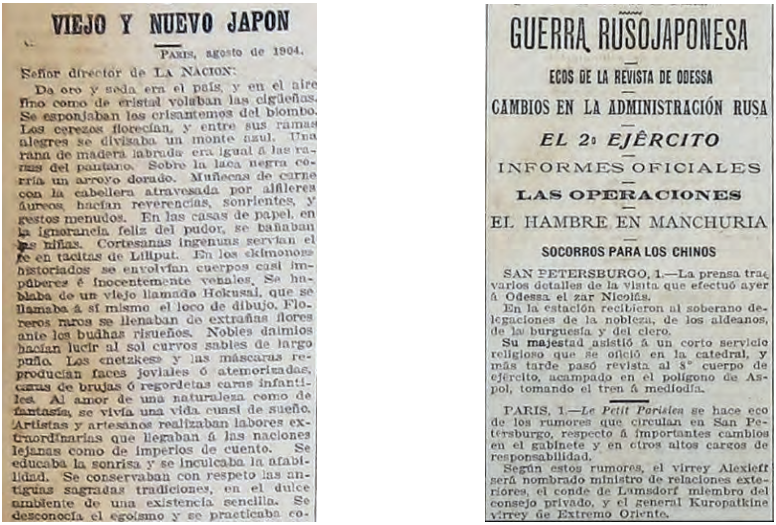
The Old and the New Japan

"Old and New Japan" is composed of three distinct parts. The initial segment glorifies the traditional Japanese culture where—according to Darío and his influences[24]—art, nature, and social norms were deeply intertwined in a utopian space. The second section delves into the Western world's exploration of Japan, accompanied by tales of its ethical principles. The third and final part is markedly different from the first two, offering a contemporary account of the rise of imperialism and militarism in Japan, and the country's ongoing Westernization.

Darío's chronic "Viejo y Nuevo Japón" ("Old and New Japan") was featured in *La Nación* on December 2, 1904. The chronicle garnered significant attention for its in-depth coverage of Japan's expansionist policies, which Darío had previously explored in his writing. Its relevance was heightened by the ongoing war in Japan, as evidenced by the extensive coverage it received in the Argentinian press. In the same section as Darío's article, there was another section titled "Telegrams" (as shown in Figure 1) that offered a comprehensive update on the Russo-Japanese War. The information was provided by the Russian authorities to the newspaper, and the outlook is from their perspective, possibly concealing or underestimating the true situation on the frontline concerning the astonishing victories of the Japanese Imperial Army over the Russians. At that time, the Japanese controlled all the Russian territories disputed in the Far East, and the war was nearing its end. The dispatch transmitted to Europe seems to convey a rather positive outlook of the Russian prospects in the conflict. The message in *La Nación* is divided into three sections, each with its own theme. The first section discusses changes in the Russian Army Administration, including the appointment of General "Alexieff" (Mikhail Vasilyevich Alekseyev) as Minister of Foreign Affairs and General "Kuropatkine" (Aleksey Kuropatkin) as the Russian Imperial Minister of War for the Far East. The second section covers official reports and operations, such as the situation in "Mueden" (Mukden) and the impact of the Port Arthur attack on the Russian

[24] Although the issue of influences is a recurring theme in studies on Darío's engagement with Japan, in this chronicle the Nicaraguan writer explicitly names one author: the British orientalist and writer Lafcadio Hearn, who played a key role in promoting Japanese culture in the West.

army. Finally, the third section contains a special report on the effects of the war on food supplies in Manchuria.



VIEJO Y NUEVO JAPON

PARIS, agosto de 1904.

Señor director de LA NACION:

Da oro y seda era el país, y en el aire fino como de cristal volaban las cigüeñas. Se esponjaban los crisantemos del biombo. Las cerezas florecían, y entre sus ramas alegres se divisaba un monte azul. Una rana de madera labrada era igual á las ramas del pantano. Sobre la laca negra corría un arroyo dorado. Muñecas de carne con la cabellera atravesada por alfileres áureos, hacían reverencias, sonrientes, y gestos menudos. En las casas de papel, en la ignorancia feliz del pudor, se bañaban las niñas. Cortesanas ingenuas servían el té en tacitas de Liliput. En los kimonos historiados se envolvían cuerpos casi impúberes é inocentemente venales. Se hablaba de un viejo llamado Hokusai, que se llamaba á sí mismo el loco de dibujo. Floreros raros se llenaban de extrañas flores ante los budhas risueños. Nobles daimios hacían lucir al sol curvos sables de largo puño. Los «netzkes» y las máscaras reproducían faces joviales ó atemorizadas, caras de brujas ó regordetas caras infantiles. Al amor de una naturaleza como de fantasía, se vivía una vida cual de sueño. Artistas y artesanos realizaban labores extraordinarias que llegaban á las naciones lejanas como de imperios de cuento. Se educaba la sonrisa y se inculcaba la afabilidad. Se conservaban con respeto las antiguas sagradas tradiciones, en el dulce ambiente de una existencia sencilla. Se desconocía el egoismo y se practicaba co-

GUERRA RUSOJAPONESA

ECOS DE LA REVISTA DE ODESSA

CAMBIOS EN LA ADMINISTRACIÓN RUSA

EL 2º EJÉRCITO

INFORMES OFICIALES

LAS OPERACIONES

EL HAMBRE EN MANCHURIA

SOCORROS PARA LOS CHINOS

SAN PETERSBURGO, 1.—La prensa trae varios detalles de la visita que efectuó ayer á Odessa el zar Nicolás.

En la estación recibieron al soberano delegaciones de la nobleza, de los aldeanos, de la burguesía y del clero.

Su majestad asistió á un corto servicio religioso que se ofició en la catedral, y más tarde pasó revista al 4º cuerpo de ejército, acampado en el polígono de Aspol, tomando el tren á mediodía.

PARIS, 1.—*Le Petit Parisien* se hace eco de los rumores que circulan en San Petersburgo, respecto á importantes cambios en el gabinete y en otros altos cargos de responsabilidad.

Según estos rumores, el virrey Alexieff será nombrado ministro de relaciones exteriores, el conde de Lamsdorf miembro del consejo privado, y el general Kuropatkine virrey de Extremo Oriente.

Figure 1: Telegram reporting on the situation of Russian Troops in Manchuria (right). Displayed on the same page on which Darío's chronicle was published for the first time (left). La Nación, Sunday, December 2, 1904, 5. Courtesy: Instituto de Investigación en Arte y Cultura Dr. Norberto Griffa (IIAC). Universidad Tres de Febrero, Argentina.

Fifteen days after the publication of the chronicle, on December 19, 1904, in the Costa Rican illustrated magazine *Pandemónium*, annexed to the newspaper *El Noticiero*, Darío republished his "Viejo y Nuevo Japón." The first article published in the issue where Darío's text appeared, which serves as the cover piece, was dedicated to Mrs. Stoessel (Figure 2), the wife of the Russian General Anatoly Stoessel, who was injured during a Japanese attack on Port Arthur. The international press covered the couple extensively, turning her injuries into a vehicle for narrating the situation on the front and the violent crisis of the war.[25] It is worth noting that once more Darío's chronicle, as had been the case in *La Nación*, shares a textual space with descriptions of the Japanese advance on the Russian border in the Far East.

[25] See for instance "The returning heroine and defender of Port Arthur: Madame Stoessel and General Stoessel leaving S.S. 'Australia' at Port Said," *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. 1905-03-11. https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/c6131318-0ea5-cd99-e040-e00a1806250f.

Such a connection testifies on the one hand to the impact of the global transmission of information about the conflict and the specific political and historical environment in which Darío found himself on his changing views of Japan. On the other hand, it reveals how readers at the time were reading Darío's comments about Japan through the scope of the war. As previously noted, although the war did not occupy a central place in the imagination of the twentieth century, it was a conflict that had a significant impact on the neocolonial order and was vastly covered by the press. This conflict transformed how Darío understood and portrayed Japan, acknowledging that it is not the exotic paradise he imagined it was. Darío's perception of the war led him to see modern-day Japan as an expansionist empire, rather than the idealized version often portrayed in European orientalist literature.[26] This shift in percep-tion also influenced his view on the political role of literature, as he came to understand that literary depictions of Japan did not necessarily reflect the true nature of the country but rather served as a societal model and a path towards (un)modernization for Latin America.

Año II. San José, C. R., 19 de diciembre de 1904. Núm. 79

Pandemónium

Revista Ilustrada anexa á "El Noticiero"

Director: LEONIDAS BRICEÑO

SUMARIO:

LA SEÑORA DE STOESSEL

No todo son horrores en la guerra del Extremo Oriente. En aquellos campos de mortandad y exterminio, escarnio del progreso alcanzado por las ideas y los sentimientos de humanidad, hay también focos esplendorosos de las, ejemplos de abnegados sacrificios, de valor moral, dignos de admiración.

Uno de éstos es sin disputa la señora de Stoessel, con cuyo retrato se honra PANDEMÓNIUM.

Su figura es limpia, pura, sublime. Se glorifica, inmaculada.

Ella no toma parte en el fragor de la lucha. No hiere ni hace mal al adversario. Su misión y sus ocupaciones son las de asistir y curar á los heridos de la heróica guarnición de Puerto Arturo.

Las glorias militares son al fin glorias: el hombre arrostra la muerte, expone su vida por lo que cree un ideal. Representa el triunfo de una tendencia alta y noble, si se quiere, sobre el instinto natural de la propia conservación. Pero esa gloria se conquista matando, exterminando otras vidas, llevando el luto y el llanto y el desamparo, y muchas veces la miseria, á infinitos hogares.

La gloria de la Señora de Stoessel, tanto más digna de admiración, cuanto que se trata de una débil mujer, no avienda á los peligros á que á veces se exponen los hombres, dotada de nervios más delicados y de una naturaleza más sensible, en la obscuridez aquellas sombras. Sus manos no hacen derramar sangre, la restañan. Ella es ajena á la matanza, y lucha por arrebatar sus víctimas á la implacable muerte, corriendo igual ó casi igual peligro que los combatientes.

Por tanto, en los títulos que la hacen acreedora á la admiración universal, no

Figure 2: Edition of the illustrated Costa Rican magazine Pandemónium, attached to the newspaper El Noticiero, December 19, 1904.

[26] Darío, in his chronicle, refers constantly to the British journalist and orientalist writer Lafcadio Hearn. However, Darío did not mention any specific text.

In the opening segment, Darío interweaves literature, nature, and social hierarchy. This exemplifies the "exotic" perspective of Japan that many critics have observed, such as Morán (2009), Tinajero (2004), or González (2022). Darío outlines a picturesque nation yet emphasizes the paramount role of art in shaping societal values, writing how "poesía se mezclaba á la vida cotidiana" ("Poetry mixed with everyday life") (5). Nevertheless, instead of an enigmatic place or an escapist attitude, the chronic seems to establish a political position regarding the place of literature in society. Darío developed an ethos about the place of literature and art in general within society: a productor of moral orders. Darío imagined Japan as a pure state of nature where sensibility can be exploited and reproduced through dimensions ideas of justice, honor, and religion. Towards the end of the section, Darío ironically characterizes Japan as a "barbaric" state, prior to the influence of the West. At the same time, however, he contends that by introducing its values and technologies, the West corrupted Japan's soul. The supposed "civilization" inherently tied to Europe's colonial project and its model status for many non-European elites had caused Japan to spiral into violence through the adoption of the imperialist, military, and expansionist spirit (also known as coloniality) developed in Europe. This play on the concepts of civilization versus barbarism is a political analysis of the contemporary events taking place in the Far East, particularly the Russo-Japanese War. The second segment of the text incorporates two moralist stories that apparently took place in feudal Japan, describing a natural path where the Japanese lived in harmony based on the art and the careful adoration of their gods. It is a celebration of the "Old Japan," with a government that made the subjects happy before the arrival of foreign tendencies.

The last section, Darío starts with violence, writing how "á cañonazos se despertó á la vida y á la civilización de Occidente el Japón Viejo, y se convirtió en el Japón nuevo" ("with cannon fire, Old Japan woke up to life and Western Civilization, and became the New Japan") (5). The event that Darío refers to here is Commodore Matthew C. Perry's attack on Edo Bay on July 8, 1853. The attack was significant in ending Japan's 220-year-old policy of national seclusion. As a result of the attack, the Japanese authorities were forced to sign the Convention of Kanagawa under threat of force the following year. This reference highlights Darío's knowledge of Japanese political history, instead of solely literary references. The last part of the section is full of current references regarding the domestic and international policies of Japan, such as the presence of socialist leader Katayama Sen during the International Socialist Congress held in Amsterdam in August

1904.[27] Moving on to the same section, the author referenced a diplomat named Hayashi to further explore the theme of civilization versus barbarism. According to Hayashi's statement, Japan's military strength, consisting of powerful cannons and ships, allowed them to wage war in Chinese waters and be recognized as a civilized society. In contrast, during the sixteenth century, when Japan boasted artists and writers, and published Aesop's fables, they were still perceived as "savages." The contradiction pointed by Hayashi reinforces Darío´s opposition to western capitalist modernization.

> They were forced to learn the science of war in Western institutions, and they were demonstrated that living a happy life, without bloodshed, soldiers, militarism, or Krupp cannons was the height of savagery. They were taught Western characters so they could read the French nationalistic newspapers, the speeches of M. Jaures, and the works of Kipling. Then, they learned about the appeal of nationalism, the usefulness of socialism, the superiority of imperialism. … They became militarized, armed themselves, and were excellent disciples of the butchers of the Christian countries. *They destroyed all possible poetry* … They launched themselves into collective murder with a superhuman appetite (5. My emphasis).

Darío's depiction of Japan is far from being a semiotically empty and mysterious space. Rather, he acknowledges that Japan has adeptly adopted and refined the tactics, strategies, and dispositions of colonialism. While Darío notes that the country's aggressive and hostile international policies are modeled after European examples, he also recognizes that the militarism and colonialism that emerged during the early twentieth-century capitalist era are not unique to Europeans. In the text, he mentions Japanese generals who directed the war, such as Oku (Count Oku Yasukata), Kuroki (General Kuroki Tamemoto), and Togo (Admiral of Fleet, Tōgō Heihachirō). This suggests that Darío's references to Japan were not limited to literary sources, but also reflect a broader awareness of the unfolding war, the country's modernization, and its rising geopolitical influence.

When comparing the content of *La Nación'*s Telegrams section to the rest of the page, it becomes clear that there is news of reconfiguration in the Russian military. The article suggests that the country is "resisting" Japanese hostilities and maintains an optimistic tone regarding Russia's performance in the war. However, Darío's chronic delves deeper into the impact of Japan's

[27] Darío refers to one of the well-known incidents in the Japanese socialist movement known in the West: the encounter and symbolic shaking of hands between the Japanese socialist Katayama Sen (refer directly in the text) and Russian George Plekhanov during the Amsterdam Congress of the Second International in August 1904. This encounter was intensively covered by the time due to simultaneous conflicts in Manchuria between Japan and Russia (Crump 2010, 46).

actions in Manchuria and takes a more pessimistic view of the war, underscoring how the triumph of values such as militarism, modernization, and imperialism ultimately led to the Japanese victory over Russia.

The concept of "Old Japan" versus "New Japan" emerges from Darío's disillusionment upon discovering that the modern-day Japan he encountered did not align with the idealized version depicted in Orientalist literature. Darío's response to Japan stems from his conservative belief that literature should hold significant political influence and that artists should have a hand in shaping both the material and moral aspects of society. His understanding of Japan, as well as the world at large, was heavily influenced by literature. However, the rise of capitalism disrupted the traditional order that Darío idealized, pushing artists away from the "Lettered City" (Rama 1996, 51) and depriving poets of their previous privileges. Darío longed to regain the status he once held. At the end, after mentioning the accumulation of corpses in Manchuria and the staining of China's seas with blood, he returned to an ironic approach to the dichotomy between barbarism and civilization, asserting ironically that civilization had triumphed.

This evolving perspective reaches a new stage in Darío's final chronicle on the subject, "Bajo las luces del sol naciente" ("Under the Lights of the Rising Sun"), published in the volume *Cuentos y crónicas* (*Stories and Chronicles*, Madrid, 1922). The piece is a revised version of his earlier text "Viejo y nuevo Japón" from 1904. After initially portraying "Old Japan" as an idyllic and natural paradise corrupted by Western influence, Darío later added two new lines and several examples, further nuancing his representation of Japan in light of a new context of inter-imperial confrontations over the expansion of spheres of influence in the Pacific. These lines were inserted between the paragraph in which he discusses the dire situation in Manchuria and the subsequent sentences about the triumph of civilization. He writes that "Se mira a los Estados Unidos con aire de desafío, con amor a la guerra" ("The United States is viewed with an air of defiance, with love for war") (93). The insertion of the United States in the picture is extremely significant, due to the announcement of the upcoming conflict that will take place some decades later. However, this is not a revelation made just by one intellectual. Several writers, many of them with direct contact with Darío, wrote about an inevitable conflict between the two powers in the Pacific. In the early twentieth century, writers like José María Vargas Vila, in *Némesis* (1923), and José Cascales Muñoz, in *Los Estados Unidos y el Japón* (1908), warned of rising tensions between Japan and the United States. Darío was thus not an isolated case, but part of a wider

intellectual current that approached geopolitical change with both fascination and concern—an intellectual history still to be fully charted.

Conclusion

As I previously highlighted, Darío reverts in his chronicles the dichotomy of civilization and barbarism in the case of the Russo-Japanese War. Where the concept of "civilization" embodies the destructive impact of capitalist modernization, "barbarism" comes to represent the utopian, artistic world envisioned by the modernistas. In the case of Darío, Japan served as a means to understand his perspective on the role of literature and literary representation in the world. As previously noted, Darío did not use literature as the primary material to develop his own ideas about Japan. Instead, he employed literary representation as a vehicle for critiquing the rise of nationalism, imperialism, and militarization. Although critical tradition has analyzed in detail how certain writers from the modernismo movement used Japan as a means of escaping reality or creating an enigmatic paradise (Schulman 2002, 220), these authors were also aware of the expansionist policies of the new ascendant empire.

Despite its historical significance, the Russo-Japanese War of the early 1900s is often overshadowed by the larger and more well-known world wars that came after (Kowner 2007). Nonetheless, this conflict marked a pivotal moment in the global landscape, especially in subjects that lived under colonial rules, as it reshaped the way nations approached expansion and modernization. Additionally, it demonstrated that even the most powerful European nations could be challenged and overcome using their own tactics and weaponry by a non-European enemy.

In this chapter, I examined four chronicles when Darío reads the war. Although he does not explicitly mention it, the dates and information circulating at the time reveal that the war caused a crisis in his representation of Japan and his understanding of the role of literature in the material world. It presents a growing fear, a disappointment, and a challenge to his role in society. During the era of imperialism, marked by significant technological progress and the looming threat of war, the role of the poet was diminished. Rubén Darío, in his work, expressed a sense of longing for the old feudal system, while also rejecting the all-encompassing power of capitalism that threatened to push society to the brink of war. He astutely identified the contradictions of this new era, characterized by rapid communication, large-

scale migrations, and a technology that would eventually lead to massive destruction.

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World-Making in Exile: Feminist Diaspora Activism from Poland and Turkey and the Politics of Possibility

Ecem Nazlı Üçok

> "What if, *compañera* and sister, we learn not only to scream out of pain, but to find the way, place, and time to scream a new world into being? Just think, sister and *compañera*, things are so bad that in order to stay alive we have to create another world."
>
> —Coordinators of the Zapatista Women for the Second International Gathering of Women Who Struggle

This powerful call from the Zapatista Women captures the core of feminist diaspora activism from Poland and Turkey explored in this chapter. Feminist activists from Poland and Turkey, who have left their home countries due to escalating anti-gender policies and political repression, are actively involved in shaping alternative spaces and communities in self-exile. These activists are not merely resisting existing systems; they are actively engaged in worldmaking, envisioning new political, social, and cultural possibilities (Escobar 2020).

To analyze these practices, in this study I draw on two interconnected concepts: prefigurative politics and pluriversal political praxis. Prefigurative politics in this study refers to the ways activists embody the social and political values they wish to see in the future through present-day organizing (Monticelli 2022). Pluriversal political practice, grounded in the work of Arturo Escobar (2020), expands this by imagining a world where many worlds can coexist—a pluralist, horizontal vision of justice and care. Together, these frameworks allow us to understand how feminist migrant activists enact political alternatives that resist patriarchy and nationalism, while simultaneously constructing inclusive, collective futures. I conceptualize this activism as a politics of possibility—a term that describes how displacement becomes not only a site of loss but also a ground for imagining new ways of being and relating (Escobar 2020). These feminist migrant activists challenge both the exclusionary narratives of their home

countries and the marginalization they face in host societies through embodying pluriversal political praxis. Their activism is not only oppositional but generative: it creates new solidarities, redefines belonging, and expands the boundaries of citizenship and nation-state.

This chapter adheres to feminist methodologies and epistemologies (Haraway 1988; Smith 1990; Ahmed 2015) and begins by acknowledging my positionality in the research. My comparative focus on Poland and Turkey reflects a personal and political journey shaping my academic perspective. As a migrant woman from Turkey, navigating an identity of ambiguous whiteness between Europe and the Middle East, I grapple with belonging and identity, which affect my research. As a feminist migrant academic, I see myself as a bridge-builder fostering accountable, horizontal, pluriversal political processes envisioning worlds where diverse movements coexist. This chapter intertwines my personal and political experiences, shaped by socio-political shifts happening in recent years. My decision to leave Turkey once again in 2021 for academic purposes coincided with the country's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention—a significant setback for gender rights (Altan-Olcay and Oder 2021). Around the same time, the Polish government also moved to denounce the Convention, invoking religious values and the rhetoric of "gender ideology" (Warnaffe 2021). These parallel developments highlighted the interconnected struggles of feminist activists in both countries, reflecting a broader pattern of anti-gender policies advanced by conservative governments.

I conducted forty life-history interviews with feminist migrant activists from Turkey and Poland who migrated to different European cities because of political repression. Additionally, I organized three focus groups, bringing together feminist migrant activists from both countries and used visual stimuli to encourage participatory dialogue. This chapter focuses on narratives from a subset of one of these focus groups, exploring how activists articulate alternative practices of protest and imaginaries of feminist futures through their biographical and political stories. Situating these narratives within pluriversal praxis and prefigurative politics frameworks, this chapter highlights the horizontal resistant political practices these activists shape in their new contexts.

The chapter proceeds as follows: First, I situate the relevance of this research within a broader global context of rising of anti-gender movements. I then offer a brief overview of the socio-political shifts on anti-gender politics in Turkey and Poland, identifying the specific pressures leading to migration of feminist activists. Next, I introduce the theoretical framework of

prefigurative pluriversal politics and analyze how activists embody this praxis in their own biographical narratives. Drawing on focus group narratives, I illustrate how their mobilizing reshapes feminist politics in exile. I conclude by reflecting on how diaspora activism offers a radical vision of future feminist worlds rooted in care, solidarity, and collective agency.

Contextualizing Transnational Anti-Gender Politics

We are navigating a global conjuncture marked by interconnected crises—economic, socio-environmental, health, (geo)political, and institutional—spanning the globe. These crises, exemplified by the climate emergency, COVID-19 pandemic, the rise of neo-fascist and far-right movements, deepening socio-economic inequalities, and the eroding social cohesion, represent a "civilizational crisis" (Escobar 2021). Within this global crisis, gender and sexuality have become one of the central political battlegrounds. Right-wing populist actors increasingly target feminist, LGBTIQ+, and reproductive rights movements as symbols of moral decay and cultural threat. In what has been termed the "anti-gender movements," conservative forces frame struggles for gender equality as attacks on the traditional family, national sovereignty, and religious values. While the rhetoric varies across countries, the political function remains consistent: to consolidate power by mobilizing fear, moral panic, and nostalgia for an idealized past (Graff et al. 2019).

By the late twentieth century, a "curious global alliance" (Buss and Herman 2003) began coalescing around the concept of the "natural family." Previously fragmented conservative religious groups were consolidating into an "anti-gender" coalition, strategically utilizing UN policy frameworks and mechanisms to promote pro-family agendas in opposition to LGBTIQ+ and reproductive rights. Since then, these right-wing factions have continued their collaboration through what Clifford Bob (2012, 36) terms the "Baptist–Burqa network"—an improbable yet tactical global alliance of conservative Christian and Islamic actors united in resisting progressive norms related to gender and sexuality (Buss and Herman 2003; Butler 2004). In recent years, the rise of anti-gender discourse has also been linked to the emergence of new illiberal, populist right-wing movements, particularly following the 2008 global financial crisis. Rooted in "anxieties produced by neoliberal reforms" (Graff et al. 2019, 541), anti-gender ideology portrays gender equality, sexual rights, and gender diversity as destabilizing forces, advocating a return to

heteropatriarchal norms as a "common sense" remedy for restoring social and economic order.

Poland and Turkey stand out as key cases where anti-gender politics have gained significant ground. Though embedded in different religious and historical traditions—Catholic and secular-Islamic respectively—both countries reflect a convergence in their deployment of gender as a tool of political strategy. In both contexts, conservative populist governments have combined cultural conservatism, nationalism, and anti-Western sentiment to advance policies that undermine feminist and LGBTIQ+ movements. The 2023 general election outcome in Turkey and Poland provides a backdrop for this discussion. While Turkey's Justice and Development (AKP) government secured another term, Poland's Law and Justice (PiS) Party lost power. Despite the change in government, feminist migrant activists from Poland emphasize that the struggle for reproductive rights and gender equality persists. They argue that a shift in political leadership does not signify a transformation in the deeply entrenched influence of Catholic doctrine within Polish society. Consequently, the challenges facing feminist activists remain largely unchanged—particularly as abortion continues to be effectively illegal in Poland. Conservative regimes in both countries use anti-gender policies to consolidate power, suppress dissent, and enforce traditional views on family, nation, and identity. In Poland, the Law and Justice Party has restricted abortion, limited contraception, and curtailed sex education under the guise of protecting "family values" aligned with Catholic teachings (Wierzcholska 2018).

Similarly, Turkey's Justice and Development Party has advanced an Islamic traditionalist vision of womanhood, withdrawn from the Istanbul Convention, and stigmatized feminist and LGBTIQ activism as threats to societal morality. These policies reflect broader anti-gender movements that vilify feminism, reproductive rights, and LGBTIQ advocacy as "Western ideologies," portraying activists as enemies of national traditions and values (Wierzcholska 2018). Framing these rights as foreign impositions, the PiS government in Poland has positioned itself as a defender of Polish identity against what it calls "gender ideology." Symbols such as *Matka Polka* (Mother Poland) are invoked to celebrate women's reproductive roles, while moral panic around "Western decadence" fuels culture wars. Despite these pressures, the feminist movement started to mobilize day by day. The Black Protests (*Czarny Protest*) began in 2016 as a reaction to proposed legislation to impose a near-total abortion ban in Poland, sparking mass mobilizations. Women dressed in black to mourn the loss of rights took to the streets,

demanding reproductive freedom and opposing far-right ideologies under the Law and Justice Party (PiS). In 2020, the Polish Constitutional Tribunal banned nearly all abortions, including cases of severe fetal abnormalities, sparking the largest protests in Poland since communism's fall. Known as the Women's Strike (*Strajk Kobiet*), the movement mobilized tens of thousands with the slogan "This is war," epitomizing defiance against patriarchal policies. These protests and their diaspora offshoots have strengthened transnational feminist connections, communities, and organizations, creating a framework for continued mobilization against far right and anti-gender politics (Wierzcholska 2018).

In Turkey, a similar shift has taken place under the long-standing rule of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). Initially promoting gender equality in alignment with EU accession goals, the AKP gradually turned toward an Islamic conservative agenda. Around 2011, the government began replacing the language of "gender equality" with that of "gender justice," (Özkazanç 2020), which emphasizes divinely ordained gender roles and women's duty as mothers. Feminism and LGBTQ+ activism are increasingly framed as Western imports that threaten Turkish family values and Islamic morality. This culminated in Turkey's 2021 withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention—a landmark treaty on preventing violence against women—despite having been its first signatory in 2012. Notably, opposition to the Convention gained momentum after pro-government media actors observed campaigns against it in Central and Eastern Europe, reflecting the paradoxical mimicry at the heart of Turkish anti-gender discourse (Eslen-Ziya 2022).

Women's rights organizations faced heightened hostility after Turkey's 2021 withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention. The withdrawal sent shockwaves through feminist networks, igniting renewed protests across Turkey. The Istanbul Feminist Night March, held annually since 2003, is one of the most significant feminist protests in Turkey. Despite its distinction as the most participatory feminist protest in the country, it has faced increasing restrictions (Büyükgöze 2023). Despite bans, women gather defiantly, facing police violence and legal action. On November 25, 2024, demonstrators protested on Istiklal Street for the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women despite restrictions. Police detained dozens, even as femicides were on the rise, with over four hundred women murdered in 2024. These attacks on feminist activists highlight Turkey's crackdown on women's rights, as feminists remain among the few groups consistently

resisting the authoritarian turn in the country.[28] In a further institutionalization of this ideology, the Turkish government officially declared 2025 as "The Family Year."[29] Promoted with the slogan "A strong nation is formed by a strong family," the campaign frames the family not only as the core unit of society but as the moral center of national strength. Nationalistic discourses in Poland and Turkey construct the ideal woman as pure, honorable, and self-sacrificing, while positioning feminist and queer activists as traitors to the nation. In both Turkey and Poland's nationalistic discourse, gender has become a proxy for broader anxieties about sovereignty, cultural identity, and moral decline.

For some of the feminist activists in these countries, this political climate has led to self-exiled migration. Branded as enemies of the state, activists were driven into exile due to the increasing existential pressures they faced in their home countries. As I will explore in the following sections, this displacement becomes not only a site of rupture but also a ground for reimagining feminist politics and futures. Through acts of solidarity, storytelling, and organizing, feminist migrant activists from Poland and Turkey engage in what Arturo Escobar (Monticelli 2022) calls "prefigurative pluriversal politics": a radical, future-oriented praxis rooted in care, mutual aid, and the construction of alternative feminist worlds.

Theoretical Dimensions: Enacting Prefigurative Pluriversal Politics in Feminist Migrant Activism

In this study, I follow Escobar's powerful call to decolonize our imaginaries by using the concept of prefigurative pluriversal politics. Drawing on the work of Arturo Escobar and Lara Monticelli (Escobar 2020; Monticelli 2022), I explore how feminist migrant activists from Poland and Turkey not only resist state oppression but also actively reimagine and enact alternative political and social structures. This theoretical lens is useful because it shifts the focus from seeing activism purely as resistance to understanding it as a form of worldmaking rooted in everyday practices of care, solidarity, and mutual support.

The feminist migrant activists from Poland and Turkey challenge patriarchal norms not only through protests or public declarations but through

[28] Selin Hacialioglu, "Protests to end violence against women in Türkiye marred by mass arrests," Türkiye Today, November 26, 2024. https://www.turkiyetoday.com/turkiye/protests-to-end-violence-against-women-in-turkiye-marred-by-mass-arrests-84620/.
[29] https://www.aileyili.gov.tr/

embodied practices that promote alternative values and belief systems. Their political engagement is not limited to a reactive stance against authoritarian regimes in their countries of origin. Rather, their struggles represent efforts to construct plural, inclusive, and post-patriarchal futures. Drawing from Maturana and Verden-Zöller (2008), we can understand the patriarchal culture they confront as one rooted in competition, domination, and hierarchy—justifying control over others and Nature. The activists' departure from this culture takes the form of self-exile, yet migration is not merely an escape. It also becomes a transformative site of engagement where new feminist imaginaries emerge. In host countries, feminist migrant activists continue to participate in transnational feminist organizing, advocating for reproductive rights, gender equality, and comprehensive sex education. Their activism aligns with Escobar's (2020) pluriversal framework, which offers a decolonial critique of Eurocentric modernity and foregrounds the coexistence of multiple political realities. This approach challenges the idea of a single, dominant worldview—typically Western, capitalist, and liberal—and instead emphasizes the legitimacy of diverse ways of knowing, being, and organizing society that emerge from different cultural, historical, and geopolitical contexts. Within this frame, feminist migrant activists reimagine belonging, citizenship, and solidarity, not as fixed categories but as relational practices that resist exclusionary and nationalist discourses. Their creation of transnational networks is not simply the extension of activism beyond borders, but the making of new "worlds" through solidarity, imagination, and resistance.

Feminist migrant activists from Poland and Turkey enact their political visions through grassroots solidarity and mutual aid, creating feminist communities that challenge dominant gender ideologies, confront nationalist and heteronormative narratives, and subvert the logic of capitalist care and productivity. They articulate a politics where care is not reserved for emergencies but is practiced daily—what Sitrin and Colectiva Sembrar (2020) describe as prefigurative care ethics. As one interviewee noted, "We take care of each other like a family—but not the kind of family that controls and silences you. It's a post-patriarchal migrant feminist family." These small, everyday acts of solidarity are not just about helping each other—they also represent early forms of imagining and enacting a world beyond patriarchy. They prefigure, or point toward, what a post-patriarchal society could look like (Cooper 2020). These acts of world-building are not abstract ideals. They are grounded in the lived experiences and narratives of the women I interviewed. For example, one interviewee described her feminist

activist group in Berlin as "the place where I started to breathe again," while another in Vienna stated, "This group made me hopeful that I can exist differently in this world." Such reflections illustrate how feminist migrant diasporas function as sites of healing, and collective redefinition, where women claim new subjectivities and build shared futures.

In this way, prefiguration enables communities to affirm their identities while also striving for more equitable, democratic, and cooperative forms of life (Fraser 2018). The goal is not merely to critique the present but to perform alternative futures in the now—to embody, however incompletely, the worlds they wish to inhabit. These visions resonate with decolonial and Indigenous feminisms, which similarly emphasize de-patriarchization as essential to liberation and the reconstruction of collective memory (Galindo 2015; Cabnal 2010). Escobar (2018) and Kothari et al. (2019) similarly argue that recovering "matristic" or relational ways of being can offer foundations for civilizational alternatives. These perspectives do not prescribe fixed societal models but point to an emancipatory horizon—a guide for daily, grounded practices of resistance and hope. To deepen this collective reflection, I conducted focus groups that incorporated visual storytelling methods, inviting participants to bring images and videos representing their activist journeys. These visual tools allowed them to reflect more intimately on their experiences, articulate shared values, and envision a shared post-patriarchal future. The focus groups thus functioned not only as data collection settings, but also as spaces of solidarity and learning from each other, where feminist imaginaries of post-patriarchal life were co-created in real time. In the analysis that follows, I draw directly from these conversations to examine how feminist migrant activists respond to anti-gender politics, how they reframe care and solidarity, and how they prefigure transnational feminist futures from the margins of Europe. To explore how these women reflect on their feminist activism and their visions of change, I facilitated open, dialogical conversations during focus groups. Rather than using a rigid interview guide, I invited interviewees to share personal stories, memories, and reflections, allowing themes to emerge organically. Inspired by Mohanty's (2003) notion of self-reflexive collective practice, this approach encouraged interviewees to connect their lived experiences with broader political struggles. The quotes analyzed in this chapter are extracted from these open-ended, co-constructed discussions.

Feminist Diaspora Activism as Pluriversal Worldmaking

Feminist migrant activists from Poland and Turkey forge transnational solidarities in response to intersecting forms of patriarchal, nationalist, and neoliberal violence. They sustain activism beyond national borders, not only resisting the authoritarian policies of their home countries but also building feminist pluriverses in exile. In doing so, they enact what Escobar (2020) calls a pluriversal politics: a politics of many worlds, of many feminist futures which grounded in solidarity. The narratives of feminist migrant activists from Poland and Turkey underscore the deeply embodied and affective nature of transnational feminist resistance. Their activism emerges not as a detached political stance but as a lived, emotional, and situated practice shaped by exile, grief, and solidarity.

Patrycja, a Polish feminist activist who migrated to Germany, reflected: "Sometimes I feel like I'm constantly translating my existence both personally and politically—not just words, but anger, grief, hope. Between German women and Polish women, German colleagues, or even to myself. It's exhausting, but necessary. If we don't translate, we disappear." Patrycja thus captures the exhausting and emotional labor involved in sustaining transnational feminist solidarities. Her words reveal how feminist migrants continually navigate overlapping cultural, linguistic, and political landscapes to ensure that their communities' struggles are neither lost in translation nor dismissed by host societies. In this context, translation becomes more than a linguistic task—it symbolizes a broader form of feminist praxis: the effort to remain politically visible and emotionally tethered across borders. Viewed through the lens of pluriversal politics, translation operates not only as a mode of communication but as epistemic labor—building bridges between different worlds, histories, and affective-political realities.

Similarly, Ayten, a feminist migrant activist who migrated to Austria, reflected on her experience of migration and whether it changed anything for her: "There is no such thing as going back to normal. There never was a normal for many women." Ayten rejects the notion of political and personal stability as something inherently desirable or achievable through migration. For many of these activists, exile did not signify the end of struggle but rather a transformation. As she poignantly adds, "Now we carry it in other languages, in other streets," suggesting that feminist resistance is mobile, adaptable, and deeply rooted in the embodied experiences of women who carry multiple losses and yet continue to resist. Here, exile becomes a site for rearticulating feminist subjectivity and practice. Begüm, an activist from

Turkey based in Germany, described the entrenchment of patriarchy in both Turkey and Poland and the urgent need to build autonomous feminist spaces: "Poland and Turkey share similarities, especially the influence of religion, but both struggle to create alternative politics that truly represent women ... The patriarchy is terrified of women becoming independent and breaking free from traditional structures ... That's why we need to create spaces, create politics for ourselves, demand representation, and build our own feminist politics. But not the politics that put us back into the system … And we already started finding ways to exist differently through our organization that we created." Begüm's call for "our own feminist politics" reflects acts of prefiguration—envisioning and enacting alternative worlds within the present. Rather than merely resisting the status quo, she insists on building new feminist spaces that are autonomous and grounded in the lived experiences of women. The affective weight of her words expresses the deep responsive push behind the creation of transnational feminist spaces, while also emphasizing the stakes of remaining politically invisible. Pluriversal practice is evident here in the refusal to conform to dominant frameworks and the insistence on creating alternative political vocabularies and spaces from and within the margins.

Anna, a Polish feminist now based in Austria, echoed this urgency, reflecting on the high costs of activism and the shared sense of determination across borders: "We have to fight for the same basic rights—and we do, at risk ... In the end, we are migrants, we are 'Eastern European women', and as Begüm noted, they are 'Middle Eastern women,' which means that our status is already degraded in the countries to which we migrated." Anna continued, "It is wonderful to see that you are not the only one who believes in the sense of these actions ... [We] migrant feminist women are taking their affairs into their own hands instead of giving in." Here, Anna articulates a transnational feminist diaspora shaped by shared struggle and resilience. Her invocation of "we," "we are migrants," and "we fight" help her frame feminist migrants as a collective political subject. The founding of a feminist migrant organization in Germany by Begüm and Nehir—following their departure from Turkey—emerged from the emotional and political toll of sustained activism under authoritarian conditions and the personal upheaval of self-exile. As Nehir put it: "We believe in horizontal resistance and solidarity. We value becoming stronger through first creating our own politics of space rather than trying to fit ourselves into conventional discourses. Our aim is to identify the needs of women—especially migrant women—develop solutions, and communicate these to decision-makers. Our existence here feels like moving in a

cylindrical loop—we keep turning, unsure if we're rising or falling. It's not just spatial displacement, but a dismantling and rebuilding of social ties and political selves. Patriarchy, far more entrenched than capitalism, shapes this circular disorientation—and yet, in those fleeting moments it's our emotional solidarity that brings us together." Rather than aligning themselves with the institutional frameworks of state-led organizations or conforming to dominant liberal feminist narratives, Begüm and Nehir intentionally create autonomous feminist spaces. These spaces are not designed to assimilate into existing structures, but to transform them. By centering the lived experiences of migrant women, they articulate political agendas rooted in everyday realities rather than bureaucratic norms. Their work redefines political subjectivity—not as a category to be granted by the state, but as a relational and affective practice forged through collective experience. Operating within a pluriversal feminist praxis, their activism resists homogenization. It embraces multiplicity, insisting that diverse feminist imaginaries and relational modes of organizing are vital for envisioning meaningful and inclusive political change.

Begüm elaborated further on how affect, particularly loss and anger, shaped this solidarity: "How long do you think it takes for a woman, in a new city or a foreign country, to find others who feel the way she does? I found them in a month. And when I met them, it felt like we'd been walking arm in arm for years. These were women who had lived through the same losses, the same disillusionments, and carried the same anger. We all brought with us the values, statuses, and roles we had lost, we were forced into silence. In Turkey, we felt both the breath of isolation and the suffocation of feeling trapped. We didn't only lose a room of our own, but we lost our country." This quote encapsulates the emotional terrain of transnational feminist diasporic communities. The use of words like "loss," "disillusionment," and "trapped" underscores how exile is not simply geographic but ontological a rupture in identity and belonging. Yet in these conditions, collective anger became a catalyst for connection and political creativity for Begüm.

Beyond building organizations, feminist migrant activists also stage highly visual and embodied protests to confront the violence of anti-gender policies. In 2021, following the death of a woman in a Polish hospital due to delayed medical care under the country's abortion ban, Polish feminist activists in Austria mobilized transnationally. Anna recalled: "She wasn't the only one ... It was stories like these that brought us migrant women together" She continued, describing a protest staged in Vienna: "We created a powerful scene: participants in white outfits, posters in hand, lying on the ground

surrounded by blood ... This was about more than visuals; it was about forcing people to confront the violence of policies that deny women their rights." Anka added: "It wasn't just performance. It was mourning, protest, and resistance all at once. We wanted them to see what laws look like when they become violence." The symbolic scene—white clothing, artificial blood, and coordinated silence—renders visible the horror of state violence against women's bodies. It challenges institutional logics through theatrical disruption, turning public grief into both spectacle and demand. Through the pluriversal lens, this act is more than a political protest; it is a form of ontological dissent—a refusal of dominant definitions of what is real, knowable, or politically intelligible. As decolonial theorist Arturo Escobar argues, ontological dissent involves "the affirmation of other modes of existence" that challenge the universality of Western modernity (Escobar 2020). In this sense, the performance ruptures the symbolic order, exposing the systemic violences it conceals while enacting a space where feminist imaginaries to power, grief, and justice can emerge.

Together, the narratives and collective practices and imaginaries of Begüm, Nehir, Ayten, Anna, Patrycja and Anka illustrate what Escobar (2020) calls the "matristic turn"—a shift from hierarchical, patriarchal governance to community-oriented, relational feminist politics. Their collective work builds new political worlds across national borders. These feminist migrant activists refuse isolation in host societies. Instead, they transform exile into a plural, relational, and radically hopeful feminist diaspora. This is the promise of a pluriversal political practice: to make space for diverse ways of being, knowing, and resisting—honoring cultural, political, and affective difference while weaving solidarities that affirm life, dignity, and the transformative possibility of feminist futures across boundaries.

Prefiguring Feminist Futures: Reflections and Conclusion

This chapter has examined how feminist migrant activists from Poland and Turkey, in response to intensifying anti-gender policies and political repression, enact prefigurative pluriversal praxis—a form of political engagement that both resists dominant paradigms and enacts alternative futures in the present. Rather than merely opposing patriarchal and nationalist state formations, these women organize "as if" new feminist worlds already exist, thereby producing spaces rooted in care, solidarity, and collective agency (Cooper 2020). By foregrounding embodied experiences, affective

ties, and transnational solidarities, the activists' practices challenge the idea of exile as solely a condition of rupture or loss. Instead, consistent with Edward Said's (2000) conceptualization of exile, they transform displacement into a generative site of resistance, wherein identities, communities, and political imaginations are reconstituted. Through the lens of pluriversal politics (Escobar 2022), these feminist activists do not seek full inclusion within existing political models but instead co-create spaces and mobilizations that reflect multiple ways of knowing, relating, and organizing, rejecting state-centric modes of legitimacy. The narratives examined in the analysis reveal that prefiguration is not merely symbolic or aspirational, it is enacted through everyday practices such as mutual aid, emotional translation, embodied protest, and organizing feminist diasporas. For instance, the founding of feminist collectives in exile and the staging of visceral, symbolic actions such as blood-drenched protests in Vienna illustrate how these activists reframe mourning and rage into political action. Their refusal to conform to normative scripts of integration or victimhood underscores the pluriversal dimension of their activism: they build feminist futures that are not derivative of a singular ideal but rooted in diverse cultural and political imaginaries.

This chapter illuminated how this pluriversal, future-oriented political practice fosters not only resistance but also possible futures. The activists during the focus group proposed: "We could imagine creating something, a network or a platform where we could bring together feminist women whom we know, who have migrated from different places. Something transnationally organized, like a website or even a simple Facebook group, where we could connect women beyond national and state defined borders. It could start small ... Over time, this could grow into a broader transnational network, connecting feminists worldwide to exchange ideas, strategies, and solidarity."

This vision underscores how prefiguration operates not as a form of utopian escapism, but as a practical and iterative mode of political experimentation (Monticelli 2022). Through the collective imagining and building of infrastructures grounded in feminist care and connection, activists actively rehearse alternative futures in the present, demonstrating how the possible is constructed through intentional and situated praxis. While the narratives highlighted in this chapter foreground the transformative and visionary dimensions of feminist activism in exile, it is equally important to acknowledge the tensions and contradictions embedded in these processes. A critical area for future research concerns the potential unintended

consequences of politically motivated migration on feminist movements in the countries of origin. The departure of key organizers, the fragmentation of local activist networks, and shifting political or personal priorities post-migration may all contribute to a weakening of grassroots feminist struggles in home contexts. Recognizing these dynamics introduces a necessary ambivalence into the hopeful trajectory outlined here, reminding us that activism of migrant women are shaped by loss, dislocation, and uneven transnational consequences. Another area worth exploring further is how migrant activists deal with the activist discourses and narratives they bring with them from their home countries. Moving into a new political and social setting often means that familiar ways of doing activism no longer fully apply. Many activists find themselves needing to rethink their language and approach—not necessarily abandoning what they knew but adapting it to a different context. This chapter briefly touches on these processes of adaptation, but more detailed analysis is needed to understand how activists navigate the tensions between what they carry with them and what their new surroundings require. It is not just about adjusting to a new place, but it is also about responding to, and sometimes challenging, the assumptions and norms of the activism they were part of before.

By reimagining concepts like gender, authority, activism, migration, belonging, and resistance these feminist migrant activists push against the core assumptions that shape dominant political systems. They unsettle familiar binaries between public and private, reason and emotion, the personal and the political and instead put forward a kind of politics that takes care and connection as seriously as critique and resistance. What this chapter has aimed to show is that prefigurative pluriversal practices (Escobar 2022) are not just a side note to what some may deem more legitimate political action, but they are central to how alternative futures are imagined and built. These activists create space between the present and the future they are working toward, showing how feminist practice can hold both struggle and hope in the systematic and civilizational crises.

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Practices

World Fairs as Worldmaking Places: Ecuador at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition

Erika Rosado-Valencia

During the nineteenth century, universal exhibitions were large-scale events where many nations came together to showcase the most up-to-date achievements in the arts and culture, science and technology, and to celebrate the modern ideological notion of progress. Universal expositions "put the contemporary world on display" (Osterhammel 2014, 15) offering a physical and symbolic space to represent an idealized version of the industrial capitalist economy. Universal exhibitions peaked during a time of intense international rivalry among industrial powers and the formation of nation-states in post-colonial regions. Thus, beyond showcasing material culture, they served as platforms for the strategic enactment of imperial and national identities. Industrial powers used them to display political dominance and notions of racial and cultural superiority, while peripheral countries saw them as fleeting opportunities to present themselves as part of the cosmopolitan concert of nations (Tenorio-Trillo 1996, 8).

By projecting visions of national and imperial identity on a global stage, world fairs actively shaped global hierarchies and dominant understandings of the world, making them quintessential examples of worldmaking places. These events were meticulously designed representations of modernity, conveying the idea that the world's complexity could be fully replicated. However, it is worth remembering that material culture displays have never been representations of uncontestable facts as they inherently involve processes of negotiation and value judgment with clear cultural, social, and political consequences (Macdonald 2010, 1). In this sense, world fairs were carefully curated narratives of the world they claimed to represent, and while this exhibited world may have appeared ideal, it was underpinned by contradictions and exclusions.

One of the major exhibitions of the nineteenth century was the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, hosted in Chicago by the United States to commemorate the four-hundredth anniversary of the "discovery" of the "New World." Scholars have described this event as "one of the most memorable spectacles of the late nineteenth century," highlighting how, despite occurring during a severe economic depression and in the aftermath of the city's recovery from the devastating fire of 1871, the fair's organizers

achieved unprecedented architectural and technological feats, attracting millions of visitors (Böger 2009, 312). Ecuador was one of the forty-six countries invited to participate in the fair, for which the liberal elites of the coast undertook the task of editing the book *El Ecuador en Chicago* (*Ecuador in Chicago*, New York, 1894), intended to circulate in the national pavilion, providing visitors with evidence of Ecuador as a modern nation.

Although the fair organizers put on display a world dominated by the United States, participating countries were able to display their own national versions of modernity in their national pavilions. In this contribution I explore the national self-representation strategies employed by Ecuadorian representatives at the 1893 Columbian Exhibition, by analyzing the contents of the book *El Ecuador en Chicago*, particularly the representation of national history and Ecuadorian "progress" in the form of agriculture and transportation technologies. I argue that Ecuadorian elites engaged in a dual worldmaking practice, seeking both to reshape the global order by challenging the hierarchical narratives conveyed at the fair and to construct a national narrative aligned with their economic and political insterests. However, I also seek to shed light on the contradictions at the heart of these imagined worlds, where certain subjects were conspicuously excluded.

Showcasing Power: The 1893 World's Columbian Exposition

The Chicago World's Fair took place during the Gilded Age, a period of rapid economic growth and expanding U.S. influence. Industrialization, infrastructure development and access to resources fueled the nation's rise to wealth. Immigration also played a key role, with over twelve million immigrants arriving between 1870 and 1900, many bringing new agricultural technologies (Library of Congress, n.d). These settlements were widely seen as the culmination of the Manifest Destiny, however, some Americans were appealing to this same idea to justify expansion beyond U.S. borders. Motivated by a desire for colonization abroad, the United States expanded its military and imperial ventures, including the overthrow of Hawaii's monarchy and the invocation of the Monroe Doctrine, affirming U.S. dominance in the Western Hemisphere. By the late nineteenth century, the Spanish-American War solidified its status as a global imperial power.

Figure 2. View of the Administration Building. Photographic Archive, [apf3-03143], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

Although these events marked the rise of the United States as an imperial force, a symbolic act was needed to legitimize this newly acquired position. As Tony Bennet argues, exhibitions served as "vehicles for inscribing and broadcasting the messages of power" (2013, 61), for which hosting a Universal Exposition was an effective way to assert America's burgeoning power on a global stage. Given the circumstances of the United States in the late nineteenth century, it is clear that imperialism was the driving force behind the Columbian Exhibition and it should be no surprise that it commemorated Columbus's arrival in the Americas, one of the most iconic imperial acts in history.

The World's Columbian Exposition is often regarded as one of the most successful exhibitions ever held. The fair lasted from May until October, receiving more than twenty-seven million visitors, half of them U.S. citizens (Tiven 2020). The fair's main section, the Court of Honor, also known as the

"White City," comprised fourteen white neoclassical buildings designed by prominent architects and artists, housing displays of industry, art, and science that showcased "the 'high' culture of American achievements" (Domosh 2002, 184).

Progress was made visible in many ways at the fair, but electricity stood out as one of the most impactful symbols. Advances in electricity were so central that, during the months the fair was open, Chicago was the brightest point on Earth (Valance 2009, 431). The U.S. narrative of progress was further embodied in exhibitions of transportation technology, particularly railways, which served as "powerful symbols of the nation's technological progress and relentless westward expansion" (Perry and Smith 2006, 289). The Transportation Building, a major attraction, celebrated the Transcontinental Railroad, completed in 1869, which first united the East and West coasts and was regarded as one of the century's most impressive technological feats. The exhibition conveyed the message that it was national connectivity that enabled the United States to achieve its triumphant state of progress.

Furthermore, U.S. imperialism occupied a central role at the fair, conveyed in the portrayal of U.S. technology as having a "civilizing potential" abroad. For instance, over five hundred U.S. companies exhibited their products and machinery in the Agriculture Building, distributing catalogues featuring images of white men conquering the wilderness by means of U.S. American technologies (Domosh 2002, 182). The clear message was that U.S. products were the civilizing force of the American West and could serve the same purpose overseas.

U.S. power was showcased not only in the White City but also in the portrayal of non-white people. Non-western groups were primarily placed in the Midway Plaisance, a mile-long area "devoted to *live*, supposedly *authentic* ethnological shows," such as replicas of villages and other forms of "entertainment" (Buonomo 2014, 23). The Midway was the place where organizers consigned all those elements that did not conform to their definition of "high culture," portraying non-white societies as "barbaric" and "childlike," awaiting civilization. This portrayal reinforced a hierarchical narrative of human development, positioning "superior, civilized white races" at the forefront while "barbaric non-white societies" followed behind.

Ecuador in the Late Nineteenth Century

In 1891, when government officials were invited to participate in the fair, Ecuador was a relatively isolated country marked by deep regional divisions. In the highlands, religious conservative elites relied on Indigenous labor for agricultural production aimed at local markets. Meanwhile, coastal elites, less influenced by the Catholic Church, focused on eliminating trade barriers to strengthen their presence in global markets. The cause of these political and economic disparities was the geographical divide between the regions. With no roads connecting Quito and Guayaquil, national communication was unattainable, leading the *Sierra* and *Costa* to develop largely independently.

The government of Luis Cordero, in office in 1893, adopted moderate policies as a mediating response, pursuing a "partial secularization of the state" while maintaining "the protection of Catholicism" and initiating infrastructural modernization projects, particularly in communication routes and electrification (Lauderbaugh 2012, 79). Between 1870 and 1920, Ecuadorian cocoa exports surged by 700 percent, making the country the world's leading cocoa producer (Henderson 1997, 172). As coastal elites gained increasing economic power, they began demanding the political power traditionally concentrated in Quito.

A key aspect for the consolidation of liberal rule in Ecuador was the need to define national identity in relation to the global community. Blanca Muratorio has pointed out that coastal liberalism "looked to the outside world to gain legitimacy for Ecuador as a 'civilized' society, to accumulate its own symbolic capital, and to construct its own cultural hegemony in an era when commercial success and cultural progress were perceived to be closely intertwined" (2012, 124). For the cocoa elite, the Columbian Exhibition became an indispensable platform to strategically display a national identity designed to secure Ecuador's position in the expanding global market and by presenting Ecuador as a "civilized" nation, they actively claimed their voice as active participants in the making of the modern world.

However, to the detriment of the coastal elites' interests, the international perceptions of Ecuador were overwhelmingly negative. In the late nineteenth century, tourism was not yet a major industry and foreign impressions were primarily shaped by travelers, whose accounts were often marked by prejudice. For instance, U.S. journalist William Eleroy Curtis harshly criticized the country in his popular travel chronicles. He described Guayaquil as "so filthy that one has to hold his nose as he passes through it" (1888, 312), Ecuadorian society as "a picture of the dark ages" (1888, 317),

and in general described Ecuador as the "most backward, ignorant, and impoverished" country in South America (1888, 304).

Aware of the negativity surrounding international reports, coastal elites recognized the need to improve Ecuador's reputation abroad. To this end, the newspaper, *Diario de Avisos de Guayaquil*, aligned with the National Liberal Party, undertook the task of publishing the book *El Ecuador en Chicago*. Supported by Cordero's government and a consortium of Guayaquil bankers, the book was designed to circulate in the Ecuadorian pavilion, showcasing photographs and writings that would support the image of Ecuador as a modern country.

The project was overseen by the newspaper's director, Luis Carbo, who also held prominent positions in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The volume featured detailed descriptions of the country's geography, history, economy, and infrastructure, written by leading figures such as ex-presidents, ambassadors, ministers, landowners, and bankers. Cocoa exporters, in particular, seized the opportunity to introduce themselves to the world, through the airbrushed portraits that took up a significant portion of the book. Additionally, photographs of Ecuador's modern infrastructure provided visual testimony of the country's progress.

Ironically, the book failed in its mission to introduce Ecuador to an international audience, as it was published months after the fair had ended. In the introduction, Carbo briefly explains that the delay was due to "causes beyond the control" of the authors (*causas ajenas a nuestra voluntad*) and notes that the editing process was only completed in July and August, by which time the Ecuadorian delegation had already left for Chicago (1894, xii). Due to these delays, Carbo introduces the book as "an incomplete album of the views of the Republic" (*un álbum incompleto de vistas de la República*) (1894, xii), a modest description of a book that had originally been intended to present a boastful image of the nation.

Representing Modern Ecuador in Chicago

Rewriting national history

A key way in which worldmaking occurred at world fairs was through the representation of history. At the Columbian Exposition, the history of the United States was reformulated through the colonialist perspectives of its organizers. The focus was on the completion of westward expansion, framed as a simplistic narrative of "American heroism" that related the birth of a

"modern" nation embodied by the "white race" to the triumph over the "old world" symbolized by the natives defeated in the American Frontier Wars (Domosh 2002, 189). Similarly, the newly founded Latin American republics placed great importance on representing their historical past. As Alejandra Uslengui notes, "universal exhibitions provided the stage where the stories of nations could be told and related to the prospect of a universal history of civilization" (2015, 7). In this context, the Ecuadorian ruling class viewed the fair not only as an opportunity to display Ecuador's present state of progress, but also as a means to position Ecuador within the narrative of universal history. The first pages of *El Ecuador en Chicago* tell the national history from the pre-Inca period to contemporaneity. The section opens as follows:

> The history of the early inhabitants of Ecuadorian territory is lost in the dark night of time … The most illustrious among them was the Ecuadorian Huayna Cápac, a celebrated monarch who ruled the vastest empire of South America … Upon the death of this great prince, his two sons, Atahualpa … and Huáscar … divided the Inca Empire between themselves. The civil wars that subsequently broke out between the two brothers weakened the power of the Children of the Sun, paving the way for the rapid triumphs of the Spaniards. Victorious in various internal campaigns, Atahualpa welcomed the conquerors warmly; but, taken by surprise and treacherously imprisoned by them, he was later sentenced to death by Pizarro … With the death of the Ecuadorian prince, Spain became master of the vast domains of the Children of the Sun; and the unfortunate Indians, left without a homeland or a king, were condemned to endure the harshest servitude (Carbo 1894, x).[30]

These lines reflect how Ecuador's elites sought to define the place of Indigenous people within their constructed modernity. In narrating the pre-colonial period, Indigenous societies are depicted as powerful imperial forces. Figures like Incan rulers are referred to as "Ecuadorians" and praised as "illustrious" or "great princes." This portrayal of the Indigenous past as "noble" directly challenges the expectations of U.S. fair organizers, who had requested that Andean countries send representatives from "peoples considered the furthest from civilization" to be included in the ethnological exhibits (Egan 2010, 7).

The idealized portrayal of precolonial civilizations can be seen as a strategy by coastal elites to distance their national mestizo identities from any association with "backwardness." During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, *mestizaje* was promoted as the cornerstone of Ecuadorian national identity. By presenting Ecuadorians as descendants from an

[30] All content quoted from the book *El Ecuador en Chicago* has been translated from Spanish by the author, with careful attention to maintaining fidelity to the original text.

aristocratic indigenous past, the book attempts to craft a civilizing narrative in which the *mestizo* subject, despite their Indigenous ancestry, is portrayed as free from any hint of "racial inferiority."

However, it is important to recognize that the narrative tells the story of the "defeat" of the Inca rulers, noting that the era of the first American settlers is now lost "in the dark night of time" (Carbo 1894, x). This statement underscores a definitive break between contemporary Ecuador and its indigenous past, signaling the impossibility of an Indigenous reassertion of power. As a result, after the defeat of the Inca Empire, the prevailing image is of natives as weak, contemptible, and enslaved subjects with no place in modern Ecuador. Coastal elite's representation of Indigenous peoples as belonging to the past aligns with the narrative of the fair, which framed indigeneity as pre-modern. A striking example of this was the invitation of several Sioux chiefs to the opening ceremony, where they appeared from the Administration Building while the fair's choir sang *America* (My Country, 'Tis of Thee), a song emblematic of U.S. patriotism. A Chicago newspaper described the scene as a "fallen majesty" showing "submissive admiration to a new world" (as cited in Rydell 1984, 64).

The book's narrative also touches on the colonial period and the early republican years. The colonial period is only mentioned briefly, while much more focus is placed on the independence processes. Latin American representatives viewed exhibitions as crucial opportunities to assert their status as sovereign political entities abroad (Rezende 2010, 44). Thus, the limited mention of the colonial period was as a strategy by Ecuadorian elites to reaffirm and legitimize their sovereignty in the eyes of other participating countries. The description of Ecuador's republican history is overall depicted in a negative light, with the book's authors seizing the opportunity to criticize past conservative governments as "dictatorial" and "backward," while presenting the rise of liberalism as a fresh new start. In this context, the minister of Public Instruction, argues:

> No one among us can deny that, for the past thirty years, the nation has been following a different path from the one it had previously taken, in pursuit of the great benefits of civilization and true human progress … Tyrants and petty opportunists are now, fortunately, disappearing, giving way to selfless patriots who devote their efforts to the general prosperity and the interests of the Republic (Espinoza in Carbo 1894, 194).

The minister presents a critique to the conservative regimes that had dominated the national political scene until that time. Beyond the break with the pre-Columbian past, the book's narrative marks a second division,

contrasting an ancient Ecuador dominated by conservatism with a modern Ecuador characterized by the triumph of liberalism. Scholars have noted that liberals viewed the liberal and conservative periods as representing "the light of progress" and "obscurantism," respectively, with liberals seeing themselves as positioning the country on the threshold of something entirely new (Clark 1998, 43). *El Ecuador en Chicago* thus not only serves as a testimony of the past and present from the perspective of liberal elites but also as a concrete expression of the aspirations of the world they longed for the future.

The "civilizing" power of agriculture

Another way in which the shape of the world was defined at world fairs was by portraying the place that nations ought to occupy in the global economy. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Second Industrial Revolution in Europe and the United States shifted global dynamics as the demand for raw materials increased and new markets expanded abroad. Universal exhibitions became a miniature version of a globalizing world, in which the relations between industrialized nations and the nations that provided the raw materials were reinforced.

The Chicago World's Fair served as a platform for the United States to present itself as the quintessential model of industrial development. One of the clearest examples of the United States' demonstration of industrial predominance was the agricultural exhibitions. They showcased what were identified as the United States' "significant gifts to the twentieth century," among them, the technological advances in farm machinery. The Agriculture Building featured a large globe "with an array of farm technologies, all American-made, revolving around its circumference" (Domosh 2002, 183), spreading the message that U.S. farm technology was ready to dominate the world and spread prosperity to its most "unfortunate" regions.

Latin American representatives had to negotiate the subordinated role attributed to their countries in the global economy. As Olga Vilella argues, "faced in most instances with a lack of adequate national infrastructures, the solution for many countries in Latin America was to highlight their respective participation in the world's economy as suppliers of raw products to the metropolis" (Vilella 2004, 82). This also was the case for Ecuador. For the export elite, the fair was an opportunity to expand their presence in the booming international market and potentially diversify export products, making the imagery of Ecuador as an agricultural country highly significant

in the book. The general message of the publication is that despite the great abundance already generated by Ecuadorian soil, this potential can still be amplified through the importation of new agricultural technologies. In this way, Ecuador is portrayed as a kind of earthly paradise, characterized by vast, uncultivated land waiting to be exploited:

> Those who believe that we have already cultivated all the soil in the Andean region are truly mistaken … With machines, with fertilizers, with the formidable resources that science now has at its disposal, we would not quadruple, perhaps not even tenfold, the production of a land whose chemical elements are not replaced today … In the most interior provinces, there are still parishes with munificent soil that cause property owners the inconvenience of filling their barns to empty them immediately, without any profit, simply to make room for the new crops that rapidly sprout thanks to the bounty of the fertile soil … How many riches could be exploited by the knowledgeable cultivator, the skilled industrialist, or the capitalist with access to the most effective resources to transform into an inexhaustible mine what appears barren, arid, or sterile to the ignorant routine judgment or timid stinginess! (Tobar in Carbo 1894, 186).

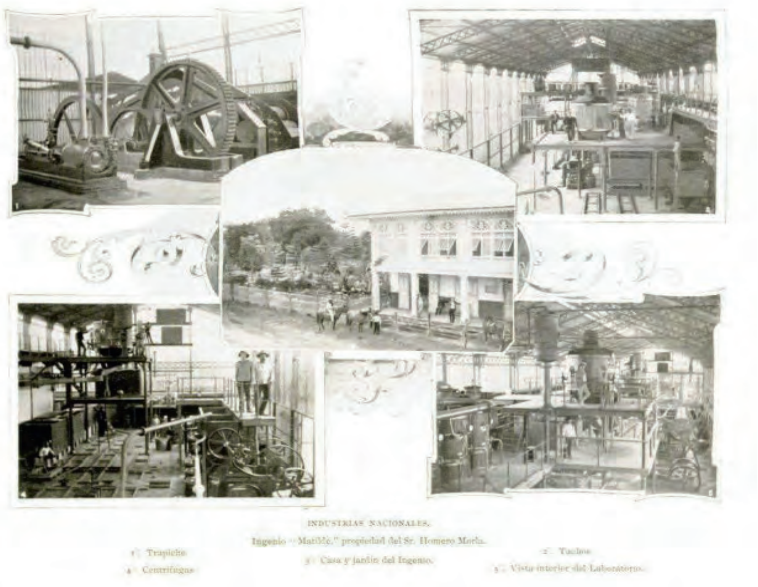

Figure 3. National Industry. El Ecuador en Chicago (1894, 273)

The motivation of the fair's organizers to invite Latin American countries stemmed partly from the perception of the region as a "land of mission" (*tierra de misión*), a place where the transformation of nature through science was still pending (López-Ocón 2002, 116). Latin American representatives were receptive to this idea, which explains why, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the application of scientific methods in agriculture was widely seen as a key formula to modernize the region. This perspective is also reflected in the above-cited extract, where Ecuadorian soil is presented as fertile and abundant, yet in need of foreign technologies to maximize its productivity.

World fairs were not neutral platforms for knowledge exchange, as "colonial and imperial ideologies were pervasive" at these events (Schuster 2018, 72). In the book's narrative, agricultural land, especially on the coast, is often described as "empty," asserting that "the barren lands are immense and are there waiting for the axe to fell the corpulent trees so that the hand of man can sow the grain that produces excellent fruit" (Carbo 1894, 279). This portrayal was a strategic move by coastal liberal elites, not only to call for the importation of agricultural technology but also to advocate for colonization by European farmers, widely perceived as civilizing agents.

This representation, however, was far removed from reality. At the time, despite the highlands concentrating most of the Indigenous labor, the cocoa boom triggered the greatest migration wave in Ecuador's history. The coastal population increased from 165,280 to 1,115,264, primarily due to Indigenous highland workers attracted to cacao plantations by higher wages (Pineo 2008, 140). Moreover, the Indigenous labor force often suffered under the abuses of landowners, as recorded by the Austrian traveler, Friedrich Haussarek, who observed that "the Indian does more work than all other races together, but his position in the social scale is in an inverse proportion to his usefulness" (1868, 188). Given this, it is striking that coastal elites depicted Ecuadorian soil as devoid of agricultural workers. Despite the crucial role of the Indigenous labor force in the national economy, liberal elites hesitated to represent these workers in their national narratives, fearing it would portray the country as "uncivilized" and instead encouraging colonial occupation.

The Ecuadorian railway as the formula of progress

In the nineteenth century, modern transportation systems were widely regarded as symbols of progress, a notion that was reinforced by the United States at the World's Columbian Exposition. For instance, *The Official Guide*

of the Fair stated that "no other instrument surpasses that of transportation in utility, or equals it as a power in the progress of civilization" (Flynn 1893, 109). The fair particularly celebrated the Transcontinental Railroad, which connected vast portions of the United States and was described in the exhibition's guide as "the greatest of all means of transportation" (1893, 109), showcasing it as one of humanity's most outstanding achievements.

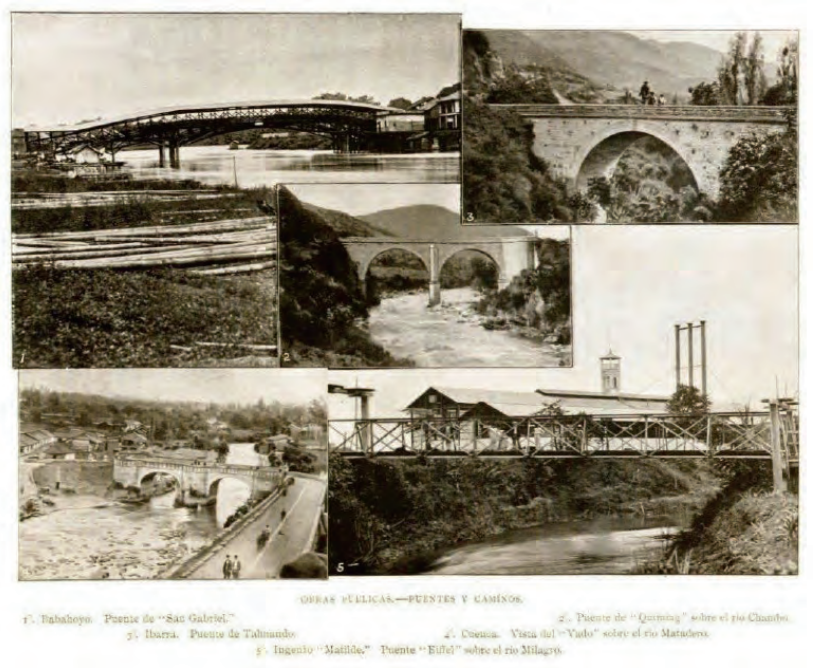

Figure 4. Public Works. El Ecuador en Chicago (1894, 183)

In Latin America, railways were similarly viewed as ultimate symbols of modernity, as they "served to integrate export regions with the world market, which was thought to guarantee prosperity in the late nineteenth century model of export-led development" (Clark 1998, 41). This sentiment was shared by Ecuadorian liberal elites, whose quintessential project was the construction of a railroad connecting Quito and Guayaquil. The railroad stood in public discourse as "the cornerstone of a broad program of economic, political, social, and even moral reform," which some believed would release the country from its afflictions (Clark 1998, 43).

Moreover, amidst the longstanding rivalry between the coast and the highlands, the railway was one of the few points of consensus. Highlanders saw it as an opportunity for gaining access to international ports, while the coast hoped to expand its markets into the interior of the country. This is reflected in the book's narrative, where Senator Carlos Tobar writes in his essay "*Lo único que le falta a Ecuador*" ("The Only Thing Ecuador is Missing") that fast and inexpensive connectivity is "the secret to the material prosperity of nations" and that Ecuador will be "great" on the day "when railways traverse the vast and fertile lands of its three great regions" (Tobar in Carbo 1894, 179).

Coastal elites recognized internal disconnection as a major challenge. The journey between Quito and Guayaquil took over two weeks and was nearly impossible during the rainy season. This isolation led to limited trade between the two regions, with coastal Ecuadorians finding it cheaper to import basic goods like wheat and barley from Chile or California than transport them from the highlands (Clark 1998, 27). Connecting the two largest cities, along with towns along the railway's route, was seen as a key nation-building project. The railway was expected to bring economic benefits and foster national unity, marking a turning point in Ecuadorian history. As Tobar writes:

> As we have said on another occasion, the railroads are like the irrigation ditches that when carried to a wasteland, they distribute greenery to its surroundings and soon enrich it, making it opulent. Railways also bring to life, almost overnight, not only farms and small settlements, but entire populations, towns, and cities: just look at those found along the railway lines of the United States, Argentina, and Chile. Populations, towns, cities, sprouted under the influence of the railroad, as plants sprout on the banks of a new watercourse ... Railroads and no more than railroads are missing for Ecuador to present itself at the same level of prosperity as the most favored nation on earth (Tobar in Carbo 1894, 186).

The belief in progress celebrated at world fairs encompassed a kind of religious devotion, portraying technology, industry, and the capitalist economy as the key formula for achieving an eventual utopia or paradise on earth. In the particular case of the Columbian Exposition, it conveyed the message that by emulating U.S. American progress, it would be possible to transform the entire world into an earthly paradise. The White City itself was often associated with religious imagery, sometimes described as "a prophetic New Jerusalem" (Rydell 1984, 48).

The book's narrative suggests that coastal elites also viewed the railway with a kind of religious reverence, seeing it as a miraculous solution to the nation's problems. The railway is portrayed as a "mystical force" capable of transforming Ecuador's reality immediately, without addressing underlying structural issues. It's supposed ability to instantly foster urbanization and prosperity led to its depiction as the ultimate key to modernization, requiring no further efforts. In fact, the project was widely known as "*La Obra Redentora*" ("The Redemptive Work"), a term also used by the book's authors.

Walter Benjamin described nineteenth-century world fairs as "sites of pilgrimages to the commodity fetish" (1999, 7), expressing that the exhibited commodities often masked the labor and social relationships behind their production. He argued that these exhibitions embodied the "phantasmagoria" of capitalism, a dreamlike spectacle in which visitors were blinded by the dazzling display of goods, distracted from the human costs and complex conditions underlying their production (1999, 7). At the Columbian Exposition, visitors encountered an overwhelming variety of commodities that represented the "high ideals of civilization" and promised to expand them to "the benighted peoples of the darkened lands" (Domosh 2002, 191), in a way that effectively erased the violence underpinning such production and expansion. Similarly, the book's narrative seems to idealize the liberal state's modernization projects, portraying them as benevolent instruments of progress, while remaining silent on the violent material realities that their implementation would later entail. In fact, the mythical representation of the railway was a far cry from what it actually was. Historians have pointed out that many of the worst cases of labor exploitation in the history of the Americas have been related to the construction of railways and the case of the Ecuadorian one was no different (Esposito 2020, 14).

For its construction, the Quito-Guayaquil Railway Company contracted four thousand Jamaican workers, renowned for their "resilience" after building the Panamanian Railway under harsh conditions. Ecuadorian and U.S. contractors considered people of African descent better suited for heavy construction work than local Indigenous labor due to the tropical climate (Clark 1998, 90). However, when the workers embarked on the construction of the project in 1899, the results were catastrophic. Many succumbed to disease, grueling tasks like cutting through rock, and extreme managerial abuse. By 1902, half of the laborers were too ill to work, and some deserted to seek employment on cocoa plantations in Guayaquil, though many were forcibly returned under conditions resembling forced labor (Esposito 2020,

14). The book's narrative glosses over this brutal reality, idealizing the railway as a symbol of progress while omitting the amount of human suffering that those modernization project entailed. This omission highlights that the modern world envisioned by liberal elites was in some cases built at the expense of vulnerable populations, a reality far removed from the dream-like modernity they propagated.

Conclusion

In the nineteenth century, universal exhibitions served as important platforms for worldmaking, where the economic, political, and intellectual elites of host and participating countries presented their idealized visions of the modern world and sought validation from the international community. Within this context, the Chicago World's Fair replicated the world as a grand celebration of the ideological notion of progress. However, this imagined world was far from ideal, as it was defined by asymmetric power relations, contrasting the supposed "high civilization" of the United States against the peripheral status of other participants. In view of this, Latin American representatives, were compelled to negotiate these hegemonic representations by crafting their own interpretations of modernity within their national pavilions.

Aware of the influential role of universal expositions in defining the shape of the world, the book *El Ecuador en Chicago* was an effort by Ecuador's cocoa elites to challenge the peripheral position assigned to their nation in the emerging world order. By crafting their own version of modernity, liberals sought to portray Ecuador as a "civilized" and progressive nation, emphasizing the country's productive potential and liberal modernization projects. They also aimed to distance Ecuadorian mestizos from racial stigma in an era dominated by pervasive human evolutionary ideologies. However, the modernity envisioned in *El Ecuador en Chicago* was deeply partial and exclusionary. Indigenous and afro-descendant populations were systematically erased from the narrative, denying them any role in the country's present or future.

The Chicago World's Fair as a worldmaking site, shows how worldmaking practices can serve as powerful instruments of both domination and transformation. On the one hand, a significant portion of the world was excluded from the idealized modernity showcased by the fair's organizers, just as large segments of Ecuador's population were left out of the nation imagined by its liberal elites. At the same time, Ecuadorian representatives actively participated in imagining a world that challenged the marginal

position assigned to their country within the global hierarchy of the exhibition. Understanding world fairs as sites of worldmaking reminds us that "the world" does not exist as a fixed reality. Rather, it is constantly in the making, shaped through contested representations by different actors, located in different subject positions. It is crucial to examine how these representations not only bring certain visions of the world to the fore but also how they may exclude others who inhabit it.

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Enclosed Solidarities: Worldmaking Between Magic and the Material

Thomas van Gaalen

On June 6, 1929, Curaçao, a small Caribbean island and oil economy close to the coast of Venezuela, was shook by a tumultuous sequence of events. The *Union General de Trabajadores* (UGT), a clandestine, underground union active on the island, came out into the open—and, led by a "secret military committee," it raided the island's colonial arms supplies and instigated a revolution (Machado 1930; Urbina 1936). The revolution had a double aim: union members would first overtake the island and proclaim a "free Curaçao." Subsequently, they would stage an expedition to Venezuela in order to topple the Juan Vicente Gómez dictatorship (Machado 1930). Within a few hours of the raid, some three to five hundred insurgents spontaneously joined, received arms from the raiders, and poured through the streets of Willemstad (McBeth 2008, 162; Haagsche Courant 1929). The rapid growth and diversification of the revolt, however, confused Gustavo Machado, one of the union's key strategists (Urbina 1936; Machado 1930). The interests of different cohorts of insurgents diverged: the union's sizable cohort of Venezuelan labor migrants, spurred by a desire to liberate their homeland, left everything on Curaçao behind, and immediately set sail for Venezuela (Machado 1930). Black Curaçaoan oil workers in the union, on the other hand, charted their own course, separate from their Venezuelan colleagues. As other Afro-Curaçaoans—ranging from merchants and agricultural laborers to housewives and servants—joined their ranks, they swept the streets as a broad front dedicated to liberating the island from centuries of Dutch colonial rule (Daily Worker 1929). Despite his efforts to co-ordinate the strategies of the different groups, Machado failed, as he later lamented, to keep the rebels' eyes fixed on a singular "revolutionary focus" (Machado 1930). The focused class solidarity which had underpinned the UGT and its mission to unite "all workers [on Curaçao] without distinction on the basis of race, nationality, or sex" dissipated as the priorities of its members shifted (Machado 1930).

The actions carried out by the UGT, before the organization was crushed by military force in May 1929, provide an exemplary case of the radical, political practices of worldmaking that emerged from Latin American

and Caribbean soils across the twentieth century (Corinealdi 2022). In its attempts to bridge the racialized, gendered, and national divides that cut across Curaçao's workforce, the union built upon Marxist-Leninist theory and anti-imperialist ideas to shape something of a "counter-world" (Lindner 2023; Clark, Finlay, and Kelly 2017; Wynter 1977). To Sylvia Wynter, a "counter-world" builds upon existing symbolic and signifying elements, only to reinscribe them with new meanings in an attempt to open up alternative pathways towards a more just society, or a new global order (Wynter 1977). Leveraging the common laboring status of the exploited workers of Curaçao, the UGT cultivated solidarity—that is, an affective bond, rooted in shared political or material interests—to lay the foundations for a model of working class revolution, liberation, and—eventually—self-rule (Alston 2014, 450).

For the UGT, working class solidarity carried both a future-oriented and a practical, present function. On the one hand, solidarity was cast as the basis on which the prospective social order advocated by the organization would, one day, be built. On the other hand, working class solidarity represented a practical strategy: by actively cultivating a sense of class solidarity among the island's divided workers, and by appealing to working class solidarity to rally workers into joining the insurgency, the UGT used solidarity as a political tactic. Put differently, the union translated what this chapter calls solidarity-as-imagining—solidarity as an imagined, future-oriented blueprint for a potential new world—into solidarity-as-repertoire. By introducing this last term, this chapter builds on social historian Charles Tilly's notion of the contentious repertoire, which denotes the full set of tactics and strategies that a political movement employs to navigate and influence its social context (Tilly 2014; Tilly and Tarrow 2015). Solidarity-as-repertoire, then, refers to the pragmatic appliance of solidarity as a set of tactics employed amid locally specific social and material conditions (Clark, Finlay, and Kelly 2017; Featherstone 2012; Kelley 2002). As Machado's anxious response to his splintering revolutionary force and the subsequent failure of the 1929 double revolution showcases, this process of translation—from an imagined utopia to a functioning strategy in the here-and-now—is no easy task.

Still, grappling with this translation and putting solidarity into practice has been a core issue for movements across the world. This chapter aims to propose several starting points for coming to a better understanding of the interrelation of solidarity-as-imagining and solidarity-as-repertoire. It takes the case of the 1929 Curaçaoan double revolution as a proxy to delve into the dynamics between imaginative solidarity-as-imagining and on-the-ground, pragmatic appliances of solidarity. Like many movements in past and present,

the UGT grappled with the issue of unifying a wide diversity of peoples and individuals into a potent movement rooted in a basis of shared political interests. Its merit as a case study lies in the practical advantages offered by a study of the UGT: due to its short life-span, its diverse membership, its activity in a relatively concise geographical region, and its explosive and highly visible revolutionary outcome, the organization provides a useful case study for the purposes of this chapter.

The following first delves into the concepts of counter-world/worldmaking, and argues that recent historical scholarship on solidarity has adopted an overly optimistic reformulation of these concepts. As a result, the chapter argues, the transformative capacities of solidarity-as-imagining have been overstated—in some instances, perhaps to a utopian extent—without paying sufficient attention to the adjacent phenomenon this chapter labels solidarity-as-repertoire. Then, the essay employs Italian Marxist scholar and organizer Antonio Gramsci's notion of enclosure to illustrate how material conditions and constraints thoroughly affect and limit the possible worlds that marginalized groups may formulate and promote. Finally, the chapter builds on social scholar Kevin Hylton's concept of magic thinking to crystallize its key arguments. The case of the UGT threads through these sections, and functions as their analytical anchor.

This chapter hopes to speak to academics and social organizers alike: in order to grasp how solidarity works as a tactical, on-the-ground strategy, it asks academic analyses as well as political organizations to pay thorough attention to the ways in which imaginative practices are embedded within, and structured by, their material contexts.

Counter-World/Worldmaking

To Sylvia Wynter, Black communities in the Americas constructed radical counter-worlds in a "powerful symbolic" response to the enforced diaspora and the afterlives of slavery. Counter, in Wynter's work, implies both going against something, and being part of a larger, overarching worldview. To a certain extent, the counter-worlds of Black nationalism, Garveyism, or radical Black labor movements adhered to the logic of Western worldviews, and, as Paul Gilroy notes, the Western logic of modernity (Wynter 1977; Gilroy 2002). These movements each invoked a teleological, linear approach to time and development, and a sense of identity rooted in either nationalistic, essential conceptions of race, or in the labor divisions enforced, in the first place, by Western rulers and bosses (Wynter 1977; Gilroy 2002; Robinson

1983). At the same time, counter-worlds were very much resistant to dominant hierarchies, and formed a basis for plotting alternative pathways out of dominant economic and social systems. By subversively leveraging existing categories and ideas to set course for new worlds, counter-worlds provided radical alternatives while keeping one foot firmly in prior lived experiences (Wynter 1977).

Political scientist Adom Getachew's concept of "worldmaking" omits the prefix -counter. Still, her concept, like Wynter's, retains an emphasis on ambiguous relations with dominant worlds: to Getachew, anti-colonial national independence movements took dominant Western categories of nationhood to propel a "rethinking of state sovereignty," and to inspire a "far-reaching reconstitution of the postwar international order" (Getachew 2019). In comparison to Wynter, Getachew's concept centers the act of making, and the practice of constructing (counter-)worlds. Still, like the counter-world, Getachew's notion of worldmaking represents a future-oriented framework in which dominant, hierarchical categories and concepts are reinscribed with meaning and subverted by exploited communities (Getachew 2019).

In recent decades, historical scholarship has increasingly cast solidarity as a practice of worldmaking, or of imagining radical alternative futures (Featherstone 2012; Kelley 2002; Carr 2012; Kelliher 2014; Nickels 2014). However, the ambiguous relation to dominant categories and logics that is so explicitly central to Wynter's concept of counter-world, and implicit but essential to Getachew's worldmaking, seems to have gradually dissipated across such works. To scholars such as David Featherstone, Robin Kelley, and Diarmaid Kelliher—who each draw from Getachew's work—worldmaking is strongly associated with utopianism, imagination, and the agency of marginalized actors (Featherstone 2012; Kelley 2002; Kelliher 2014). Featherstone, for instance, casts solidarity as "generative, transformative," as an "agentic practice" in which marginalized groups could actively imagine radical "new relations, new linkages, new connections" (2012, 19). Worldmaking, here, seems to have largely lost its ambiguous but close relation to dominant hierarchies and logics, and is now an almost utopian practice, or something of a free zone in which marginalized actors can escape the confines of their social realities.

It is valuable to acknowledge that past solidarities were indeed transformative practices in which marginalized actors creatively reconfigured existing categories to negotiate new forms of linkage. But over-emphasizing, and singling out, the imaginative, creative, and utopian aspects of solidarity also risks detaching actors' practices of solidarity from the profound

constraints, limitations, and hierarchies these actors encountered on the ground. Casting the actions of the UGT as worldmaking in a strictly utopian, imaginative sense would neglect the fact that the union spent most of its time dealing with practicalities. Its organizers initially spent their days knocking on the doors of every working class house on the island in an attempt to recruit new members (Machado 1930). The labor put into these campaigns to spread the gospel of solidarity was tiresome, and the constituency that arose from these outreach campaigns was conditioned by the linguistic barriers, geographical borders, and the racialized social hierarchies which the union representatives encountered across the island. Other UGT members traveled from island to island to get their hands on fake passports, munition, and all the radical newspapers they could get their hands on (Machado 1930; Urbina 1936). When extra funds were required, Machado would make long phone calls to "his communist boss, Salvador de la Plaza, in Mexico," in an effort to convince him into sending money (Urbina 1936). Where the active concept of worldmaking, as used in recent works on solidarity, conjures up images of global ambition, unbridled imagination and agency, the political activities of UGT members were subjected to chance, harsh social constraints, and favors from sympathizers abroad (Urbina 1936).

Especially in the study of significantly marginalized actors, an overemphasis on actors' capacities to construct and shape their own, wildly ambitious, utopian worlds risks downplaying the pragmatism involved in their political activity. The next section therefore unpacks Antonio Gramsci's concept of enclosure, as it offers a lens for highlighting how suppression and subjugation affect and structure the practices of solidarity of marginalized actors.

Enclosure

Enclosure plays a central role in the writings Gramsci developed in his prison notebooks (Thomas 2018; Green 2011). The concept also marks a key difference between Gramsci's approach to subalternity, and the work produced by the British-Indian school of Subaltern Studies. Where the latter associates subalternity with exclusion—from social infrastructures, political institutions, and media—the writings of Antonio Gramsci describe the subaltern as fundamentally "included" within the social order (Thomas 2018, 863). Included, however, does not mean adequately represented, socially accepted, or politically powerful (Gramsci 2021, 8). Inclusion, instead, points to the enclosure of subaltern groups within the dynamics and relations that

underpin a given social order (Thomas 2018, 863). For Gramsci, subaltern groups exist relationally*;* they are subaltern because they are slotted into a wider social constellation which delegates them to the bottom of certain hierarchies (Thomas 2018; Beyen, Lauwers, and Suodenjoki 2023). Subaltern groups, to Gramsci, are nonetheless an indispensable element to upkeeping social order: their low rank not only legitimizes higher positions, but they also provide important "raw material"—i.e., a source for cheap or free labor, soldiers, servants—for projects that strengthen and consolidate dominant hierarchies, and aid the capitalist order in generating surplus value (2021; Thomas 2018).

Read in this light, the label of "subaltern" aptly applies to the case of Curaçao's oil workforce. After the *Koninklijke Nederlandsche Petroleum Maatschappij* (Dutch Royal Petrol Association, or KNPM)—a predecessor to contemporary multinational company Shell—opened the world's largest oil refinery on the island in 1918, an industrial working class emerged on Curaçao. Over the years, the refinery's labor force diversified: Venezuelan refugees were brought in, as well as workers from Jamaica, Dominica, the Guianas and Trinidad (Soest 1977; Machado 1930). These workers were very much inside dominant economic and political structures: in fact, they were essential to the Curaçaoan—and, by extension, Dutch—economy. In the same vein, the workers were very much included in the island's precise and rigid social hierarchy system: laborers were divided on the basis of race and nationality through spatial segregation and enclosure (Tankbouwer 1929). Meanwhile, "the authorities," wrote Machado, "circulated alarming reports about alleged atrocities committed by black people" to stir fear and negative attitudes towards Black Curaçaoans, and upkeep strict social hierarchies (Machado 1930). Oil workers, being slotted into tight social positions, provided an essential role in keeping the island's inequal social structure in its place. At the same time, they were significantly constrained: refinery workers were forced to accept a low pay, and were subjected to dangerous and limiting conditions (Machado 1930). By 1929, the refinery resembled an open air prison (Machado 1930). Refinery workers had little to no access to political organization, as unions and independent parties were forbidden on the island. Additionally, they were spatially closed off from existing organizations or infrastructures, such as the island's Catholic church, through which they could try to improve their conditions (Machado 1930).

Adopting Gramsci's early conception of subalternity—not excluded but enclosed, and not outside power but locked inside power—offers new approaches to histories of political expression and organization (Beyen,

Lauwers, and Suodenjoki 2023). Firstly, it does away with the binary distinction between a ruling class and an "amorphous mass of the indifferently oppressed," instead pointing towards the complicated hierarchical interrelation of different groups (Thomas 2018, 873). An emphasis of subaltern groups' enclosure within social relations also opens up new ways for understanding the political activities of such groups. To Gramsci, subaltern voices most definitely existed, but they were limited and constrained within dominant hierarchies, and, as such, often filtered and expressed through thick layers of pre-existing "political formations" and categories (Gramsci 2021, 9–10). Subaltern political activity—whether in the form of protest, petitioning, or outright revolt—often utilizes the channels that are most immediately available within its context of strict enclosure. Subaltern political activity is therefore, to Gramsci, structured according to the logics of oppression. As they are, by definition, dependent on their inequal relations with more politically powerful groups, the political activity of subaltern groups often mirrors such existing hierarchies (Thomas 2018, 873).

The concept of enclosure, then, echoes Wynter's counter-world, as both stress that radical movements depend on existing, dominant worldviews and logics. But where Wynter is primarily concerned with language and meaning, Gramsci pays attention to material conditions. Early modern Italian peasants, argues Gramsci, sided with insurgent barons, since linking their own discontent with that of upstart aristocrats allowed these peasants to leverage the resources and power at the disposal of lower noblemen (2021, 25). The peasants' attempts to make new worlds, then, comprised a pragmatic compromise with a more materially advantaged ally. Their attempts to create new meaning, to Gramsci, could not be detached from their material needs and options (2021, 25).

The case of the UGT might also be read as an instance of subaltern political activity channeled through inequal political relations out of material necessity. The UGT was marked by an unequal relationship between gatekeepers, or patrons, with access to resources, and those who depended on them. Gustavo Machado was one of several exiled Venezuelan communists who helped organize the UGT by utilizing his access to anti-imperialist organizations abroad. After being exiled for his resistance to Venezuelan dictator Gómez, Machado had been living in radical melting pots such as Havana and Mexico City (Beltrán, Velásquez, and Meleán 2005, 28). He traveled to Curaçao in May 1929 to help lay the groundwork for an emergent underground union, since anti-imperialist infrastructures on Curaçao would provide a useful launching pad for a coup d'état against Gómez (Machado

1930). Through his connections in radical hubs on Cuba and in Mexico, Machado smuggled resources, funds, weapons, and publications onto Curaçao. Via the support it received from the PRV and the Mexico City-based organizations such as the *Liga Antiimperialista de las Americas* (LADLA; All-America Anti-Imperialist League), the UGT was able to bypass local colonial infrastructures and access the material resources required to carve out a space in which workers of different nationalities, colors, and genders could interact and organize outside of the island's dominant institutions (Machado 1930; Urbina 1936).

Although radical patrons thus broadened local workers' access to resources, Machado and his colleagues from the PRV and the LADLA maintained an implicit veto right over the union's core policies, since most UGT members depended on their political patronage. Prescribing working class solidarity as the central focus and foundational basis of the UGT, Machado hoped to bridge a complex local set of racialized, gendered, and national divisions. But imposing this singular category of class over all else also obscured the other social divisions that the union's members were experiencing. In the wake of the June 6 raid, some of these neglected social fault lines came out in the open. With the uprising in full throttle, and with weapons distributed among various groups active in the UGT, the insurgents' direct dependence on patrons such as Machado fell away (Machado 1930; *De Tribune* 1929). As a result, the rebels' emphasis on class solidarity—which Machado had prescribed beforehand, and, inadvertently or not, imposed in return for access to resources—largely dissolved (Machado 1930). Venezuelans focused on their Venezuelan coup and embraced what Machado deemed a "bourgeois" nationalist mindset. Black Curaçaoan workers, meanwhile, spurred other Black Curaçaoans to topple the racialized colonial hierarchy of Curaçao (Machado 1930). The fact that the UGT shattered and broke into sections organized on the basis of other social categories than class, then, suggests that the workers' broad adherence to Machado's course of action had, in part, arisen from pragmatism—not unlike the Italian peasants' allegiance with local aristocrats.

To speak with Wynter—and with scholars such as Featherstone and Kelley—the UGT practiced solidarity as worldmaking, as it re-signified the category of labor, and imbued it with revolutionary potential. By building on the Gramscian notion of enclosure to embed the UGT's practices of worldmaking within their material constraints and conditions, however, important questions regarding power arise—questions that help clarify the swift dissolution of the UGT during its uprising. Whose "agentic practices,"

to speak with Featherstone, were we looking at before the organization fractured? Machado's? Those of the Curaçaoan oil workers? Or a momentary compromise between the two? Who, furthermore, had the power to pick which fundamental ideas or social categories were to be re-signified, and to promote the world that was to be put into practice? Connecting imaginative practices to the adjacent pragmatic actions performed within, and filtered through, enclosed social contexts and material conditions helps comprehend what processes occur when movements attempt to translate their vision of utopia into reality, or turn solidarity-as-imagining into solidarity-as-repertoire.

"Magic Thinking" and Conclusions

As the case of the UGT exemplifies, solidarity practices are, with Featherstone, profoundly "generative" and "transformative," since they help imagine new political communities, social systems, and worldviews (2012). The enclosure in which such generative practices of worldmaking take place, however, significantly structures the way in which solidarity-as-imagining is eventually translated into solidarity-as-repertoire. The solidarity-as-imagining practiced by the UGT was rooted in class and given shape by Machado and the union's patrons. In spite of the union's explicit openness to members of all colors, genders, and nationalities, it hardly represented a vision of a "world where many worlds fit," to speak with the Zapatistas. After Curaçaoan workers could freely access weapons following the raid, their need for radical patrons fell away, and conflicting visions and worlds came to the surface. An attention for racialized difference, which had been overshadowed within the imagined world promoted by the UGT, broke through. The crowning achievement of the UGT's solidarity-as-repertoire—rallying the island's working class to perform a double revolution—failed to follow the union's imaginary "counter-world" rooted in class, which left Machado astounded (Machado 1930).

By wishing away complex, on-the-ground intersections of difference and subjugation in favor of a monolithic focus on class, Machado adopted an approach to emancipation which, in the terms of sociologist Kevin Hylton, could be characterized as "magical." "Magic thinking," a concept Hylton uses to critically describe some contemporary interpretations of social justice, is magical in the sense that it imagines alternative realities and better futures and expects these to become reality through sheer human will. By purely relying on wishful thinking and outlining new visions, Hylton argues, social

justice movements sometimes fail to account for the ways in which the material infrastructures in which they are embedded obstruct, structure and shape potential pathways to these new realities (Hylton 2009). Machado saw the category of class as a self-evident basis for anti-imperialist action, and as the breeding ground for the liberation of both Curaçao and Venezuela. In taking class as its sole rallying point, however, the UGT adopted something of a color-blind stance, even though racialized, gendered, and national fault lines still proved essential to the social structure of the island and the lived experiences of its members (*De Tribune* 1929). By going overboard with solidarity-as-imagining and neglecting the on-the-ground constraints that would affect implementing its ideas into a functioning solidarity-as-repertoire, the UGT succumbed to a somewhat magical approach to reality.

Hylton's notion of "magic thinking" also provides a basis for critiquing the shift that has marked recent scholarship on solidarity: the shift from worldmaking as a practice related closely to dominant systems and hierarchies to an approach to worldmaking that disproportionately emphasizes imagination and utopian thinking. As this chapter has pointed out, a return to the ambiguity enshrined in Wynters' counter-world and Getachew's worldmaking, and a move towards analyzing utopian, imaginative practices within the material conditions and limitations—or enclosure—in which they occurred, could significantly enrich scholarly understandings of solidarity. Scholarship that negates conditions of enclosure and the influence of such conditions on both solidarity-as-imagining and solidarity-as-repertoire, may fail to account for significant on-the-ground conditions that limit and structure human action (Hylton 2009).

Finally, Hylton's critique of "magical" thinking could also provide handles for practitioners of solidarity themselves. As anthropologist Arturo Escobar argues, today's unprecedented ecological challenges require "sophisticated conjunctions" of different knowledges (2018). To Escobar, tackling global systems of exploitation necessitates a pluriversal approach, in which unified action goes hand in hand with the nurturing of a wide diversity of worldviews and ways of living. Relying on a magical belief in which imagining something is enough to make the imagined thing real, it is all too easy to forget the power dynamics and hierarchies that allow some visions of the world to flourish, and force other people to filter their experiences, to speak with Gramsci, through the logics and worlds promoted and reiterated by more powerful social groups. A pluriversal approach, then, requires ample attention to the obstructions and practicalities that structure on-the-ground action.

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Lawen and Ontological Struggles: Memories, Territories, and Epistemic Conflicts in Patagonia

Kaia Santisteban

This chapter aims to understand how partially connected worlds (Strathern 2005, 28) are articulated and disarticulated in their ways of understanding the world, revealing tensions and possibilities in the coexistence of epistemological, ontological, and ideological differences (Blaser 2010; Law 2015; Briones 2019). To this end, I analyze the struggles surrounding the defense of *lawen* (Mapuche medicine) as a contested space that exposes ontological and epistemic boundaries within specific sociopolitical contexts.[31] These struggles, deeply rooted in divergent conceptions of health, territory, history, and citizenship, articulate demands for the ontological and epistemic self-determination of the Mapuche-Tehuelche people in Patagonia, Argentina.

To frame this analysis, I connect the concept of the pluriverse with key authors such as Arturo Escobar (2015) and Marisol de la Cadena (2015). Both reflect on the pluriverse as a space of alliances among heterogeneous worlds negotiating their coexistence in diversity, challenging the notion of a single world. The pluriverse requires a political transformation that recognizes relationships among multiple worlds, including non-human agents as legitimate actors. In general terms, these authors propose that worlds interweave, co-produce, and mutually affect one another through partial connections. This is challenging in contexts dominated by hegemonic conceptions. In response, Escobar (2015, 35) posits the historical possibility of a significant alternative project: envisioning globality as a strategy to protect and promote the pluriverse. This strategy, referred to as the "political activation of relationality" (Blaser, De la Cadena, and Escobar 2009),

[31] The term *lawen* in *Mapuzugun* (the Mapuche language) means medicine or remedies made from medicinal plants and other natural elements such as water, earth, animals, and minerals. However, its meaning extends beyond the material realm: it encompasses therapeutic and ceremonial practices performed by key figures in Mapuche medicine, such as the *machi* and *lawuentuchefe*, who play a fundamental role in healing and caregiving processes. This chapter does not present an ethnobotanical analysis of the healing properties of the plants used, as that knowledge is a carefully guarded legacy of the Mapuche-Tehuelche people.

suggests forms of action that recognize and strengthen the multiple relationships among diverse worlds.

In this framework, lawen is an example of how these interactions challenge the dominant dualistic ontology by configuring a pluriverse of interconnected, though often asymmetrical, worlds. These alliances allow us to imagine fairer forms of coexistence that respect the rights of Indigenous communities and expand the possibilities for negotiating diverse practices. However, when working with various communities and families of the Mapuche-Tehuelche people located across the provinces of Neuquén, Río Negro, and Chubut, it is essential to understand the memory processes associated with lawen.[32] A key aspect of these processes lies in how the historical narratives and contemporary practices of the Mapuche-Tehuelche people challenge the dominant ontologies imposed during the Indigenous genocide in Patagonia (Delrio 2011, 2023; Lenton et.al. 2015; Perez 2019). This process represents the "Conquest of the Desert." This military campaign, carried out in the second half of the nineteenth century, aimed to exterminate and forcibly displace Indigenous peoples from Patagonia in order to expand the Argentine nation-state. The period was also marked by processes of evangelization and the imposition of hegemonic institutions such as the Christian church, formal education, and Western biomedicine. As a relational practice, lawen is embedded within a broader framework of resistance and identity reconstruction in the face of colonial policies that devalued Indigenous knowledge and marginalized central figures like the *machi* (philosophical authorities of the Mapuche-Tehuelche).

From this perspective, working with the memories of genocide involves not only recovering critical events (Das 1995) that marked systematic violence and forced migrations but also recognizing how these experiences shaped subjectivities that persist in current struggles for epistemological and ontological self-determination (Ramos 2010). The processes of evangelization and biomedical hegemony eroded lawen practices and created a field of dissent and negotiation where what I call "coexistences" emerge in healthcare settings (Santisteban 2024). The pluriverse provides a lens for analyzing how these memories are not merely recollections of the past but living threads that weave diverse worlds together and propose alternatives to

[32] My interest in memory studies solidified in 2012 when I joined the Group for the Study of Alterized and Subordinated Memories (GEMAS), which focuses on reconstructing political-affective memories in contexts of asymmetric power (Ramos and Rodríguez, 2020). These experiences were pivotal in shaping my doctoral project.

the singular conception of health and well-being. By politically activating relationality (Blaser, De la Cadena, and Escobar 2009), the struggles surrounding lawen become practices that not only resist but also build possibilities for fairer coexistences, where the memories of the Mapuche-Tehuelche people, linked to their ancestral medicine, reclaim their place in the present. These themes are central to my doctoral project, where I seek not only to understand political projects related to intercultural health but also to explore how the knowledge of lawen has persisted through daily practices and stories passed down through generations. I examine how the Mapuche-Tehuelche people resist their memory becoming lost to oblivion (Derrida 1997) and how they transform it into a political resource for reclaiming the past and articulating contemporary struggles. These memories have been pivotal in territorial demands, the defense of ecosystems, and the recovery of ancestral medical practices, underscoring the importance of ontological pluralism as a political horizon.

This work is structured around several ethnographic experiences that illustrate the tensions and coexistences between Mapuche perspectives on the relationship with Nature, the environment, water, territory, and the medicine associated with these elements, and the biomedical and developmental policies that often exacerbate sociocultural asymmetries and inequalities. These experiences allow for an analysis of how Mapuche communities confront, negotiate, and reconfigure these tensions, highlighting the dynamics of resistance and potential spaces of articulation between these seemingly disparate approaches.

The Actions of *Trekaleyiiñ ka inkaleyiiñ Chubut ñi lewfu* to Protect the Chubut River

In February 2024, I had the opportunity to join, along with other colleagues from GEMAS (Group for the Study of Alterized and Subordinated Memories), a collective action initiated by Mapuche-Tehuelche communities in the province of Chubut, Argentina, to defend the only river that traverses the entire province. The Chubut River provides water to many families, communities, and cities along its banks. However, in recent years, it has become increasingly polluted due to various factors, including waste contamination, large-scale mining projects, and tourist exploitation. In response, the communities organized a public action to denounce the devastation of the water and to raise collective awareness about how to engage with and care for the river. These gatherings along the Chubut River

brought together Mapuche-Tehuelche communities and environmental organizations to advocate for water and territorial defense. They also highlighted how relational Mapuche worlds oppose extractivist and privatizing practices characteristic of modernist ontology. This initiative, named in the Mapuche language *Trekaleyiiñ ka inkaleyiiñ Chubut ñi lewfu* (Walking and Defending the Chubut River), provides a key example of how struggles for territories are also struggles to defend the pluriverse.

Before dawn on February 6, participants in the *trawün* (gathering) were awakened by the sound of the *kull kull* (a Mapuche instrument). Gathered around the fire, we prepared to walk to the banks of the Chubut River, where the *llellipun* (ceremony) would take place. Once the leather of the *kultrün* (ceremonial drum) was warmed, we organized ourselves into two lines—one of *pu zomo* (women) and one of *pu wentrü* (men)—and walked along a path through wetlands and springs. It was the first time a ceremony had been held at this *lelfun* (river). The central theme of this ceremony and the subsequent trawün was articulated by the *papay* (elder woman) Maria Luisa Winkaleo, who, concerned about the future of coming generations, asked, "What will we leave our children if we let the *ngen* [spirits who give us strength] die?"

In the same way as inhabitants of the Peruvian Andes consider mountains to be living beings or people in Paraguay consider the animals of the forest to be spirits for their communities, in the Mapuche conception, water is a living being that has its own forces. Its destruction or contamination is difficult to understand from a hegemonic conception of Nature, which only sees water as a resource. Similarly, making public these types of arguments in which it is declared that it is necessary to defend the *ngen co* (spirit of water) is difficult for Mapuche people since they are trivialized or ridiculed by people who deem their view of reality as nothing but cultural believes (Blaser and De la Cadena 2018, 2).

During the trawün, participants detailed the various ventures endangering the vitality of the Chubut River: hydroelectric dam projects, lead mining, cattle feeding operations, and river diversions by landowners and private enterprises. As news was exchanged, the conversation repeatedly emphasized the lack of information. "Misinformation is the control strategy chosen by various governments," concluded the participants. Communities from Costa del Chubut and surrounding areas shared their methods for gathering information, such as continuous land surveying, speaking with workers, investigating boundary markers and signage, and consulting clues with experts from other places. These practices often helped to render visible plans for polluting and extractive projects long before the proponents made

them public. Phrases such as "They want to privatize water control" and "They don't care about life in any way" were voiced repeatedly. The focus then shifted to the need for unity to strategize and gather information: "What we're doing is for everyone. And in this way, we bring together *kimün* (knowledge) and *newen* (strength of Nature)," said Eusebio Antieco.

In the face of projects seeking to privatize the land and its beings, the communities underscored the importance of ancestral kimün as a guide for any struggle. This knowledge, centered on life and health, encompasses expertise in nutrition, collective labor practices, and ways of relating to the *ngen* (spirits) of the surrounding environment. Alongside these discussions, it was emphasized how lawen extends beyond health, becoming an integral practice of territorial care where ancestral knowledge guides strategies of resistance and articulation. Thus, a shared understanding emerged: protecting water and territories is the only way to safeguard life for future generations. In this context, defending lawen involves more than preserving ancestral medicine; it means protecting the ontological and epistemic foundations of a relational world that challenges dominant narratives of development projects that would pollute the river's water. These struggles thus reaffirm the right to a pluriversal future where the coexistence of many worlds is possible. As one *longko* (authority) noted:

> lawen is also the spirituality of the Mapuche people. That's why I reflected on how all these demands are interconnected and how the state has fragmented them, reducing them to mere cultural claims. Of course, everything is tied to the territory. Without territory, preserving all of this becomes nearly impossible. Without territory, there is no lawen. Without territory, practicing spirituality cannot truly happen—it would be exceedingly difficult. I understand that societies adapt, but in the process, the essence is lost ... (Millan, personal interview 2022).

As Escobar points out, each world is enacted through specific practices that transcend the influence of modernity (2015, 34). These struggles for relational territories can be interpreted as contributions to the ecological and cultural transitions necessary to build a pluriverse: a constellation of partially connected worlds that resist reduction to a single model of development. By articulating common commitments between Mapuche communities and environmental organizations, these efforts not only denounce the ecological and social crisis caused by extractivism but also reaffirm the idea of territories as spaces of life, hope, and freedom. The actions of Trekaleyiiñ ka inkaleyiiñ Chubut ñi lewfu to protect the Chubut River seek to achieve the latter.

Challenges to articulate

Another of the discussions where I observed ontological and epistemological tensions is in the articulations and disarticulations that emerge between Mapuche medicine, understood as relational, and biomedicine, representing a hegemonic conception of health. In this section, I will analyze the perspectives of those who navigate their health-illness processes through Mapuche medicine, biomedicine, or a combination of both. Here, I draw on the experiences of several Mapuche interlocutors from different communities in Puelmapu (Argentina) and insights gained from visiting key figures at the first Intercultural Health Hospital, called Raguiñ Kien, located in Ruca Choroy, Neuquén Province.

At Raguiñ Kien, inaugurated in 2021 in Ruca Choroy, machi and medical doctors work together to address the health-illness processes of both Mapuche and non-Mapuche patients. This health center employs a model of care based on an intercultural approach, aiming to integrate and complement Mapuche medicine with biomedicine. This initiative has only been implemented in Neuquén, as in other Mapuche communities in Río Negro and Chubut, interculturality in health remains an emerging topic of discussion and negotiation. For instance, some interlocutors from Chubut communities remarked:

> At times, one feels as if committing a crime. I remember once when a *peñi* [brother] had become quadriplegic after being crushed by a horse. I had to stand at the door so that Aurora, his sister, could treat him because he had bedsores—his bones were even visible. She was determined, saying, 'I have to bring this mapu lawen.' I said, 'Alright, I'll guard the door.' We had tried talking to the doctor, reasoning with him, but he refused to cooperate. Still, we decided to go ahead. So, I stood watch, ensuring she could carry out her work—her healing of her brother—without the doctors seeing her. They wouldn't allow her to treat him. We were always hiding. There are countless situations like this, where coexistence was non-existent. But I'm speaking of twenty or thirty years ago. Over time, things have changed a little (Millan, personal interview 2022).

Other Mapuche women said:

> Lawen has always been in our families, but it remained hidden. It was a matter of the doctor arriving and not being able to tell them what plants one takes. Not sharing. That's why now we are finding a place of dignity for our lawen. (Calfinahuel, personal interview 2023)

> We personally do believe in a coexistence between both medicines, because it also depends on who you are. How you will stand your ground when a doctor tries to impose something on you that you don't want and that you want to accept something else. That has to do with who the person is … I heard Machi María say that she no longer wants to waste time explaining things to white people or to people who don't understand medicine. So, I kind of followed her steps as well. They see it as something strange, something unknown, something amazing. But for us, it's something natural that continues to be used. It was never lost. Among families that know each other, it's like a trusted conversation about lawen. But with a doctor who doesn't know you, no, it has to be very organic to be able to share; otherwise, don't even talk, because it's a waste of time and they'll be the ones to start putting obstacles later. So, it's better not to say anything. My mom was very distrustful of what some doctors say. No one can tell you anything, because you have the right to live your life the way you want and to choose your health. (Fermin, personal interview 2023).

> We have been affected in the sense that we have been deprived, restricted, confined, deprived of our healing, our lawen, the collection of lawen, the ability to visit our machi to continue solving our physical problems. We've been affected in different ways, spiritually, in health, mentally in many ways, because we are very spiritual people … we've been deprived of being ourselves, and the state doesn't understand this part … We do recognize that sometimes we need the doctor's help, for the doctor to give us a view of the illness, and we give them another view. And sometimes that's what we want, the comparison of what we do versus the diagnosis given by the doctor, and maybe we have a better diagnosis than the doctor, don't we? (Ñancucheo, personal interview 2021)

On the other hand, in the Ruca Choroy community, these issues began escalating in the level of discussion. The Mapuche communities in the area started fifteen years ago by presenting a demand to the provincial government for the construction of a health center that would integrate both medicines, Mapuche medicine and biomedicine. This led to the inauguration, in 2021, of the country's first intercultural hospital, combining the knowledge of Mapuche political and philosophical authorities, health agents, and actors from the Neuquén Ministry of Health. There were many instances of organization, negotiations, and discussions with the state in terms of health. Some workers at this hospital report that it was a process filled with tensions and discussions with representatives of biomedicine, because they had different views on what health is and how to carry out the work in this space: "It was a lot of fighting and meetings. It was not easy for them to accept the hospital in the shape of a crescent moon, they wanted it to be a square building" (Calfinahuel, personal interview 2023).

Ricardo Peña, five times longko of his community and now a member of the management team of the Ranguiñ Kien, recalls that when he was a child and went with his mother to the doctor for a stomach pain, which could also be a sore throat, the doctor would often ask contemptuously him: "You haven't been poisoned by some medicinal herb, have you?" However, now in his community, there is a health care space that recognizes lawen as a medicine:

> The request was part of the life project our elders assumed in 1995, when we began a process of territorial recovery … Then we started to project a health and education system, community-based tourism, livestock. Without territory, it would be impossible to talk about all of this (Peña 2021).

In Ruca Choroi, there are 460 families, mostly Mapuche, who will now be able to choose to be treated by Western medicine (biomedicine), Mapuche medicine, or a combination of both. In this hospital, general practitioners, Mapuche specialists such as machi and *lawentuchefe* (specialist in medicinal plants), bone setters, and midwives work together. The Raguiñ Kien intercultural hospital represents a key space for exploring the tensions and opportunities that arise when integrating biomedicine with Mapuche medicine. This unique space in Argentina allows health-illness processes to be addressed from an intercultural perspective, recognizing both the importance of spirituality and relational balance in Mapuche health and the technical contributions of biomedicine. However, this effort is not without ontological and epistemological challenges that reflect deep differences in how health is understood and practiced.

On the one hand, Mapuche medicine is characterized by its relational approach, where lawen*,* ngen, and newen are fundamental for maintaining harmony between people, territories, and spiritual forces. On the other hand, biomedicine operates from a hegemonic paradigm that prioritizes scientific objectivity and tends to separate the physical from the spiritual. These differences create tensions but also open up possibilities for dialogue, as demonstrated by the structure of Raguiñ Kien, which integrates both Mapuche health agents and biomedical professionals.

Gabriela Calfinahuel's (health center worker) testimony illustrates how this dialogue involves not only medical practices but also an act of dignification and the visibility of historically delegitimized knowledge. The architectural form of the hospital, crescent moon-shaped, reflects Mapuche principles, demonstrating resistance to the state's imposition of a square design. Likewise, the legal recognition of Mapuche personnel as part of the public health system represents a significant advance, although challenges

persist, such as the full integration of machi and the overcoming of prejudices towards ancestral medicine.

This experience can be understood in terms of what Escobar calls transitions to the pluriverse (2015, 28). These transitions involve creating spaces where multiple ways of understanding and practicing health coexist, and where tensions are not obstacles but starting points for building more equitable relationships. As Ricardo Peña points out, Mapuche medicine, intertwined with spirituality and balance with the environment, is not learned from books, but is lived and transmitted within the community. Therefore, its inclusion in Raguiñ Kien is not merely a matter of technical complementarity but an acknowledgment of the ontological richness it can bring to the ecological and cultural transitions needed to face contemporary crisis.

The reform of the constitution of Neuquén province in 2006, recognizing interculturality and the rights of Indigenous peoples, provides a crucial legal framework for initiatives like Raguiñ Kien. However, as the stories of Calfinahuel and Peña show, these policies must be constantly defended and expanded to ensure that intercultural practices are not reduced to symbolic coexistence but truly transform health systems and strengthen the bond between people, territories, and relational worlds. As Mauro Millan, longko of a Mapuche community, points out: "We are not talking about better or worse medicines, because evidently, one medicine could coexist with the other."

In daily life, this collaborative work is still a process of much learning about how to build diagnoses on health-illness processes from both perspectives. Therefore, I bring this example into the analysis to propose how the activation of Escobar's relationality is a way of understanding these scenarios of communication, articulation, and disarticulation. These cases illustrate how the struggles for lawen reflect ontological and epistemic tensions between Indigenous and hegemonic worldviews. They also highlight the limits of intercultural projects that, while promoting dialogue, often fail to fully recognize the ontological self-determination of Indigenous peoples.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have argued that lawen is a space of ontological dispute, where memories, knowledge, and practices converge, contests the logic of the hegemonic system or biomedicine. These disputes not only have local implications but also resonate with broader struggles in Latin America for the

recognition of pluriversal worlds (Blaser 2010; Boaventura 2007; Gudynas 2012). The intercultural challenges in spaces seeking to integrate biomedicine with Mapuche medicine should not be understood in terms of a hierarchy between one medicine and another, but rather as an opportunity to explore coexistence and dialogue between different forms of knowledge. It is not about one medicine being better than the other; rather, it is about recognizing how both can coexist and complement each other's approaches, respecting the different ontologies and epistemologies that underlie them. In this context, the notion of the pluriverse, proposed by anthropologist Arturo Escobar, becomes a useful tool for understanding intercultural processes in health. The pluriverse not only recognizes the plurality of ways of life but also values the diversity of knowledge and worldviews. Linking the idea of the pluriverse with the concrete examples of intercultural challenges mentioned highlights how tensions can give rise to new forms of coexistence and mutual respect between different worldviews and health practices. In this sense, lawen, defined by the Mapuche people themselves as a relational medicine,[33] and biomedicine, as the hegemonic conception of health, represent two worlds that, though different, can interact and enrich each other in a space of respect and collaboration.

At the same time, it is important to recognize, as Annemarie Mol (2002) reminds us, that even when it comes to the hegemonic medical system it is necessary to understand the particularities of this system in each context, hospital, or health center. From a pluralist perspective, it could be argued that each of these worlds encompasses, in itself, a multiplicity of worlds. Therefore, I return to Mol's (2002) reflections on the multiplicity of realities that exist in the ways of living different health practices, to offer a final reflection. It is necessary to keep in mind that each of these worlds is also heterogeneous, with differences in their historical trajectories and the places they inhabit or in which they are established. The challenge for the Social Sciences in general, and for anthropology in particular, is to produce diagnoses that not only shed light on epistemic inequalities but also promote more equitable ways of understanding the different scenarios of coexistence. This implies recognizing the structural asymmetries that condition intercultural dialogues and valuing subaltern memories as essential resources for the creation of alternative worlds where "many worlds fit." We must also

[33] I understand the relational meaning here as explained by the Mapuche people because it means a relationship between humans and nonhumans, kinship, and ancestors. This characteristic is constitutive of the Mapuche being and their way of life. In turn, the relational nature of lawen responds to the relationships between different organizations, biomedical spaces, and lof (communities) that have emerged.

take into account the heterogeneities and intersectionalities of social cleavages (Viveros Vigoya 2016), since these impact both inequalities and processes of subjectivation, not only between different worlds but also within each of them.

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Practicing Environmental Care: Migrant Women's and the Struggle Against Intersectional Inequalities in the Reconquista River Basin

María Belén López

The ways in which contemporary environmental challenges impact the plurality of ways of living, and how they are being contested, are not univocal. On the one hand, the same environmental issue affects populations unequally (Gudynas 2004). In Latin-America, a region that is a major focus of resource extraction that are leading to a wide variety of environmental problems, besides the socio-economic conditions and the colonial and geopolitical history, gender relations play an important role in defining scenarios of intersectional inequalities (Crenshaw 1991). This is the result either of the fact that these historical structural inequalities leave women in disadvantaged social, cultural, and economic positions, or because they are the ones in charge of the pre- and post-care work produced by environmental problems (Resurrección 2017). This leaves women, particularly those forced to migrate (IPCC 2020), in an exceptionally precarious position and high exposure to the impact of ecological destruction, pollution or other environmental issues. Nevertheless, women within marginalized groups are not at all passive when it comes to contesting these issues. Saba Mahmood (2001) encourages us to think outside the box of hegemonic feminist theory and not understand this structural frame as a total limitation to subaltern women. Instead, we can find different ways in which Latin American women from socially marginalized groups confront environmental and climate issues by considering the experiences of women residing in non-urban areas (Vazquez García et. al 2016).

This chapter is based on research conducted from 2019 to 2022 in the peri-urban areas of the Greater Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area (AMBA, in its Spanish acronym), specifically in the Reconquista Area (RA), as part of a Participatory Action Research project (Rahman and Fals Borda 1989) called *Migrantas en Reconquista* (Female Migrants in Reconquista).[34] RA

[34] My positionality as an anthropologist and doctoral researcher shaped this study: while initially an outsider, I engaged in reciprocal collaboration with RA women through shared knowledge and workshops in community kitchens and social organizations. The text uses interlocutors'

comprises more than fifteen neighborhoods that have been built on wetlands of the contaminated Reconquista River basin and is situated directly adjacent to the largest open garbage dump in the country, the CEAMSE Norte III.[35] The area is inhabited by a predominantly migrant population that came from rural areas in neighboring countries (e.g., Paraguay and Bolivia), as well as northern provinces of Argentina. In this peripheral urban area, they encounter new kinds of socio-economic and socio-environmental inequalities that are affecting their lives in varying ways. Migrant women feel the brunt of these inequalities particularly strongly, as they face compounded environmental risks due to their gender and socioeconomic position. Care obligations and economic marginality prolong their exposure to hazards in contaminated neighborhoods, while precarious work intensifies their vulnerability, creating new forms of embodied inequalities.

By exploring these migrant women's experiences, this chapter seeks to render visible these intersectional inequalities and understand how their practices and actions contribute to the construction of socio-environmental improvements in contexts of urban marginality. How do rural migrant women in urban settings navigate their relationships with these issues? What diverse worldviews emerge from their responses to environmental challenges? By answering these questions, I aim to shed light on the potential and limitations of community-based environmental stewardship practices, such as waste recycling cooperatives and flood prevention through collective labor. These practices emerge in contexts in which women challenge top-down environmental management and offer a response to dominant narratives that organize the world in patriarchal and socioeconomic ways. The chapter thus shows how these experiences differ from that of non-hegemonic women in non-urban contexts to contribute to the discussion on worldmaking and the agency of marginalized women in shaping environmental narratives and practices.

To address these tense scenarios containing a plurality of inequalities while displaying innovative forms of worldmaking, I will first offer a brief historical overview of women's grassroots organizing in Argentina that shapes the environmental engagement of the women studied here. Subsequently, I will delve into the question of how care labor is configured

direct voices (first-person quotes), third-person analysis for theoretical analysis derived from ethnographic observation, and 'we' only for co-designed actions, reflecting PAR's tension between rigor and situated knowledge.

[35] It is an acronym for the name of the garbage dump: *Coordinación Ecológica Área Metropolitana - Sociedad del Estado* (Metropolitan Area Ecological Coordination - State Company).

through intersectional and community-based frameworks and how this shapes migrant women's unequal exposure to environmental hazards and their collective responses to them. I will then analyze how environmental problems are contested through community organization, highlighting how women's gendered care work and resulting prolonged neighborhood exposure both heightens their vulnerability and fuels collective responses that transcend individualized care. Finally, I will explore how RA women resignify these practices as political acts, despite their unpaid and precarious conditions.

Women's Grassroots Political Action Frameworks in Argentina

Although environmental issues affect the entire population of the RA, my focus on women does not mean that the experiences of men are ignored. Rather, it responds to the fact that structural gender inequalities, along with poverty and urban marginality, place women in situations of greater exposure and vulnerability. This context is reflected in the prominence of women in socio-community organizations that have historically worked to improve living conditions in the area (RENATEP 2022).

As Andujar (2010) notes, women from marginalized groups have played an active and leading role in local social movements, better known as "piquetero movements." The women involved in these grassroots movements struggled against the neoliberal model of the 1990s. Their participation was characterized by collective political action demanding from the state measures to improve their increasingly precarious living conditions. Considering the socio-historical context of institutional ties between the state and marginalized popular sectors[36]—ties that had existed since the mid twentieth century—we can observe a weaking of these bonds under the neoliberal governments of the 1990s. After the 2001 crisis, these relationships were partially restored (Ferraudi Curto 2014; Masson 2004). With the assistance of a series of programs that enabled them to stabilize their incomes, the popular sectors began to participate in cooperative work, which is now predominantly female-dominated, with 58 percent of its members being women (RENATEP 2022). Despite its importance in providing work and income to these sectors, this kind of labor did suffer an important decline in economic and symbolic loss of value. Such a loss can be linked to the

[36] In Latin American critical theory, particularly in Argentina, 'popular sectors' refers to marginalized, impoverished, racialized and segregated groups that organize collective survival strategies outside of formal economies. I use the term in this tradition.

marginality of the socio-economic groups that do this work and the lower value ascribed to community care compared to productive forms of labor. This testifies to the existence of gender inequality within the cooperative hierarchy (Fournier 2017; Zibecchi 2019; Bottini and Sciarretta 2019; López and Rajoy 2022).

In their role of organizing for the sustainability of their communities, in a practice that addresses food, health, and socio-environmental needs, women assume a disproportionate burden of domestic and community care (López, 2022, López and Rajoy 2022). This labor is intrinsically tied to efforts to address socio-environmental challenges, where they assume a disproportionate role in domestic and community care. The position of leading and putting in action different community care practices imposes a significantly greater burden on their daily lives compared to women from more privileged socioeconomic sectors, who are active in other kind of domestic structures.

Care Work and Migrant Women's Experiences Facing Environmental Issues

The disparities in the organization of care between women from marginalized socioeconomic sectors and those from more advantaged sectors have been evidenced in numerous studies. Research has demonstrated the particular forms of care in marginalized groups, linked to family and household structures that are different from the more hegemonic ones: blended families, community child raising, blurred household boundaries, and the use of the family as a family unit (Collier and Yanagisako 1987; Fonseca 2006). Marega and Vera Vega (2023) developed the concept of "domestic-community politicality" to explain how women workers in the popular economy in Mexico configure collective spaces within these frameworks, challenging the distinction between public and private and highlighting cooperation and care. Locally, Aiello (2022) highlighted the permeability of household boundaries in RA at the intersection of unpaid care work and work in community-based social organizations. Thus, in these contexts, the distinction between public and private is blurred in the everyday life of the household (Pacífico 2019; Roig 2020). In line with these authors, the present analysis argues that although there are walls that separate the inside from the outside of the home, the boundary between public and private in these sectors needs to be rethought. In this sense, interventions in the environment they live in extend their care politics to territories that include and transcend their homes,

mobilizing their bodies, networks, and multiple resources. At the same time, they overload their lives with the investment of time, money and extra energy involved in care (Pérez Orozco 2006), which remains feminized and precarious, even more so for community care workers and migrant women (Rosas 2018).

Moreover, as my fieldwork has shown, women tend to allocate a greater proportion of their time to their neighborhoods. This tendency is attributable to several factors. Firstly, women are responsible for domestic care, which occupies a significant portion of their time. Secondly, their participation in community activities is strongly related to childcare, which is equally time-consuming. Thirdly, the characteristics of their occupations, which are informal and precarious, similar to those of men's jobs, tend to offer more flexible working hours. The latter refers principally to domestic work, which is the predominant labor activity of women in these neighborhoods. This type of work is frequently intermittent, which makes it more amenable to childcare scheduling. It is important to recognize that in contexts such as the RA the provision of care encompasses the attention and assistance allocated to health conditions stemming from environmental and climatic issues that impact the community. Consequently, the allocation of a greater proportion of their time to the neighborhood, as well as the assumption of direct responsibility for the well-being of individuals facing health challenges, establishes a nexus of exposure between them and environmental issues, or "double exposure" with regard to these hazards.

Additionally, women play a key role in environmental improvement processes such as waste management, the construction of drinking water networks, and sanitation of public spaces. These initiatives usually begin with the creation of community soup kitchens and then extend to environmental and infrastructure problems, with women also leading work teams and groups. However, these practices take place in contexts of precarious work and invisibility, reproducing not only exposure to environmental issues, but also patterns of inequality widely criticized in feminist theory of the organization of care (Colen 1995; Comas D'Argemir 2014; Zibecchi 2019; Faur 2024).

Migrant Women's Collective Responses to Socio-Environmental Inequalities in the RA

The concept of environmental justice has been used to promote an equitable distribution of social responsibilities and environmental damages (Bullard

1990). In Latin America, the concept has acquired a particular meaning in relation to the dynamics of neo-extractivism and colonial heritage. These amplify environmental injustices by linking them to racial, gender and socio-economic inequalities in the context of the region's colonial history and the contemporary destruction of biodiversity, high concentration of land ownership, capital and technology, and the low demand for peasant labor, leading to the dispossession of peasant and indigenous lands (Moncada Paredes and Mancheno 2021). This makes the displacement of these sectors to metropolitan peripheries understandable.

This reality permeates RA migrants' lives throughout their migratory trajectories. Although climatic conditions are not highlighted in their narratives as reasons for migration, they are part of the precarious situations that they face in their places of origin and the places to which they moved. In the former, increasing industrial concentration in agriculture and livestock farming and worsening environmental phenomena undermined the socioeconomic opportunities of their communities. Confronted with this reality and the ever-present option of migrating to large urban centers like AMBA in search of "better opportunities" those who could migrate did so. They ultimately settled in RA neighborhoods adjacent to the CEAMSE Norte III open dump, amidst chronic waste accumulation within their own blocks and the contaminated wetlands of the Reconquista River basin.

This complex scenario combines waste management failures, air pollution, flood risks from their riverside location, precarious urban infrastructure, and soil contamination from the polluted river, all factors leading to material losses and health complications including pulmonary diseases, skin conditions, dengue fever, and chronic diarrhea (Curutchet, Grinberg and Gutiérrez 2012). These environmental burdens reflect deeper inequalities stemming from real estate speculation and unequal urban development patterns that socially and environmentally marginalize vulnerable populations in a context in which local degradation is exacerbated by global climate change.

Responses to these forms of socio-environmental marginalization come from a network of associations of which there is a high concentration in San Martín, the district of Buenos Aires in which the RA is located. These organize different formats of social and solidarity economy, social movements, and recovered factories (Abal Medina 2019), as well as environmental interventions through construction, sanitation, or recycling. Among the cooperatives involved in environmental interventions, nine of

eleven are led by women. This is similar to the majority of cultural centers and soup kitchens, which are neighborhood spaces that are run by women.

In such scenarios, women workers perceive environmental danger when ecological conditions directly or potentially harm the bodies of those under their care. In line with the literature on caregiving, women in these contexts do care work in a precarious, overburdened and unequal manner in terms of the time that men devote to them and, in the case of impoverished sectors, with far fewer resources than women from more advantaged socio-economic sectors do. Living in environmentally adverse areas adds weight to this, if we take into account that women are exposed more to the environmental impacts of their residential areas than men, mainly because of the caregiving responsibilities they assume and the greater amount of time they spend in their neighborhoods. As a result, they engage in a range of practices that can be subsumed under the notion of environmental care, as their perception of environmental risks is intertwined with their role as caregivers. Among the practices of neighborhood containment in everyday RA life, which fall mainly on feminized bodies (Gavazzo, López and Rajoy 2020), are those of "maintaining" the environment (López 2022). For example, the population typically fills in the wetlands on which they build their houses to prevent flooding. This work is done during the time spent in the neighborhood, which women tend to do more while taking care of children. Furthermore, through their daily activities in the neighborhood, led by the cooperatives in which they integrate and interact, the migrant women of the RA are involved in environmental interventions related to the construction of services, infrastructure improvements for better access to basic goods, the cleaning of parks, streets, streams and rivers, and the recycling of waste, among others.

Lara, for instance, is a migrant from Paraguay who runs a community kitchen in her home and is also one of the neighbors in the cleaning teams of a RA cooperative that has been working to improve the vacant park through which you enter her home. She linked her participation in this collective work to the activities the group carries out in their kitchens: "There are more women [in the crews] because there are more women in charge of community kitchens" (interview with Lara, 17 June 2021). Additionally, there were instances of more disorganized practices, such as the case of Monica, a rural migrant from Misiones who cooked in a community kindergarten. During the hours when the garbage that is dumped daily at the corner was burned, she would close windows and doors to prevent smoke from entering the space. Or Nena, who took pictures of the accumulated trash to demand the

municipality to collect it to prevent children playing in her cultural center from getting hurt. Thus, the women of the RA actively engaged in environmental intervention in their everyday lives and through the collective care networks for the environments they inhabited.

Through these fragmented but persistent acts—filling wetlands, organizing waste recycling cooperatives, or shielding children from toxic compounds—RA women enact a praxis of plurality: one that weaves rural migrant knowledge, urban community organizing, and gendered care into an embodied critique of environmental racism and call for environmental justice. Their worldmaking emerges not as a grand design but as a collective patchwork—where demands for clean air or flood-free homes embody their right to define what justice means in their streets.

Contrasting Local Caregiving: Collective and Individual Perspectives

In the RA, both general care practices and environmental care practices tend to emerge in community forms, as opposed to individualized forms or those centered around the nuclear family. Here, everyday life, care, and cooperative work are intertwined. Visualizing the structure of the houses can help understand these dynamics. Andrea is from a rural area of Chaco (Argentina) and leads a cooperative. Her house has a semi-covered gallery at the front, where people gathered every time I went. Beyond the gallery, to the left of the facade, is the kitchen door, and to the right is the main entrance, with the bedrooms on the upper floor. The house underwent constant modifications throughout the research period. A handcrafted awning made of recycled plastic fabric was added to provide a roofed space for various activities. The site was used for a soup kitchen that served 105 children from Monday to Friday. In addition, it offered school support and art workshops. In the mornings, it hosted the Plan for the Completion of Secondary Studies (FINES, in its Spanish acronym). It was also the meeting place for the cooperative to plan activities to provide access to education, construction, food, and sanitation. Andrea's cooperative also works in the Arroyo Program,[37] initiated "for the neighbors," which involves the cleaning of streams and ditches. In addition, they are undertaking improvement projects,

[37] Agreement signed between the municipality of San Martín, work cooperatives, and the government of the province of Buenos Aires to carry out the task of cleaning streams and ditches in the RA.

such as the construction of embankments, infrastructure for a municipal kindergarten, and parks.

Andrea's house reflects the daily life scenarios of migrant women from the RA who present different home formats, with permeable borders to the neighborhood and shaped by the collective management of daily activities. Houses becoming cooperatives; secondary schools located completely within a neighbor's home; family kitchens opened to the streets, becoming community centers; the collective raising of children among neighbors; the cleaning of play areas commenced at home and extended to the streets, parks, and streams; or the neighborhood organization for the usage of garbage as a resource through recycling.

As Andrea's case illustrates, the permeability between domestic and collective spaces not only reconfigures traditional notions of care and labor but also underscores how migrant women in the RA navigate- and reshape- environmental challenges through community-driven practices, even as these efforts remain entangled with gendered precarity.

The Re-Signification of Care Work Among RA Referents

The community care in which environmental care practices are embedded presents a paradox, which is reflected in the interlocutors' discomfort when talking about "care." This paradox is linked to the traditional feminist slogan "it's not love, it's unpaid work," which refers to the recognition of unpaid care activities as a task that should be paid for. This is in tension with the value ascribed to the collective aspect that exists within the RA network. But community care work, as the sociologist Eleonor Faur pointed out in a recent lecture (2024), has the particularity of being an activity whose social representation often oscillates between failing to see it as work and failing to see it as care.

First of all, community care is provided by organizations that fight for the recognition of their activities as work and against the precarious conditions in which it is carried out. An example of this was given by Zulma, a migrant from Paraguay who is a key figure in the "popular economy" and who has led various neighborhood organizations, such as the sanitation group in which Lara worked. In one of the "community care" classes of a diploma course in which she was participating, she reacted with concern to the comments of some of her colleagues who mentioned how they had found in

these mechanisms the possibility of doing work with which they felt very comfortable:

> This is the fight we want to have, that they [fellow workers in our organization] should be recognized, that it is a job, that they should have social security. This is another issue that we are constantly raising in our spaces. All the comrades who are here work in the community and we discuss with them that they are workers. And it's very difficult for us because they say 'no, I like it, I don't know, I started out of necessity,' but the reality is that this woman is a worker. That she is not recognized by the concept of work ... historically. Peronism really made an effort [in this area], that they have their rights, their salary, that they have social security, that they have paid holidays ... today, unfortunately, our comrades don't have them. It is a desire to have them, and we are going to transform it. That's why in the popular economy we talk about workers, women workers. (on-site field registration, 10 May 2022)

Another of the discomforts that were reiterated and that were part of this paradox was exemplified in the case of Nora, a migrant from a rural area of Santiago del Estero and an urban waste management worker and leader of a community center of the Bella Flor recycling cooperative. After telling me about the differences of being a man or a woman in the plant, we started talking about the fact that most of the CEAMSE recycling plants are run by women. While thinking about women's roles, she corrected me when I mentioned "caring" as follows:

> Women know more about organizing [as opposed to caring]. They have a better sense of organization than men ... imagine if you have to organize your house with eleven children ... women are better at it, that's the thing. That's why it's easier for them to organize in every sense. Because women have the experience of organizing, whether we like it or not ... [In the soup kitchen] you have to feed your children, you know what to spend, what to measure, everything. Economically, socially, who you are going to relate to, who you are not going to relate to, who your children are going to relate to, who they are not going to relate to. The economy, how are you going to sustain yourself, how are you going to sustain yourself for a month ... so women have already taken that on board. They have the chip of organization. (Interview with Nora, 29 June 2022)

In other words, although Nora subscribes to the classical model of the sexual division of labor—which places women at home and men in the public sphere of work—she prefers the concept of organizing to my mention of caring as a specifically feminine skill that is reproduced more fluently in the sphere of neighborhood organizing. In this case, the discomfort that the concept of care causes her, is in line with a revaluation of RA women's actions in community activities, linked to the capacity for collective organization that they develop.

It is important to note that the concepts of organization, recognition, and this ideal of the common good, surround the meanings of community care undertaken by the interlocutors of the RA. These meanings are inscribed in the AMBA framework, which, as previously discussed, has a specific history regarding its political relations and interrelations with the state. Nora's narrative illustrates a landscape of actions in segregated areas where, far from passive victims of circumstance, the women of RA have forged these fragmented practices into both a survival strategy and a dynamic that reproduce socioeconomic, socioenvironmental, and gendered burdens. These tensions around care do not reflect an image of emancipation shaped by hegemonic discourses prescribing what it should look like, but rather reveal the paradoxical space inhabited by women in the RA.

Contributions and Final Thoughts

The ways in which these women collectively responded to various environmental issues that directly affected their lives emerged from their community care practices and socio-political organization, linked to their identification with the category of "workers from the popular economy." Moreover, they extend their caregiving activities beyond the walls of their households, for and from their current communities, branching different resources through these practices of "environmental care" that are mainly carried out on a collective basis. But despite their invaluable contributions, marginalized women's community-based environmental care practices overburden their lives, and it remains invisible, undervalued, and inadequately compensated.

Nevertheless, this case compels us to center gender in environmental justice studies. RA women's prolonged community presence—shaped by care duties and community work—generates both heightened contamination exposure and crucial ecological knowledge. Their environmental interventions, though rooted in unpaid-or poorly retributed care labor, become collective political acts that redefine their agency. Gender-blind frameworks might misread this work as domesticity rather than expertise, masking how environmental injustices are lived and responded to through gendered realities.

These practices of environmental care—rooted in migrant women's collective survival—reveal a form of worldmaking from the margins: one that emerges not as a utopian alternative, but as a situated response to overlapping challenges. Their labor sustains dynamics of community care for people and

territory that blurs hegemonic boundaries between public/private, urban/rural, and even 'environmental activism'/domestic work. Yet these practices remain precarious, shaped by socioeconomic and sociopolitical inequalities and extractivism in both rural and urban settings. Recognizing these worldmaking practices demands more than inclusion; it requires confronting how dominant environmental frameworks often render invisible and undervalue the very transformative action and knowledge produced in contexts like the RA, where survival itself becomes a form of contested place-making.

It is important to highlight that while community-based environmental care practices cannot single-handedly resolve the devastating environmental challenges they face, meaningful change requires greater involvement from actors with more extensive resources, such as the state, the private sector, or civil society organizations. In this context, these women actively engage with these institutions, playing crucial roles as political actors in forging urban networks and opportunities to improve their living conditions and to challenge dominant narratives that perpetuate their marginalization. Therefore, when thinking about measures to mitigate environmental degradation, their experiences raise new questions: how to work with local women who operate as the main actors in detecting environmental problems, in the planning of mitigation measures without overloading their family and community lives? Is it possible to work alongside these women to co-construct knowledge and plan mitigation measures when their contributions remain precarious, unrecognized, underpaid, and overlooked by the various actors addressing environmental challenges?

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(Re)Making the World Through Dance: Bodies, Movement, and Space in an African Dance Marathon Against Anti-Immigrant Manifestations

Diana Duarte Bernal

In late 2021, I discovered a social media post promoting an African Dance Marathon. The event was organized by a teacher specializing in these dance styles and was scheduled to be held at Plaza Ñuñoa. The marathon was intended to follow a class-like format but with an extended duration and instructors from diverse dance backgrounds. The post included a video of the organizer, who I recognized as Brazilian by her accent, explaining that the initiative aimed to support the migrant community affected by the violent attacks in Iquique—a city in northern Chile—just weeks earlier.

The acts of violence the woman referred to were a series of anti-immigrant demonstrations that took place in September of that year. These riots were instigated by groups opposing people living on the streets in makeshift camps, who found themselves in a highly irregular situation after entering the country through unauthorized border crossings. I became aware of these protests because of the widespread media coverage they received in digital, print, and audiovisual outlets. The circulating images featured people protesting carrying torches, signs bearing slogans such as "no + migrants,"[38] national football team jerseys, and Chilean flags—symbols that reinforce the idea of a protest as a division between "us" against "them." However, these demonstrations did not remain solely at the symbolic level, as they soon escalated into verbal and physical confrontations, leading to the infamous public burning of tents and the migrants' few other belongings, including their documents.

Given the horrifying nature of these scenes, it was moving to witness a gathering in Santiago centered around dance and music and organized to

[38] The phrase "no +" emerged during the 1980s as part of the performance acts of CADA (Colectivo Acciones de Arte) against the military dictatorship. However, more recently, it has been used to express disagreement or exhaustion in the face of any situation that is considered intolerable, for example "no + afp" ("Administradoras de Fondos de Pensiones," in Spanish, are private financial institutions that manage individual retirement savings, which are heavily criticized for charging high fees and returning low monthly payments to their contributors) or, as in this case, "no + delinquency," which was used interchangeably with "no + migrants."

oppose the proliferation of hate speech against migrants and to collect funds to aid those affected. As an observer—albeit someone with occasional experience in African dance—I noted several similarities between this event and the regular African dance classes I have attended. For example, the presence of live percussionists, mostly male, played a significant role in the rhythm of the event. The predominantly female dancers began with a warm-up in a circle, followed by instructors demonstrating steps for participants to imitate. As the session progressed, more steps were introduced, and the group collectively created a choreography. The rotation of both musicians and dancers was frequent throughout the nearly two-hour session.

The dance marathon took place in a small amphitheater at Plaza Ñuñoa, a central square in a Santiago's pericentric district. Traditionally, this square has served as a cultural, political, and social hub. Popular art exhibitions, craft fairs, and food markets often take place in this area, and the small amphitheater within the square is frequently occupied—sometimes contested—by people practicing sports or arts, seeking space for public expression. Although the organizers' specific reasons for selecting this square are unclear, I suspect it was chosen for its central location, cultural significance, and association with public gatherings. The audience, including passersby, observed the scene while strolling through the square, amidst the craft fair, and near bars and restaurants. A common feature among many in attendance, including myself, was the wearing of facemasks as a precaution against the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

During the dance sequences, the instructors used a microphone to explain the motivations behind the initiative, inviting spectators to join the dance. In their remarks, they emphasized that violent events in Iquique were manifestations of xenophobia and structural racism. Furthermore, they highlighted that African dances embody themes of ancestry, heritage, cultural exchange, resistance to discrimination, and displacement—whether experienced by the foreign instructors, those who traveled abroad to learn the dance style, or through the spread of these cultural expressions in Latin America, which stemmed from the enslavement and forced exile of African people.[39]

[39] Text based on a field note from November 1, 2021.

Photo: African Dance Marathon. Source: Author

This marathon has remained with me throughout my research process[40], serving as a source of inspiration and reflection on the affective capacities of bodies, dance, and music. These capacities not only summon and mobilize attendees and spectators but also weave a network of narratives, meanings, places and times. Jones' (2021) non-participant observation of the public realm was very convenient for focusing on the interactions and reactions of the people involved, including me as a researcher. Based on videos, photos, field notes, and spontaneous conversations, I opted to "create a scene" for describing actions, bodies, and affects that circulate within specific spatiotemporal boundaries (Jack and Conte 2022). This approach serves as a narrative strategy to uncover structures of meaning, enabling others to share the same space and reimagine who was present and why they acted as they did.

[40] I came across this marathon while developing my doctoral research project on the role of dance in giving an account of themselves to others and making sense of a new place of residence for Latin American migrants in Santiago, Chile.

This scene connects two situations separated by more than 1,500 kilometers, linked through bodies that gather and dance to the rhythm of the drums. On the one hand, the anti-immigrant demonstrations in Iquique, far from being isolated incidents, mirror similar occurrences across Chile and the world. Events that reflect the prominence of migration within contemporary public discourse, as well as the growing intolerance toward foreign presences and encounters. On the other hand, the scene illustrates the power of dance to bring together migrants and non-migrants, demanding recognition of the injustices and inequalities affecting human mobility. Furthermore, this act foregrounds the presence of African people in Chile's capital—historically marginalized in national narratives, relegated to specific regions, or framed as a foreign phenomenon (Araya, Salazar, and Mardones 2019).

That said, this text aims to discuss the role of dance as a form of "live" transmission of embodied knowledge and performative processes of making the world through the body and presence (Klein and Noeth 2011; Taylor 2020). This knowledge refers not only to the bodily and musical knowledge of a given dance tradition but also to the meanings and affective experiences that unfold in proximity to other bodies. The ephemeral and relational character of the dance act gives social meaning and creates a familiar landscape, which is especially relevant for people who arrive at a new place of residence. It also stages stories, identities, stereotypes, and fantasies that go beyond migrant communities, serving as an analytic unit for the conditions of possibility for movement within migrations (Fensham and Kelada 2012; Shea Murphy 2022).

The Sensible Fabric of Contemporary Migrations

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM 2021), migrants constituted 3.6 percent of the global population in 2020. Although only a third of this group consists of individuals experiencing forced displacement or seeking asylum, these populations face the most traumatic and perilous circumstances while pursuing improved social and material conditions for themselves and/or their families. In Chile, an estimated 1,625,074 foreign nationals resided in the country in 2022, representing a growth of over 20 percent in five years (INE and SJM 2023). These figures position Chile as the South American country with the highest percentage of foreign residents, comprising nearly 9 percent of its total population (Doña-Reveco 2022). These same statistical sources indicate that recent migration to Chile predominantly originates from other Latin American and Caribbean

countries, with a significant urban concentration, particularly in the central regions of the national territory.

Nevertheless, migration to Chile is not a recent phenomenon; it has been a continuous process for nearly two centuries, shaping contemporary society through its diverse origins (Doña-Reveco 2022). Such historical analyses raise the question of what differentiates current migratory flows that provoke manifestations of intolerance, like those transpiring in Iquique. According to Grimson (2019), recent migratory movements are not solely driven by global inequalities but are also shaped by complex dynamics of otherness, involving the articulation, expression, and contestation of racism, sexism, and classism in specific ways. He continues to argue that these factors influence the experiences of migrants, creating a spectrum of visibility: while some foreigners may go unnoticed, others are marked by traits such as accent, language, dress, or phenotypic features, which are perceived as threats to local culture and lifestyle.

Recognizing the historically constructed regimes of visibility and invisibility is essential for understanding the sensible fabric of contemporary migrations. Although migrants constitute a relatively small proportion of the population—both in Chile and globally—the public discourse surrounding global human movement reflects a significant dichotomy. While traveling is promoted as a desirable activity and supported by economic systems, migration is often framed as a destabilizing force rather than an opportunity for cultural enrichment (Brandstetter, Egert, and Hartung 2019). Therefore, in a context characterized by slow processes of regularization, inadequate legal protections, mass expulsions, media stigmatization, and the proliferation of violent anti-immigrant demonstrations—as in the case of Chile—it is easy to assume that the identity and distinctiveness of migrants are often sacrificed to facilitate coexistence. However, encounters with scenes such as the African dance marathon suggest that the gathering of bodies, sounds, and movements perceived as foreign can serve as a means of confronting various forms of inequality and violence. Such performance constitutes a "declaration of presence," asserting "this is who we are, and this is where we are."[41]

[41] Expression of what a declaration of presence could mean for migrantised bodies. Inspired by Diana Taylor's (2020) expression "Present!," an act of being in the world and enacting it, challenges the tangled politics of recognition.

Making the World through Dance

In the introduction to a special issue of the *Dance Research Journal*,[42] Scolieri highlights the value of the increasingly frequent intersections between migration studies and dance studies as two interdisciplinary fields that share movement as a category of analysis and that seek "theories and methods for understanding patterns of individual and mass human movements across the world's stage, the policies governing human im/mobility, and the social experiences that such movements engender" (2008, v). From this standpoint, dance studies encompass more than just analyzing the characteristics of a particular dance style or modes of expression. Similarly, migration-related issues extend beyond merely examining the reasons for international displacement, means of migration, or factors that influence the choice of one destination over another. This critical approach shapes a research field that acknowledges dance as a reflection of the interactions between individuals and broader forces such as capital, globalization, and exclusion. It also fosters aesthetic and political reflections on movement and its conditions of possibility in bodies often situated in crisis or uncertainty (Fensham and Kelada 2012; Brandstetter, Egert, and Hartung 2019; Scolieri 2008).

Making the world through dance implies understanding the body and its performances as a place for self-identification and openness to the outside. It involves the comprehension of dance as part of a repertoire of knowledge, meanings, desires, and emotions preserved and mobilized through bodies, which gives dancers the capacity to appropriate and transform space. Thus, making one's body comprehensive and making sense of the world acquire a sensory and affective dimension to the rhythm of the interactions generated when learning, rehearsing, and staging a dance. According to McCormack, dance expands the range of embodied practices and knowledge through which bodies claim a place in the world: "The presence of moving bodies is not only a physical transformation of the pitch: it also alters the imaginative, affective, sonic and social qualities of this space" (2008, 1823). From this performative perspective, the body is not a passive site of cultural inscription but a living force capable of producing, claiming, and weaving through the movement.

[42] This issue compiled some of the texts presented at the 2007 Congress on Research in Dance at Barnard College in New York, dedicated to reflecting on how migrations had shaped the interpretation and reception of the practice.

In fact, politics comes into play when the hierarchical and exclusionary distributions within sensible regimes —determining what is visible, sayable, audible, or thinkable—are questioned, thereby creating space to challenge or reconfigure this order and envision alternative forms of agreement (Rancière 2009). In other words, politics moves into the realm of experience and occupies an aesthetic dimension, even when this involves challenging seemingly fixed and univocal structures of meaning that shape how things appear and are perceived within a specific space-time.

This invokes a "politics of the presence" (Taylor 2020; Campos-Medina, Jaureguiberry-Mondion, and Silva-Roquefort 2020), emphasizing the capacity of bodies to act and speak autonomously, to draw attention to exclusionary conditions, and to be recognized as valid interlocutors. When the conditions for belonging and participating in a community are limited, the body's presence and its expressive function in public space have the potential to disrupt, articulate, and reconfigure experience. This approach calls for understanding the production of the public not solely as a discursive phenomenon but also as a spatial, embodied, and performative one—manifested through acts of gathering and collective performance, whether in marches, political demonstrations or artistic interventions (Butler 2017).

Ultimately, space is not merely a neutral container for relations and bodies but rather a product of the material effects of interactions, actions, and performances. These encounters and disagreements reveal the inherently conflictual nature of space, which cannot always be apprehended through rational perception; however, they open up new political possibilities beyond those defined by institutional frameworks (Dikeç 2012). As Taylor aptly states, "Presence structures space and space gives structure to presence" (2020, 63; author's translation).

Movements in the African Dance Marathon

Back in the scene at the beginning of the text, dance emerges as a "highly embodied and situated practice of 'being in the world' which is a continuous process of making oneself from the place where one operates, while simultaneously connecting to places elsewhere in the 'worlded domain'" (Beeckmans 2019, 91). In this context, African-rooted dances, besides inscribing an act of protest and solidarity against xenophobic violence within time and space, also enacted social and spatial codes constructed around categories of origin, ethnicity, class, and gender.

Kovács (2023) highlights an important line of inquiry at the intersection of dance and migration studies by focusing on Afrodiasporic dancers, who often identify as descendants of Africans subjected to human trafficking and trade since the fifteenth century. In these cases, dance creates or reinforces an imagined and mythical connection to Africa, transmitted across generations through spirituality and embodied knowledge of sounds, movements, and ritual practices (Chapman 2016). However, Kovács (2023) expressed skepticism about the ability of bodies to evoke ritualistic knowledge not acquired through personal experience. Otherwise, Abadía-Rexach (2014) argues that diasporic discourse functions as an imaginary of belonging, instrumentalized by hegemonic powers to categorize "minority" ethnic groups, emphasizing their differences, and marginalizing what is perceived as "exotic."

These differing perspectives on Afrodiasporic dances illustrate the ongoing tension between valuing cultural practices that have resisted systematic eradication, reproducing exoticized and depoliticized stereotypes that attribute inherent musical and dance talents to Black people, and questioning the racialization processes underpinning national narratives in Latin America and the Caribbean. This tension is even more pronounced when migratory flows challenge unitary, monolithic, and historically whitewashed identity narratives. By these means, the marathon scene reveals a dispute of Rahier's (1998) racial/spatial order, for whom Blackness is not static but has a location in the cultural topography of society. In this context, if Blackness in Chile has often been linked to a foreign phenomenon and has predominantly been confined to the northern regions of the country, the promotion of African-rooted music and dances that accompany contemporary migration flows is influencing the cultural, spatial, and political repositioning of Black memory within the Chilean national narrative (Duarte-Bernal, 2022), particularly in the capital.

While it is impossible to determine the origin of all participants in the marathon due to the implemented method, during the day it became clear that the activity was promoted by migrant dancers and non-migrant instructors who had been trained abroad. All of them (en)acted against the rejection of clandestine and vulnerable international displacements through movements and sounds that form part of a historical and cultural legacy of resistance. The dance act transcends migrant communities and serves as a point of contact among diverse individuals. In Beeckmans' words, this is an urban worldmaking practice that interconnects migrant experiences beyond a linear

axis that connects home and host countries in a constitutive process of belonging, not only to oneself but also to a larger group (2019).

From an embodied perspective, the power to challenge or dispute the social norms regulating the visibility of bodies in public spaces—during events such as the African dance marathon—lies in their openness and inherent uncertainty. The performance generated sensory experiences among participants and audiences, whether they attended voluntarily or were drawn in spontaneously by the drums, the dance, or the instructors' messages. As such, the possibilities for action, evocation, and interpretation remain incalculable (Campos-Medina, Jaureguiberry-Mondion, and Silva-Roquefort 2020). Although the effectiveness of the message opposing violence and discrimination against migrants cannot be measured, the attendees' capacity to affect and be affected—whether by participating, observing, or even momentarily engaging with the performance—opens opportunities to reconfigure the urban experience and social norms about visibility and audibility.

Some Closing Words

This text began with the account of an African dance marathon—a scene shaped in time and space by the gathering of bodies sharing steps, rhythms, and stories of ancestry and displacement, aimed at both rejecting acts of violence occurring hundreds of kilometers away and expressing solidarity with the victims. By highlighting patterns of order and power relations disrupted by the sound, visual, and embodied qualities of difference (Jack and Conte 2022), this narrating exercise created a "lens" for critical reflection on the conditions of possibility for movement within contemporary migrations. While there was a violent attack on the displacements of irregular migrants in Iquique, the body movements and rhythms considered foreign during the marathon staged a criminalized migratory phenomenon and a Black memory relegated from national history.

In this sense, dance functions as a creative and emotional language, fostering intersubjective experiences that transmit affect and knowledge between migrants and non-migrants alike. These encounters shape our world, rendering it intelligible through the rhythms of the interweaving fabric created by the movements and diversity that each dancer brings (Brandstetter, Egert, and Hartung 2019). Valuing the possibility of encounter through dance does not imply ignoring the rise of more radical nationalisms that advocate for the hardening of territorial borders and reject different world-making

strategies. These discourses and actions coexist in tension amid asymmetrical societal relations. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that the African dance marathon in Santiago holds not only artistic and traditional significance but also symbolic value in its rejection of xenophobic demonstrations in Iquique.

In conclusion, the encounters generated by dance extend beyond those organized within the framework of fairs or multicultural exhibitions, where foreign customs are showcased for the enjoyment of visitors and the validation of migrants' cultural contributions to the communities in which they live. As exemplified by the African dance marathon, these encounters also serve as spaces of human contact, where participants assert their presence and demand recognition for themselves and a larger group through the rhythm and movement of their bodies.

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Identities

Contesting the Margins: Feminist Activisms and the Reimagination of São Paulo's Peripheries

Giovana de Souza Possignolo

This chapter delves into feminist activisms in São Paulo, Brazil, looking at how women from marginalized communities address systemic inequalities and forge new narratives of resistance. By engaging with Afro-Latin and Indigenous women, the research highlights how their lived experiences and collective practices navigate and disrupt structural hierarchies. Drawing on critical perspectives, it explores how these women mobilize care, solidarity, and creativity to redefine their urban settings (Hutta 2019), emphasizing the interplay between local challenges and broader social structures (Perry 2013). Through this lens, it foregrounds the significance of grassroots movements in reimagining urban life and challenging historical power dynamics.

The analysis focuses on the collective *Nós, Mulheres da Periferia* (NMP), which, through activism and digital journalism, challenges stereotypes and counters colonial urban imaginaries (Freitas 2018; Alves 2018). Founded in 2014, NMP is a collective of Black and peripheral female journalists who produce independent media focused on the experiences of marginalized women in Brazil. Through articles, manifestos, and community engagement, they amplify voices often excluded from mainstream media, redefining narratives about poverty, race, and gender from a peripheral perspective. By navigating intersections of race, gender, class, and territoriality, the chapter uncovers how NMP's work transforms narratives about urban peripheries and highlights the power of collective activism in reshaping identities and spaces. Such initiatives demonstrate how women mobilize cultural and affective practices to reframe peripheral spaces as dynamic and transformative. Incorporating participatory methods from my ethnographic work in São Paulo's urban peripheries, I came to understand these areas as sites of affect and creativity. Drawing on the concept of the pluriverse (Escobar 2016), I conceptualize peripheries as spaces where alternative ways of knowing and inhabiting urban spaces participate in the process of worldmaking. This chapter situates decolonial feminist activisms within broader debates on cultural identities, anti-racism struggles, and resistance in urban settings. It emphasizes how these movements contest

embedded systems while forging new possibilities, underlining the crucial roles of solidarity, care, and justice in reimagining urban futures.

Reimagining the Periphery: Power Structures and Feminist Activisms

The concept of "periphery" transcends geographical boundaries, reflecting the historical and ongoing effects of colonial legacies that perpetuate social hierarchies in urban contexts. In São Paulo, one of the largest cities in the Global South, the periphery is often associated with racialized, gendered, and economic inequalities, reinforcing a center-periphery divide (Caldeira 2000; Alves 2018; Feltran 2010). This section reframes the periphery as more than a physical space, recognizing it as an epistemic and political site where women actively resist colonial structures and articulate alternative imaginaries that challenge systemic violence and deprivation.

In São Paulo, coloniality shapes the urban landscape, deepening inequalities and structural violence. The center-periphery relationship means systemic exclusion and institutional violence (Alves 2018), framing the periphery as a space of lack rather than possibility. Yet the experiences of peripheral women reveal the periphery as a space of epistemic struggle where colonial legacies are actively contested. Women reimagine the periphery through notions of solidarity and their cultural standpoints, creating alternative narratives that illustrate resistance to the center-periphery dichotomy, hegemonic, racist, patriarchal, and colonial systems (Quijano 2000; Lugones 2008; Gonzalez 2020).

This reconceptualization reflects the idea of "*paisagens afetivas*" (affective landscapes) (de Souza Possignolo 2025), which underscores the emotional and relational dimensions of urban spaces inhabited by peripheral women. One of these women is Maria, a *Nordestina*[43] woman who migrated to the periphery of São Paulo in the 1990s, where she became deeply engaged in collective struggles for housing and infrastructure. I first came into contact with Maria through a solidarity initiative she led during the pandemic, distributing food to vulnerable communities—an effort documented in an

[43] The term nordestina refers to a woman from Brazil's Northeast region, often linked to migration to urban areas like São Paulo. The term reflects both regional identity and the social and economic marginalization shaped by intersections of gender, 'race', class, and geography that migrants from these regions often face.

article published by the NMP.[44] As she recalls in one of our talks: "Fighting there for twenty-seven years ... all the needs, the deprivation in these neglected places—we participated in every struggle, every single one. We had no formal education, but we navigated situations that even intellectuals couldn't."

By cultivating spaces of mutual care, women like Maria not only resist marginalization in the urban borderlands but also create new narratives of belonging and community (Carmo 2023). As Maria affirms: "I'm Maria among so many other Marias, and I'll say it's not just Maria, or Teresa—it's all the women who fight. Because we defend life, that's what we do." Their efforts to defend life are not mere acts of survival, but they constitute forms of epistemic resistance, shaping affective landscapes that challenge colonial and patriarchal power structures (Lugones 2008). The concept of "affectable territories" (Ferreira da Silva 2009) further explains this process, framing the periphery as both a site of violence and a locus of resistance. Maria's narrative deepens this understanding: "As an activist, a woman who takes hits too, we used to take beatings from the system to achieve rights. With those beatings, we built health, education for youth, dignity. I didn't even know I was an urban activist—I only realized that later, when I joined the MST in 2002."

While Maria's narrative is grounded in collective organizing for housing, urban infrastructure and later for agroecology, Zola, an Indigenous woman living in the Recanto dos Humildes community, articulates a different but interconnected resistance rooted in ancestry, care, and nature. During a conversation with Zola in the public square Praça Sorriso, close to my residence during the fieldwork, I could realize how the intersection of ethnicity, gender, class, and territory influences lived experiences in the urban borderlands. Having also migrated from Brazil's Northeast to the urban periphery of São Paulo decades ago, she now lives with her partner, a Black woman from the periphery. Zola spoke of the challenges posed by urban fragmentation and her deep connection to nature: "Nature is part of who we are, but here, we're forced into small, crowded spaces."

Her narrative highlights the tension between systemic individualism and the solidarity she nurtures through her ancestrality. As a member of a public health council, Zola advocates for improved policies while pursuing a degree in public administration to weave Indigenous knowledge into public

[44] Available in https://nosmulheresdaperiferia.com.br/mulheres-que-plantam-liderancas-do-mst-no-combate-a-fome-na-periferia/.

systems. She also mentioned how difficult it was for her to adapt to the Brazilian education system, since in her Indigenous community, teaching is done in contact with nature, listening to the elders and learning from the senses and experience. Zola resignifies her early experience with the Brazilian education system by entering university after the age of fifty through affirmative action policies for Indigenous peoples. She combines her activism within the public health system with formal academic training, aiming to act from within the structures of the state while weaving Indigenous knowledge into institutional practices. Such engagements expresses the transformative potential of decolonial feminist practices and peripheral activisms.

By centering these women's voices, the periphery emerges as a multifaceted urban space, where subaltern knowledge disrupts traditional narratives and reimagines the city through solidarity, care, connecting material conditions to affective geographies (Hutta 2019). The NMP contributed to this process by combining activism and digital journalism to contest stereotypes, emphasize systemic inequalities, and elevate stories of resilience and agency. Such initiatives demonstrate how women mobilize cultural and affective practices to reframe peripheral spaces as dynamic and transformative.

During my fieldwork, I used the articles published by NMP to map actions and collectives in the peripheries of São Paulo. These articles enabled me to trace the trajectories of women like Maria and led me to live in Zola's community. It was within these territories of resistance that I proposed collaborative projects, which were not only shaped by the women's everyday struggles but also became a core part of my research approach. Such initiatives unfolded through embodied and participatory practices, reflecting a methodological commitment to co-creating knowledge from within the lived realities of peripheral feminisms.

Embodiment and Participatory Methodologies

The research for this chapter is based on a method that integrates embodied and participatory approaches in peripheral feminist activisms. Central to this approach is the "*sentir-pensar-agir*" (feeling-thinking-acting) framework (Cariño and González 2022), rooted in decolonial and feminist viewpoints. This approach captures women's lived experiences and agency in São Paulo's peripheries by intertwining emotional, cognitive, and active dimensions of knowledge. It aims to reflect intellectual insights and the emotional realities

of structural violence and resistance. This approach challenges traditional power dynamics in research, positioning the researcher as a collaborator to co-create alternative narratives and practices with her interlocutors (Escobar 2016). My fieldwork, conducted from February 2022 to April 2023, was deeply influenced by the collective *Nós Mulheres da Periferia*, whose stories of resistance and solidarity provided the foundation for my analysis.

In addition, Participatory Action Research (PAR), drawing on the work of Orlando Fals Borda (1987) and Paulo Freire (1986), provided a collaborative framework for knowledge production, resulting in embracement and mutual learning. Immersing myself in the collective's activities, such as attending events, listening to the narratives told by the participants, and engaging in crowdfunded projects, has enabled trust and reciprocity. This process extended beyond my fieldwork in São Paulo, including co-hosting workshops at University of Giessen in Germany. Amplifying the voices and experiences of peripheral women embodies their role in the research, ensuring their standpoints as collaboration and accountability for the analysis.

Reflecting on my position as a non-peripheral white woman, I critically examined my role in the research, acknowledging how my privileges shaped the process and my understanding of the communities involved. By fostering mutual respect and engaging in solidarity, I try to interrogate and transform the power dynamics inherent in the research (Tosold 2018). Merging embodied methodologies with participatory action research, I reflect on how peripheral women navigate structural inequalities and examine their agency in shaping alternative urban futures and narratives.

Resistance, Worldmaking, and Identity Construction in Peripheral Feminist Activism

NMP's activism addresses both the narratives of violence and invisibility and the systemic structures that perpetuate these portrayals. Through journalistic activism and community-driven initiatives, NMP highlights the diverse experiences of women in these communities, countering the dominant narratives of victimhood that often shape public perceptions of peripheral women. Their creative expressions challenge entrenched colonial structures and margina-lization in urban settings, offering new ways of being and seeing. By embracing this perspective, NMP fosters a plural and diverse understanding of women's agency, inviting a broader dialogue on their representation in society. Challenging dominant narratives it is fostering

transformative worldmaking in the peripheries by confronting negative stereotypes associated with the peripheral, affirming practices of solidarity, care, and belonging, and producting new identities in the process.

Reflecting on the diversity of peripheral women, Bianca, one of NMP's co-founders, contrasts the way mainstream media tends to reify them. She states:

> When we used to search for 'women from the periphery,' we would see stories of murdered women, grieving mothers, women who had lost their children. I'm not saying these things don't happen, but today, when you type 'women from the periphery,' you see us there in a different light. You find profiles of incredible women. It's not just the tragedies. I think we've done something really beautiful in this regard, redefining the plurality that is the periphery.

This redefinition of peripheral identities is not without its challenges. Bianca further reflects on the internal struggles they face as they navigate spaces traditionally denied to women from the periphery, including the pervasive "impostor syndrome." She shares:

> We carry so much insecurity, this impostor syndrome, as if we don't deserve to be where we are. When we access spaces like universities or even when we start projects like Nós, Mulheres da Periferia, we face this constant battle within ourselves. It's hard to convince yourself that it's okay, that things are progressing. But then we look at where we are now—look at what Nós has accomplished; look at where we've reached. Still, we carry this deep-rooted need to always push harder, to do more, to prove ourselves. It's part of where we come from, part of the struggles that shaped us. And it's also part of why we persist—because there's no turning back, only forward.

This process of strengthening identity and confronting both subjective and structural challenges leads to a positive redefinition of what it means to be from the periphery. As Bianca succinctly puts it: "We leave the periphery, but the periphery will never leave us." This statement highlights how the periphery is not left behind but carried forward as a source of strength. Bianca's words shift marginalization to belonging, where resistance is not about denying one's origin but embracing it as the ground for agency and transformation.

In conversations with Lívia, another co-founder of NMP, we discussed how racial inequality and institutional racism continue to affect their daily lives. Lívia's reflections revealed the growing awareness of how systemic racism operates not just as a set of external forces but as something that Black women confront and actively challenge within themselves. As Lívia puts it: "We have a self-definition, a self-declaration, a process of self-consciousness

to face it." This personal and collective empowerment is central to their activism, as it allows them to name systemic oppression and reclaim their space in the city. Lívia's reflection highlights how the process of self-awareness and self-definition is not merely about resistance; it is also about claiming one's identity and reasserting agency in the face of structural inequalities.

NMP's work challenges not only the narratives but also the material conditions of peripheral spaces. Through their activism, they do not merely critique existing systems; they co-create new worlds. Through their collective action and storytelling, they engage in worldmaking processes (Escobar 2016), constructing new urban imaginaries embedded in diversity, solidarity, and culture. These processes emphasize that the periphery is not just a site of marginalization but a space of potential and transformation. Voices like those of Bianca and Lívia emphasize that their activism is about contesting the status quo and fostering a sense of belonging and visibility. NMP's work does not merely critique social structures; it builds a new, collective space of belonging, care, and cultural activism that resonates with plural feminist movements.

Plurality of Worlds: Connecting Local Struggles to Pluriverse Movements

The activism of peripheral women in São Paulo embodies the "plurality of worlds," where the struggles and experiences of marginalized groups are reframed as transformative forces capable of reshaping urban realities. Like pluriverse movements challenging colonial legacies in Brazil and worldwide, *Nós, Mulheres da Periferia* reimagines the margins as sites of resistance (hooks 1984), creativity, and power. Women involved in this movement actively participate in the construction of alternative worlds, where diversity, equality, and community take place.

An example of this worldmaking practice is evident in the NMP manifesto, *O que é periferia?* This text challenges traditional understandings of the periphery as a static and marginalized space by presenting it as fluid, dynamic, and politically potent. As the manifesto states: "The periphery is not easy to delimit. It is an open concept. First, because defining what the periphery is, inevitably highlights a centrality. So, what is the center, and why?" (NMP 2023). This redefinition challenges conventional dichotomies of center and periphery and positions the periphery as a locus of power and

transformation, resonating with decolonial and critical geography debates (Zaragocin and Caretta 2021).

The manifesto's perspective challenges hegemonic structures that sustain inequalities, proposing the periphery as a space of resistance where peripheral experiences and knowledge are legitimate sources of transformation. The manifesto's declaration that "the periphery is resistance" becomes a key theme, highlighting a continuous practice of defiance against systemic inequalities. This resistance also engages with structural racism, which creates the periphery as both a physical and symbolic space of exclusion. As the manifesto asserts: "In the face of structural and institutional racism, Black women are peripheral irrespective of their address. A Black body carries ancestral memories of a past that insists on being updated" (NMP 2023). This statement emphasizes how Blackness and womanhood intersect to define the periphery, not merely as a geographical feature but as a continuous state of marginalization.

Conversations with Lívia revealed how international events like the George Floyd murder have impacted discussions about racial inequality in Brazil. Lívia highlighted the importance of self-awareness in confronting racism. This self-consciousness reflects the manifesto's call for a radical transformation of how Black women are seen and represented in Brazilian society.

The manifesto also positions the periphery as a space of contestation against multiple forms of oppression, including heteronormativity, patriarchy, racism, and socioeconomic inequality. It states: "In a society governed by heteronormative standards—where white, cisgender, heterosexual men hold power—being born and becoming a woman means inevitably being on the margins" (NMP 2023). This perspective underscores the intersections of gender, race, class, and territory in the lives of marginalized women, particularly Black women from the peripheries. It critiques the gendered subjugation emphasized by patriarchal discourses and calls for a reimagining of power through diverse and inclusive representations of women in society.

The emergence of NMP coincides with the resurgence of feminist debates across Latin America, particularly among young Black women. Digital platforms have become crucial tools for transcending geographically fixed territories, enabling women to connect, exchange experiences, and amplify their voices. Through their journalistic work, NMP elevates the narratives of Black peripheral women, challenging the enduring oppressions rooted in the intersections of gender, race, and class (Freitas 2018). In this

movement, feminism evolves beyond its traditional academic boundaries and claims diverse places of speech (Ribeiro 2020). By embracing the lived experiences of all women, it effectively addresses inequalities and systems of oppression. This approach not only incorporates themes like heteronormativity and intersectionality—once confined to academic discourse—but also enlarges the movement's scope and enhances its overall impact.

The manifesto's concluding excerpt encapsulates what constitutes the periphery for NMP: "The periphery is much more than territory. It is a point of reference. It is a perspective, a place of speech, a body in the world. The periphery is much more than geography. It is subjectivity, identity, feeling, and affective memory. The periphery is narratives against the single story. Our lives matter, and each trajectory is singular." (NMP 2023) This notion transforms the periphery into a place of identity, memory, and resistance—a space that challenges exclusionary worlds while claiming the uniqueness and significance of individual lives, even those on the margins.

Through their activism, peripheral women in São Paulo are not only resisting systemic inequalities but also weaving new identities and futures that assert their agency, creativity, and belonging. The resistance they embody is not a mere reaction to oppression but a continuous and creative act of worldmaking, where new possibilities and realities are imagined and come forward. By rethinking the periphery as a site of power and resistance, women engaged in the movement's activities refuse to accept marginalization and instead create spaces for themselves and others, where their voices are represented, their experiences contribute meaningfully, and their resistance becomes a powerful force for social change.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates how feminist activism in São Paulo's peripheral areas, particularly through the *Nós, Mulheres da Periferia*, creates alternative worlds rooted in resistance, solidarity, and culture. Through the collective practices of NMP and other feminist activists in the urban peripheries, colonial and patriarchal structures are actively challenged, reimagining the urban as space of transformation and possibility. By questioning centre-periphery dichotomy, they construct counter-narratives that envision a more diverse and just city, underscoring the significance of worldmaking in the face of adversity.

The practices of these women reveal that resistance is not just reactive but a creative force capable of reshaping reality and transforming power dynamics within urban environments. Their actions assert alternative epistemologies, reshape urban landscapes, and confront the gendered, racial, and class-based hierarchies that structure their lives. As a result, peripheral feminist activisms are committed to more pluriverse societies, where solidarity and social justice are key for creating new worlds. Therefore, amplifying the voices of peripheral women is essential in academia and politics to enhance transformative perspectives. Integrating the experiences of marginalized communities into global and transversal conversations about feminism, decolonization, and worldmaking enriches discussions on multiple forms of resistance and diversifies practical solutions to structural challenges such as inequality, racism, and sexism in different contexts.

Embodied research should focus on how peripheral feminist practices contribute to diversifying public debates and connect to global resistance movements, such as Indigenous, feminist, and decolonial struggles. Examining the intersections of race, class, and gender within these movements can contribute to understanding their embedded role in shaping alternative futures. Ultimately, achieving a more diverse urban environment depends on the pluralization of experiences and voices, like peripheral women in reshaping urban narratives and redefining social and political relations.

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Negotiating Identities Through Academic Writing in Early Career Researchers

Jésica Franco

Identities are discursively constructed (Goffman 1969; Ivanič 1998) as discourses are shaped by the values, beliefs, and power relations of their social contexts. Writing, as a social practice, becomes a space where identities are negotiated. Through writing, representations of the world can be either affirmed or contested, making it a performative tool that can reinforce or challenge patterns of privilege within specific contexts.

In literacy studies, there is a growing focus on the geopolitical intricacies that influence writing practices and their contextual backgrounds, sparking new debates about identity development in academic writing. During the past decade, new studies have emerged that seek to understand the processes of appropriation and transformation among Latin American students belonging to groups who did not traditionally attend university, with the aim of building alternatives and ways of producing knowledge aligned with current paradigms of interculturality, epistemic justice, and social justice—contexts in which collaborative efforts are increasingly taking place (Sito and Moreno 2021). These studies highlight the need for structural change in writing instruction programs, calling for approaches that recognize the knowledge and experiences students bring with them and promote more dialogical and equitable practices.

Such discussions hold relevance for rethinking the training that researchers receive, especially as academics increasingly collaborate with marginalized populations, social organizations, and movements. These dynamics highlight the importance of critically aware researchers, capable of navigating complex institutional settings shaped by diversities and inequalities, thus contributing to the construction of a more plural and equitable world. International collaborative projects serve as valuable training grounds that broaden academic perspectives. Under this panorama, my research examines the question: What identity negotiation processes come into play when writing academic texts?

Central to this inquiry is a team of eight Early Career Researchers (ECRs), PhD candidates, and postdoctoral fellows, collaborating on a project that critically examines the role of higher education for Indigenous peoples

in Mexico at both local and global scales. Participants were selected based on the following criteria: their enrollment as advanced doctoral students or involvement in postdoctoral fellowships, their participation in a research project within the field of education, and their voluntary agreement to contribute to this study.

Writing and Identity

Building on the understanding of writing as a situated cultural practice (Street 1993; Gee 1996), this research adopts Roz Ivanič's (1998) framework to examine the interplay between writing and identity. From an intercultural standpoint, academic identity construction is viewed as a dialogic process shaped by the interaction of cultural elements within both individual and collective identities.

Here, writing is seen as a space of struggle, negotiation, and translation, where values, practices, and ways of being from diverse cultural communities interact—sometimes harmoniously, sometimes in tension or contradiction—reshaping academic practices in the process. By exploring how early-career researchers (ECRs) engage with writing, their guiding purposes, and how they negotiate their positioning within texts, this study sheds light on the processes through which academic identities are constructed. It also examines how, during the act of writing, multiple identities converge, drawing upon resources from a variety of cultural contexts.

Ivanič (1998) emphasizes writing as an act of identity—a site for negotiation, tension, and positioning—that reveals how individuals participate in either the reproduction or resistance of dominant discourses and practices, while adopting values and beliefs about writing. Ivanič (1998) identifies four aspects of identity in writing: autobiographical (personal experiences influencing the author), discursive (how the writer positions themselves relative to audience expectations and academic conventions), authorial, and positional (power and authority dynamics within the academic field). These aspects are marked by inherent tensions, such as conflicts between personal beliefs and academic expectations, which challenge writers to balance their voices with institutional norms, shaping the consolidation of their identities.

From an intercultural perspective, academic identity construction is an inherently intercultural process involving dialogue, tension, and contradiction among the diverse cultural elements that shape identities. The

anthropological approach to interculturality, as described by Dietz (2017), explores relationships within societies, recognizing that identities and interaction patterns are formed and reshaped through group dynamics. This relational view of identity emphasizes power, particularly the power to define inclusion and exclusion. Dietz (2017) asserts that "the historical roots of these processes of inclusion and exclusion are part of an intercultural analysis of society" (193). This intercultural lens facilitates understanding identity construction in academic texts as identity formation in the academic context navigates power relations and opportunities for redefining identity.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative approach and draws on an ethnographic method (Velasco and Díaz de Rada 1997), which is particularly well-suited to contexts that acknowledge and value diverse identities. This approach facilitates a nuanced understanding of participants' experiences and captures their perspectives on the phenomenon under study. Consequently, the research is framed within an inductive and collaborative perspective. The research design uses the following tools:

1. Literacy Histories: Narratives detailing personal and academic experiences related to writing.
2. Conversations around texts: Dialogues focusing on participants' reflections and strategies in text production.
3. Participant Observation and Self-Observation: Insights from both the researcher's and participants' observations of academic writing practices.
4. *Intersaberes* Workshops (Focus Groups): Collaborative sessions aimed at fostering shared knowledge and co-construction of understanding.

The following table outlines how these tools were applied and details the means of data analysis employed.

Table 1: Tools, application, and data analysis

Tools	Application	Data analysis
Literacy Histories interviews	July - December 2023: 8 individual interviews via Zoom, WhatsApp. Hours transcribed: 16:03:58	ATLAS.ti Coding based on a priori categories Open and axial coding: emergent categories Co-occurrence analysis: hierarchical relationships between codes (semantic networks) Micro-comparative analysis between subjects (GT)
Text corpus: CVs, Research paper drafts, published papers, PhD thesis drafts.	Collecting since December 2023.	Construction of academic trajectory lines to be contrasted with interviews.
Conversations around texts	April – October 2024: 7 individual interviews via Zoom. Transcribed hours: 11:43:04	ATLAS.ti Coding based on emerging categories Micro-comparative analysis between subjects (GT)
Intersaberes Workshop	October 2024: Workshop "Who am I in this text?" via Zoom. Transcribed hours: 02:14:26	In process: Coding with ATLAS.ti based on emerging categories

Source: Own elaboration.

Analysis

The analysis of interviews and text corpus revealed that researchers develop diverse uses and strategies with and through academic writing that extend beyond the immediate text they are producing. These uses and strategies are shaped by the purposes and motivations behind their writing, even when such reflections are only partially conscious. Moreover, the typology of these uses and strategies (see Table 3) is closely tied to two key factors: (1) the researchers' level of professional and academic consolidation, and (2) the

position they occupy within institutional spaces. These factors, in turn, influence their ability to negotiate or assert a specific positioning within their texts. This analysis offers valuable insights into the multiple identities that intersect in academic writing and highlights the conditions and challenges involved in the appropriation processes experienced by students. Building on these findings, I defined the axes of analysis for the literacy histories, ensuring both argumentative coherence in the thesis document and a systematic framework for the analytical categories.

Table 2: Narrative structure of academic literacy trajectories

Axes	Content
Life histories and previous reading and writing experiences	Where he/she is from, languages, cultural identity, early migratory experiences Relationship to reading and writing in family context Relationship to reading and writing in school context Motivations and possibilities to continue the academic path, relationship with socio-historical context
Academic trajectory and written production	Relationship to academic writing Limitations and possibilities in the learning/appropriation of writing during the academic trajectory Experiences in and out of academic contexts Motivations and possibilities to continue the path as a researcher First publications and research experiences
Tensions and contradictions in the construction of academic identity	Experiences in relation to the conception and practice of academic culture and research Tensions and contradictions between cultural contexts and identities
Positioning: choices and possibilities for the self in/with writing	Reflections on the decision to becoming and academic Uses and strategies from and with academic writing Identity negotiations

Source: Own elaboration.

Following elements of Grounded Theory (GT) (Corbin and Strauss 2015), these axes serve to understand how the writing-identity relationship is configured as intercultural dialogue and to go up levels of theoretical abstraction that account for how this relationship is constructed. Likewise, the axes of analysis are based on the dimensions of identity in writing because

they should help to answer the research questions. Regarding the textual structure, each axis functioned to articulate the coherence of the narratives.

Processes of Academic Identity Consolidation

The narratives of the participants in this study highlight how the appropriation and agency of academic writing are deeply intertwined with individual trajectories shaped by institutional affiliations, learning opportunities, social networks, and lived experiences both within and beyond academic contexts. These experiences encompass a wide range of factors, including family, community, education, migration, professional histories, and the motivations that drive continued engagement in academia. The institutions that participants belong to—and the roles they occupy within them, such as students, faculty, assistants, coordinators, or researchers—play a pivotal role in defining access to diverse spaces and ways of thinking and acting. These institutional and personal contexts influence the development of interests, networks, and broader capacities as scholars, researchers, and writers.

Sometimes these experiences arise in extracurricular spaces fostered by institutions or faculty, while at other times, they emerge from personal interests, fieldwork, or work-related encounters. In these contexts, affiliations and positionalities shift, reflecting the dynamic and multifaceted nature of academia. Furthermore, the formation of academic identity is closely tied to moments of crisis or tension that often redefine the what, why, and for whom of writing. These experiences reshape and diversify writing practices, expanding possibilities for self-definition and positioning within academic texts.

The academic trajectories of the participants were explored through iterative stages of individual and collaborative analysis. These trajectories offer provisional responses to the research question: What identity negotiation processes are involved in writing academic texts? In comparing these academic journeys, particular attention was given to strategies, tensions, and contradictions associated with academic writing, especially regarding the underlying purposes and motivations that inform writing practices within this context.

Purposes of Academic Writing

The narratives analyzed for this study confirm that writing serves as a space where writers negotiate their identities. Depending on the objectives or purposes of a given text, writers can affirm or resist certain values, beliefs, and practices within the academic community. As Ivanič (1998) suggests, the positionality assumed through writing is closely linked to broader processes of identity construction. Table 3 outlines the types of purposes served by the academic texts referred to by the participants in this study. It is important to note that these purposes are not isolated; instead, they are inherently intertwined, meaning no single text serves a singular purpose.

Table 3: Purposes for writing academic texts

Institutional Requirement	Meeting institutional criteria, such as fulfilling degree requirements, producing academic outputs, demonstrating social impact, or achieving leadership in research (e.g., publications, citations, participation in well-funded scientific projects).
Networking and Collaboration	Establishing connections with academic peers, consolidating professional networks, and exploring shared interests.
Legitimization	Gaining recognition and prestige, accessing privileged spaces, and joining exclusive academic groups.
Epistemic Inquiry	Reflecting on, exploring, and developing knowledge about topics or proposals of personal and academic interest.
Ethical-Political Commitment	Responding to, debating, or advocating for ideas or proposals aligned with the writer's ethical or political values.

Source: Own elaboration.

These purposes emphasize the multifaceted nature of academic writing, demonstrating how it functions as both a practical and identity-shaping activity within the academic sphere. For example, when talking about his doctoral dissertation, Esteban, who identifies himself as a Zapotec, expresses:

> When I write something, I don't write for our teachers. I don't write for my supervisor, because I know they do it better than me. When I write, although it might sound egocentric, I write to understand myself. First of all, to understand myself but I also write for others, others who are not academics. ... People who do not write. And not because they are illiterate or don't know much. No, I don't want it to be seen that way ... But, rather, because I consider that there are things ... Let's say, if within the academy there is the issue of the curriculum that is discussed, for us or for me and for the ordinary, common people, the people, well, who are not interested in the curriculum, that is not the discussion. For me, the discussion would perhaps be the teacher's ethics ..., how the teacher stands or behaves with his students, who are hungry, who have no clothes, who have no huarache, who have no money to buy pens, books. (Esteban, 07/26/23)

By stating "I do not write for our professors," Esteban shows he is writing under an institutional requirement but he's also resisting it, as it represents a hegemonic culture. He even declares he uses writing to "understand himself," which entails an epistemic inquiry purpose. And we also find a clear ethical-political commitment in his narrative when he states that he writes for "others who are not academics."

In another example, Andrea, who arrived in Mexico from Colombia to obtain a PhD degree, reflects on how she established a professional connection with a renowned researcher in her field of study:

> When I came to Mexico, he [referring to a prominent researcher in the field of interculturality] was one of the essential figures to read and speak with. Many people recommended him to me—from my supervisor ... to individuals I interviewed from the academic community. They kept asking, 'Have you already talked to him? Because he's worked on this topic before and is interested in comparative studies.' I had already read some of his work and thought, 'Okay, this is good.' So, recognizing the need, I invited him to be part of my reading committee. He became one of the people who reviewed my thesis. (Andrea, August 18, 2023)

Andrea's narrative shows her understanding of the importance of engaging with key figures in a specific cultural and academic context. In the process of writing her thesis in a different cultural setting, she recognized the necessity of referencing a well-established scholar in the Mexican context to legitimize herself as a researcher in her field. Her account also highlights an institutional requirement, as evidenced by her supervisor's advice to engage with this researcher. This example illustrates how institutional expectations, and personal initiatives meet to shape academic trajectories and foster connections within the research community.

In the case of Javier, who is of Zoque origin, the purposes of writing seem to overwhelm and contradict him, as he grapples with the ethical and political commitment tied to his cultural identity:

> Sometimes, I share the content of my publications, but only with people who understand the text—those who work in or are part of this environment. But not with the communities. And, well, I haven't disseminated it directly or locally, closely with my people. They won't understand me. I talk to them about life experiences, but it seems that the focus on production is driven by the idea that 'If I am in the SNII, it is to maintain the impact.' And it should be that way, one should ... but no, it doesn't reach them. They don't visualize it. It's just about producing and producing. ... I've seen it with the other teachers, and I talk to them, I approach them, and they write just to comply with the SNII. They have several publications ... and now that they know I am part of the SNII, they open their eyes, when before they didn't. (Javier, August 9, 2023)

Javier's narrative reveals that, within the framework of his belonging to the national system of researchers, he faces an institutional requirement: "If I am in the SNII, it is to maintain the impact." This connects to a purpose of legitimization within his academic community: "Now that they know I am part of the SNII, they open their eyes." However, his narrative also expresses a deeper ethical-political commitment that he feels unable to fulfill, which appears to trouble him: "I haven't directly or locally shared it with my people. They won't understand me."

Reflecting on her latest paper, co-authored with a colleague from the research team, Cecilia shares:

> I don't remember exactly how we decided it. One day, we agreed that we needed to sit down, brainstorm, and figure out how to analyze the data—but in person. So, he came to Puebla, and we worked on it ... We looked at the flowers holistically, identified recurring patterns, and decided how to process the information and conduct the analysis, because there wasn't any predefined methodology for it. We had to examine each flower individually, assessing what each one represented in terms of oppression or privilege. These became the two main categories—oppression and privilege—because that's how the flower is designed. ... The richness of this exercise lay in the fact that we developed the article while I was also thinking about the paper I needed to write. During the Sendas team meetings, we had already expressed an interest in approaching the research from a gender perspective. (Cecilia, September 20, 2024)

Cecilia's account highlights several purposes driving her collaborative work. One purpose is networking and collaboration, as evidenced by her mention

of sitting down and brainstorming with her colleague, underscoring the collaborative nature of the writing process. Another purpose is epistemic inquiry, exemplified by the statement, "We had already expressed an interest in approaching the research from a gender perspective," which reflects her desire to explore and deepen her understanding of a specific topic. Additionally, Cecilia alludes to fulfilling an institutional requirement for her doctoral program, which obligates her to publish an article based on her research. This interplay of professional collaboration, intellectual exploration, and institutional expecta-tions highlights the multifaceted motivations that drive academic writing and knowledge production.

Identity Negotiations: Dialogues, Tensions, and Contradictions

The narratives demonstrate that our position—whether defined by power, authority, or experience—and our professional trajectory play a significant role in shaping the decisions we make when constructing our positioning in a given text. These decisions inherently involve negotiating our identity as academics. Such factors and purposes enable us to adopt specific roles or positions, such as professor-expert, student, or representative of a community or culture. As we refine and consolidate our identities as scholars and authors, these negotiations and decisions increasingly reflect deliberate and strategically employed processes of agency. I call these deliberate and strategic processes of constructing positioning in a text as "identity negotiations." These negotiations encompass contradictions, tensions, and dialogues that emerge during the process of shaping our discursive identity within a text. As Fairclough (2003) asserts, discourse constitutes particular ways of being and shapes specific social or personal identities.

The analysis suggests three distinct ways of negotiating identity and positioning in academic writing. These categories of negotiation are not tied to specific texts but rather represent how we navigate our positioning in writing more broadly.

1. Contradictions

- Our academic identity is at odds with the positioning we construct in the text.
- We feel discomfort or disconnect with what we write due to perceived contradictions.

- Our position may become obscured or erased from the text, leading to objectification.

We can see contradictions in the following examples.

> This game that you seem to be playing—which is not really a game but a context that shapes personality and subjectivity—I'm going to transpose it to what we're analyzing. That very same thing, right there, my color changes. I take on a white color in a paper. I am white; I am a doctor because academia has bleached me, in a way, right? We're still talking about this kind of hegemonic, whitening academy. But outside of that article, I am still Black. (Esteban, July 26, 2023)

Esteban, who reivindicates his Zapotec identity, experiences contradictions when positioning himself within academic texts, as he does not yet fully see himself as an academic. This struggle is partly due to his age and trajectory—at twenty-nine, he has not yet had experience as a university professor—and to his ongoing efforts to establish a network within the academic world where he feels a sense of belonging. Furthermore, he continues to resist forms of writing that seek to objectify discourse and erase identity. He compares being an academic to playing a game in which he feels forced to "change color" in order to gain legitimacy within the field.

Similarly, Javier, who identifies as Zoque, describes the contradictions he faces when writing and attempting to position himself within academic texts:

> *I would like to write what comes naturally to me—I have always tried to do it that way—but there are always rules, the rules that have been established, and you have to conform to that dynamic. So yes, I feel compelled to follow them; I've always seen it that way. Because if you don't, you're not accepted—you're not recognized as a doctor. And I always want to be a doctor because, for me, academic recognition as a doctor means 'you have to be among them.' Maybe one day, if I achieve an extensive trajectory and manage to continue this life, I could impose certain things. But for now, I feel I'm not there yet—I'm still adapting to the forms imposed by a certain community.* (Javier, May 6, 2024)

Javier recognizes these imposed rules as his greatest obstacle to asserting his position because, in a way, they contradict his idea of what an academic should be. He recognizes that failure to conform leads to exclusion from the academic community in which he works. Despite his substantial experience and membership in national research systems, he still feels he lacks the authority to challenge or transform these rules. This creates profound tensions as he navigates the process of expressing authority within his writing.

2. Tensions:

- Our academic identity creates tensions with the positioning we construct in the text.
- While we may feel some discomfort, these tensions can lead to discovering alternative ways of positioning ourselves.
- Our position is inconsistently visible, marked by nuance or ambiguity.

Maria discusses the tensions she encounters with her writing style. She describes the need to adjust her vocabulary to align with established norms, though she does not view this as a contradiction. Instead, she frames it as a contextual formality required by the academic environment. Like Esteban, she is nearing the completion of her doctoral studies and is in the process of consolidating her trajectory as an academic. However, unlike Esteban, she has already spent a few years as a university teacher and has co-authored several papers. When María discusses tensions, she refers to the struggles she has faced in being forced to adjust her more literary style of writing to meet academic expectations:

> I worked with life stories, and I think my love for literature played a role in that—it blended a little. I felt—and I think my supervisor would agree—that sometimes my writing bordered too much on the literary, especially when narrating someone's life story. I think adapting to a more formal, academic, and rigorous style of writing was quite challenging for me. I overcame it by reading the work of others and finding pieces that aligned somewhat with my style but were executed with much more formality. *(María, January 8, 2023)*

María's reflections highlight the tension between her personal writing preferences and the demands of academic writing in the field of Education Research. Her journey illustrates how she navigated this challenge, striking a balance by drawing inspiration from other works that aligned with her stylistic inclinations while adhering to the conventions of scholarly rigor.
Vanesa discusses tensions related to differing methodological perspectives and her experience resisting an approach imposed by her thesis supervisor during her master's program:

> My work focused on conceptions of reading and writing in graduate school, viewed through the lens of academic literacy. I approached it qualitatively ... and negotiating this took me nearly a year. My resistance stemmed from the fact that [my thesis advisor] didn't want me to study a graduate context—which was the one I was familiar with—because she doesn't work with writing at higher levels; her expertise is with earlier stages. So, she was trying

> to push me to study something else, something aligned with her area of focus. Another issue, and this took almost a semester, was convincing her that I wanted to write in the first person ... but she said no, insisting I had to write in the third person because [she] is quantitative, you know? (Vanesa, December 19, 2023)

Vanesa's narrative highlights the challenges of navigating methodological conflicts and asserting her own academic voice in the face of supervisory authority. Her resistance to the imposition of her advisor underscores the tension between adhering to established conventions and maintaining her own approach and perspective within her research.

3. Dialogues:

- Our academic identity enters into dialogue with the positioning we construct in the text.
- We find a sense of alignment or comfort, allowing us to make our positioning visible and authentic.
- This process fosters subjectification, where the author's presence is evident in the text.

Andrea participated in the creation of an academic journal during her undergraduate studies, which provided her with extensive experience in academic publishing and allowed her to develop various ways of expressing herself in different academic contexts. Through her involvement in the journal, Andrea learned to contextualize (and control) the expectations of the reader, enabling her to engage in a metareflective exercise on how the text interacts with its audience, ultimately helping her find a balance in positioning herself within the text. She explains:

> From then on, whether in presentations or papers, I start by saying: 'This is my place of enunciation, this is my limit, but also my horizon of possibility.' So, of course, anyone listening or reading knows what to expect and, just as importantly, what not to expect. And that relieves me. In the end, it's all about 'controlling'—controlling how far people can expect this or that. (Andrea, May 18, 2023)

Similarly, Iván, who identifies with the Mazahua community and has an extensive academic background within recognized institutions and an established network in his field, has also found ways to balance his academic positioning while navigating the demands and constraints of writing. He reflects:

> I've made an effort not to let academic writing consume me. I mean, these are the things I like to say, and I will keep saying them in that way. I try to nuance it, to find a middle ground between the academic language that I have to present in a journal, in a book, or in an opinion piece, and that other part of me, my essence. And I've transferred that, not just for myself, but to the people I work with. (Iván, November 8, 2023)

Conclusions

As the participants' narratives in this research demonstrate, writing plays a crucial role in building alliances, serving as a means of positioning oneself and gaining legitimacy within the academic community. While this practice is often driven by productivist principles—such as being evaluated, generating impact, and sustaining academic output—it also serves strategic purposes. Through writing, researchers can forge connections and draw attention to critical issues and debates to which they are deeply committed. The identity negotiation processes involved in academic writing are shaped by a constellation of cultural and professional factors. As I have argued in previous research (Franco 2024), these factors include not only institutional expectations and disciplinary norms, but also the sociocultural histories and positionalities of the writers themselves. In line with Ivanič (1998), identity in academic writing is not constructed in isolation; rather, it emerges dialogically, shaped by both personal and collective experiences and the broader contexts in which writing occurs.

The cultural identity and context influences how authors understand and perform their identities in texts. For instance, writers from historically marginalized or non-hegemonic backgrounds often find themselves navigating dominant epistemologies that implicitly privilege certain ways of knowing and being—often white, Western, and male—as the default. As Zavala (2011) puts it, these contexts can compel writers to adopt voices or discursive strategies that feel inauthentic or disembodied. At the same time, professional contexts—such as academic discipline, institutional prestige, level of consolidation, or mentorship structures—shape what is legible, acceptable, and ultimately valued in scholarly contributions.

As seen in the experiences of Esteban and Javier, contradictions often emerge when individuals feel compelled to conform to academic norms that erase or neutralize aspects of their identities. These contradictions highlight the systemic pressures many writers face to "fit in" a dominant mold in order to gain recognition or legitimacy. However, the presence of tensions—such

as those described by María and Vanesa—also signals sites of potential transformation, where authors begin to question, resist, or reconfigure these norms. These tensions reveal the generative potential of discomfort, showing how writers can carve space for their own voices, styles, and methods, even within constraining structures.

Perhaps most illuminating are the examples of dialogue, where participants like Andrea and Iván find a sense of alignment between their identities and the ways they position themselves in text. In these cases, academic writing becomes not a site of assimilation but a dialogic practice of expression and negotiation. Here, identity is neither hidden nor erased but made visible—performatively and reflectively—within the discourse. The capacity to articulate one's "place of enunciation" (as Andrea puts it) or to remain committed to one's "essence" (as Iván says) signals a growing recognition of plural epistemologies within academic spaces.

These insights underscore the performative dimension of writing as a political and ethical act. To write is not only to communicate knowledge, but to position oneself within systems of value, authority, and power (Canagarajah 2013; Curry and Lillis 2003). As Ivanič (1998) affirms, the choices writers make are acts of identity negotiation that either conform to or challenge existing paradigms. Understanding this process is vital to shaping a more plural and equitable academic world. It invites scholars, educators, editors, and institutions to critically examine whose voices are being heard, whose styles are being sanctioned, and whose epistemologies are being validated. For readers invested in plurality, these narratives serve as a call to support spaces that allow for diverse forms of expression and ways of knowing. They also prompt us to imagine writing not as a gatekeeping tool (Lillis 2001), but as a permeable, dialogic, and inclusive practice.

Ultimately, reflecting on how cultural and professional contexts shape identity in academic writing compels us to ask: How can we foster scholarly environments where authenticity, difference, and situated knowledges are not only permitted but celebrated? And how can we reimagine academic writing as a space of co-construction, where plurality is not an exception, but the norm? These are the questions that must guide us if we hope to move beyond assimilationist models and toward a genuinely plural and equitable knowledge landscape.

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The State as *Illusio*: Between the Anthropomorphic Nation and the Plurinationality of the Pachamama in Bolivia

Jesús Llusco Mamani (Kuntur-Mamani Llusco)

In this chapter, I reflect from an Aymara perspective on the sociopolitical conflicts that occurred in Bolivia during 2019, a period during which people representing various political and ideological positions resorted to material and symbolic objects to activate, dispute, and resignify collective memories. These objects functioned not only as instruments of identification but also as carriers of conflicting historical meanings. In this context, I propose to understand the state as an *illusio*. From this notion, I argue that the nation and plurinationality should be understood as two contentuous ideological projects. The notion of the nation is articulated through an anthropomorphic form of the state, established since its foundation in 1825, which centers political identity on the figure of the modern and homogeneous human subject. In contrast, the plurinational project, which has been mainly promoted by Indigenous movements since the late twentieth century, proposes an alternative form of state organization, one that recognizes the political and symbolic agency of non-human living beings, such as the Pachamama. This vision acquired constitutional status in 2009 with the approval of the new Carta Magna, which formally enshrined the rights of Mother Earth and redefined the relationship between the state, cultural diversity, and Indigenous worldviews. The new constitution contributed to a transformation of conceptions of the world, life, and the nation.

Both the nation and plurinationality embody distinct historical trajectories and are sustained by multiple memories. These memories can be understood as political mechanisms that link, on the one hand, the hegemonic construction of national history and, on the other, the persistence of Aymara national memory. These narratives and counter-narratives become materialized, embodied, and connected through various objects that, as Martin Holbraad (2017) has noted, are imbued with meaning, mediating between worldviews through which visions of the past, present, and future are being expressed. As a consequence, around these things a series of

symbolic and material conflicts unfold, expressed through multiple representations, uses, and interpretations. These interactions do not occur linearly or uniformly; instead, they manifest in correlational ways, generating tensions and releases, disputes and commitments, consensus and dissent that operate across various levels of intensity, time, and space.

At the end of 2019, the Bible and the *waxt'a*, the material and ritual representation of the Pachamama in Andean practices, became the center of one such dispute. During Evo Morales's tenure, the waxt'a acquired quite a prominence in official ceremonies of the Plurinational State. It became a symbol of recognition of Indigenous spiritualities and their centrality in the country's political life. However, its presence was interpreted by certain conservative sectors as a threat to the traditional religious order. This symbolic conflict intensified when Senator Jeanine Áñez, a member of the opposition party *Unidad Demócrata* (Democratic Unity), declared herself interim president following the resignation of Evo Morales Ayma on November 11, 2019. Upon taking office, Áñez walked from the Legislative Assembly to the Government Palace ostentatiously carrying a large Bible, and thanked God before the gathered press for allowing "the Bible to return to the Palace." She concluded her speech with the phrase: "May god bless us and enlighten us."[45] In doing so, Áñez replicated the gesture of the then-president of the *Comité Cívico de Santa Cruz* (Civic Committee of Santa Cruz), Luis Fernando Camacho, who days earlier had declared: "We will return the Bible to the Palacio Quemado."[46] Camacho also delivered a brief speech from the balcony of the presidential palace, holding a smaller Bible, in which he declared: "The Pachamama will never again return to the Government Palace."[47]

Áñez's statements deepened political divisions that had been growing after several days of violent confrontations led by various social organizations, some supporting and others opposing Morales's government.

[45] He is currently under preventive arrest as Governor of Santa Cruz, "gas businessman, religious fundamentalist and deeply racist, at the time he served as president of the Civic Committee of Santa Cruz, he is the most faithful representative of a citizen and white elite that governed Bolivia for centuries and was displaced from its spaces of power with the arrival of the coca growers' and indigenous Aymara leader, Evo Morales." See: https://elgritodelsur.com.ar/2019/11/quien-macho-camacho-golpista-boliviano.html

[46] Statement made by Luis Fernando Camacho who "moments before kneeling in front of a bible and a Bolivian flag. See: https://elgritodelsur.com.ar/2019/11/quien-macho-camacho-golpista-boliviano.html

[47] https://www.elpais.com.co/mundo/la-biblia-vuelve-a-entrar-a-palacio-jeanine-anez-presidenta-interina-de-bolivia.html.

Advocates of the plurinational project faced a sudden surge of opposition from defenders of the nation state. Each position intertwined with a range of emotions expressed through uncertainty, sadness, melancholy, nostalgia, powerlessness, anger, frustration, disappointment, and social resentment. This four-month period of confrontations, from September to December 2019, left thirty-seven dead and hundreds of wounded on both sides.

At the heart of this conflict—and perhaps its most alarming aspect—was a return to an old conception of the monocultural nation-state (Anderson 1993), which sought to undo, symbolically and temporarily, the advances achieved through the plurinational project. This regression did not merely signify a change in government but rather the reestablishment of a political order in which the Pachamama—as a symbolic, spiritual, and political entity—was once again rendered invisible by the state apparatus. This moment marked a crucial point of uncertainty regarding the worldviews in play: it was not only power being contested, but also the very foundations of the world that the state is recognizing and validating.

Against the background of this concflict, this chapter analyzes the relationship between the Bolivian nation and the Bible, on the one hand, and between the Pachamama and plurinationality, on the other. Instead of understanding this dispute as a simple opposition of symbols, I propose to interpret it as a struggle over the agency that the Aymara worldview attributes to the Pachamama. For the Ayama she is not a mere Indigenous symbol politicized for their convenience, but a living entity that through invocation and materialization in rituals, offerings, and official discourses has acquired a form of agency that challenges the anthropomorphic shape of the state. The exclusion of Pachamama after the 2019 events is an active negation of a non-human political subject whose presence unsettles the institutional frameworks inherited from the nineteenth-century nation-state. Pachamama, then, does not represent only an ancestral past but an alternative possibility of a future in which humans and non-humans coexist in a relational politico-spiritual framework. Her presence—and her exclusion—should be read as expressions of the conflict between worldviews in dispute within the Bolivian state space.

To understand the context of this conflict, it is important to recognize that the Pachamama serves as a powerful transgressive vehicle of Aymara resistance against Spanish and white colonial domination. She embodies pre-Hispanic deities that oppose the imposition of virgins and saints created by the Catholic Church since colonial times. She offers a mechanism to live and relive these deities on a continuous and everyday base, particularly through

patron saint celebrations. These festivities generate overlapping identities whose coexistence unfolds over time amid various dynamic disagreements and consensuses, and which are defended periodically and annually. Scholars have often described these identities in terms of religious syncretism. However, I argue that such conceptualizations fail to account for the antagonistic nature of the dispute. Instead, in this chapter, I aim to examine the transition of Pachamama from being considered a purely Indigenous celebration—denied by mestizo classes, self-identified criollos, and the state itself—to becoming a significant element of plurinational identity. To understand this transition, it is crucial to consider the state's political agenda, which in its different historical moments has sought to recreate national identities. From this perspective, the Pachamama becomes a permanent act of political construction and expression in Bolivia.

The Bolivian State: Between Historical Exclusion and Symbolic Plurinationality

The Bolivian state has been interpreted through various theoretical frameworks, ranging from liberal historiography to decolonial approaches. Nineteenth-century republican historiography conceived the state as a civilizing tool aimed at assimilating or symbolically eliminating Indigenous people, denying their existence as pre-existing nations. Figures such as Alcides Arguedas (1909) promoted a racist and whitening vision that influenced policies of Castilianization, suppression of the *ayllu* (a form of community organization), and displacement of ethnic knowledge.

René Zavaleta Mercado (1986) took a new direction by understanding the Bolivian state not only as a political structure but as a historical and social construction linked to colonial domination and the exclusion of Indigenous people. For Zavaleta, the Bolivian state has functioned as a "machine of exclusion" that reproduces power relations centered on the hegemony of Creole and mestizo elites, imposing a homogeneous national project that renders the country's ethnic and cultural plurality invisible. Questions related to ethnicity were subordinated to the logic of colonialism and statehood. With the National Revolution of 1952, the state sought to integrate excluded sectors through structural reforms such as agrarian reform and universal suffrage. However, this inclusion had a sytrongly tutelary character: Indigenous people were transformed into "peasants," stripped of their political, spiritual, and territorial identity. Revolutionary nationalism

instrumentalized certain Indigenous symbolic elements, without dismantling the coloniality of power or transforming the dominant civilizational matrix.

During the 1970s and 1980s, Marxist scholars interpreted the state as an instrument of class domination. Authors such as Guillermo Lora (1979) and Álvaro García Linera (2009) deepened structural analysis. The latter proposed the notion of an "expanded State" as a space of dispute between capitalist and communal logics. While these perspectives recognized the conflictual nature of the state, they generally tend to subordinate ethnic and territorial demands to class contradictions.

From the 1990s and more forcefully in the twenty-first century, postcolonial and decolonial approaches emerged from Indigenous memories. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2010) denounced the persistence of the "coloniality of power" and proposed the concept of *ch'ixi* to describe the unresolved coexistence between the Indigenous and the mestizo. From this viewpoint, symbols such as the *wiphala* or *Pachamama* have been incorporated into the state apparatus, but one again without leading to a real transformation of its structures. The state continues to operate under Western, hierarchical, and extractivist logics, even when dressed in plurinational attire.

The 2009 Constitution enshrined the Plurinational State, recognizing cultural diversity, Indigenous legal systems, and the rights of Mother Earth. Nevertheless, its implementation has been partial and contradictory. Cases such as the TIPNIS conflict reveal the tensions between decolonial discourse and the government's developmentalist practices. As Raquel Gutiérrez (2017) has pointed, the colonial model has continued to function under new symbolic forms. Thus, the state remains a contested field where persistent colonial structures coexist with Indigenous emancipatory projects. Current demands call for effective sovereignty, structural transformation, and epistemic recognition based on our own worldviews—not merely symbolic inclusion.

In the context following Evo Morales's election, cultural policies promoted by international cooperation agencies, such as the United Nations Developmental Programme, played a decisive role in the symbolic configuration of the Plurinational State. Olaf Kaltmeier and Sebastian Thies (2011) analyze how these interventions not only promote the discursive inclusion of Indigenous identities but also act as technologies of state legitimation. Through publications like *El Estado del Estado* and audiovisual materials like *El Estado de las cosas*, the national narrative is reformulated under a pluriculturalized identity, without altering hierarchical structures or decolonizing state institutions.

This regime of representation operates under a neoliberal logic that converts culture into symbolic and economic capital, articulating discourses of inclusion with strategies of global governance. Instead of promoting structural or epistemic transformation, these policies stabilize the image of a modern and multicultural state for the international community, while neutralizing historical demands for self-determination and Indigenous sovereignty. In this sense, Kaltmeier and Thies's critique helps us understand how development cooperation can reproduce hegemonic forms of the postcolonial state through symbolic means, far removed from a truly communal and plural vision.

The State as *illusio* and the Nation as an Ideological Project

Let us now turn to my own reading of the state as an *illusio*, an understanding that emphasizes the constructed nature of the state and its capacity to shape the perception of political reality. This *illusio* takes form through the nation and, more recently, through plurinationality—two projects that can be understood as antagonistic ideologies. To understand this construction, it is useful to recall that Max Weber considered that the idea of the state is not only an objective description, but a mechanism of legitimacy shaped by governmental institutions to naturalize the existing political order (Corrigan and Sayer 2007, 51). Similarly, Karl Marx observed that the modern state is not only an instrument of bourgeois power but, in its very form, embodies the values and social relations of capitalist society (Corrigan and Sayer 2007, 65). Seen from this perspective, the state does not merely exercise power but conceals its functioning through a unifying narrative that grants it coherence and legitimacy.

Michael Taussig (2015 [1997], 490) has pointed out the power of the "magical realism" of the modern state, referring to how it presents itself as a real and inevitable entity when it is in fact a symbolic construction deeply imbued with ideology. Along these lines, Corrigan and Sayer (2007, 51) observe that the state functions as an ideological artifact projecting unity and structure over dispersed and often contradictory governmental practices. Philip Abrams (1988, 58) complements this view by arguing that the state is not the reality behind politics, but the mask that prevents us from seeing it as it is. Its ideological efficacy lies in its ability to interpellate both conservatives and radicals, making them believe that their political action is addressed to a superior entity when in fact they act upon an organized fiction (Abrams 1988, 63).

This conceptualization leads me to consider the state as a project of domination and legitimation, whose effectiveness depends on its symbolic representation. In this sense, the nation is one of its most powerful ideological expressions. Marx already warned: "the state is the ideal embodiment of the nation" (cited in Corrigan and Sayer 2007, 80), as it represents through its symbols, rituals, and discourses what defines and distinguishes us as a collective. This representation is key to constituting social cohesion within a class structure (Abrams 1988, 60), where coercive and ideological functions are "conveniently located as functions of the state" (Abrams 1988, 70).

In this framework, I understand the state as *illusio*, an image or representation that has no true reality, embedded in the imagination or caused by sensory deception. This understanding allows me to emphasize the ideological function of the state and of the nation. From this perspective, the state is a useful fiction, sustained by rituals, symbols, and discourses that make it appear natural. From there, I turn to consider the nation—and by extension plurinationality—as ideological constructions with opposing meanings. The Bolivian nation, conceived as an imagined community (Anderson 1993), has historically operated as a project of cultural and symbolic homogenization. However, this project has encountered its main obstacle in the persistence of a heterogeneous social reality. As Partha Chatterjee argues, the ethnic nations within the state are not only different, but also imagine the national community from the point of view of a "politics of heterogeneity" that is based on contextual and historical strategies and not fixed essences (2008, 11).

This structural ambivalence generates a tension between two temporalities: a pedagogical one, which conceives the people as in formation toward a national destiny, and a performative one, which must continually reiterate national unity as if it had always existed (Chatterjee 2008, 63). At this point, Anderson (1993, 24) reminds us that national communities are not distinguished by their authenticity but by the style in which they are imagined. Thus, the nation is conceived as a deep and horizontal community, capable of mobilizing such intense affections that millions of people have been willing to kill or die for it (Anderson 1993, 25). Nationalism, in this sense, sacralizes politics, placing the nation above politics itself. As Bruce Kapferer (1988, 1) notes, the nation becomes an object of devotion and its symbols are charged with a transcendent meaning that empowers nationalist movements. Language, customs, and traditions are elevated to sacred foundations of national identity. Culture, then, not only constitutes the nation but is constituted as national in the very act of doing so (Kapferer 1988, 1).

This symbolic dimension is emotionally expressed in subaltern subjects, generating a "human emotion" (Kapferer 1988, 8), which allows us to think of the nation as both a political and affective phenomenon. Nationalism, therefore, is not only an ideology but an emotional experience with concrete political effects (Anderson 1993, 261).

In conclusion, the state as *illusio* and the nation as its dominant ideological form are key tools for organizing power. Plurinationality, by disputing this homogeneous narrative, introduces a politics of difference that challenges hegemonic forms of representation and legitimation. The tension between both projects is not only institutional but deeply symbolic, emotional, and ultimately political.

The Anthropomorphic Nation, Sacralized Memory, and the Symbolic Exclusion of the Pachamama

The history of the nation has been constructed under an anthropomorphic symbolic scheme, as Marshall Sahlins points out (in Hartog 2007, 52), attributing human characteristics to abstract entities. This anthropomorphization materializes in objects and symbolic spaces, such as squares, flags, heroes, museums, monuments, and anthems, that function as anchors of collective memory, transforming the political into emotional and ritual. This representation is not naïve: it organizes national memory through objects that embody a hegemonic narrative about the past.

In this process, as Enzo Traverso (2019) indicates, the nation introduced a new conception of history as a "singular collective," endowed with meaning, continuity, and political pedagogy. Pierre Nora (2008, 19–39) deepens this critique by stating that institutionalized history distrusts spontaneous memory, seeks to suppress it, and aspires to a total desacralization of the lived past. Nevertheless, this very history becomes sacred in the service of the nation: it is thanks to the nation that certain memories are considered valuable and become part of the collective heritage. Thus, history, memory, and nation operate in a pedagogical, political, and symbolic symbiosis. Archives, libraries, museums, festivals, and state rituals are essential instruments in this enterprise (Nora 2008).

This logic of sacralization is not new. During the colonial period, ecclesiastical power imposed religious images as a central part of the evangelizing process. Christs, virgins, and saints adorned altars and churches and were mobilized during patron saint festivals, thus occupying public space

with the sacred. After independence, this cult was transformed. Religious images ceded symbolic space to a new political iconography. The "fathers of the homeland" replaced saints on the civic altar, sacralizing the heroes of independence. Thus, the religious and political were integrated into the same symbolic regime, maintaining rituality and devotion, but now oriented toward the nation-state. Within this framework, a deeply patriarchal representation of power was consolidated: the state as father and the nation as mother. This metaphor has been repeatedly used in official discourses, civic pedagogies, and social representations. The state embodies authority, order, and protection, while the nation represents origin, fertile land, and identity. This logic reinforces traditional gender roles and projects a familiar, naturalized, and hierarchical image onto political organization.

This anthropomorphic image also produces a symbolic reduction that hides social and political complexities, simplifying them as family relationships. The state-father guarantees order and distributes resources, while the nation-mother grants belonging, affection, and meaning. This duality generates a symbolic interdependence: without a nation, the state lacks legitimacy; without the state, the nation does not have structure. However, this paternal and anthropomorphic vision ignores—and in many cases represses—the existence of other modes of political and symbolic linkage. In particular, it omits the relationships between humans and non-humans that are central to Indigenous worldviews. The figure of Pachamama, for example, cannot be reduced to the role of "motherland" from a Western logic, as its meaning exceeds the categories of nation or citizenship. In Andean cosmovisions, Pachamama is a living and agent entity, the foundation of an ecological and relational memory that has been systematically devalued by the modern nation-state.

In Bolivia, this symbolic exclusion has been upheld by both the state apparatus and the Catholic Church. Together, they have contributed to silencing Aymara cultural memories, promoting an official narrative that seeks to homogenize identities under the umbrella of a unitary national history. This history has been used as a tool of legitimation, rendering invisible other forms of memory, especially those anchored in non-anthropocentric relationships with the territory. The result is a heroic, nationalist, and deeply anthropocentric memory, dominated by masculine and humanized figures to be admired and imitated. The present national narrative justifies itself through the glorification of that past, and any alternative memory—such as the one articulating the relationship between Indigenous people and Mother Earth—is left out of the official script. For all these

reasons, addressing the representation of Pachamama in archival documents and nationalist historiography implies a critical and conscious exercise. It is necessary to read with tweezers, recognizing the contradictions, silences, and ideological operations that have invisibilized a living and relational memory. Recovering this memory means valuing the Aymara worldview and cultural practices that have been marginalized by a traditional historical project that exalted the state, sacralized the nation, and relegated Pachamama to an empty metaphor.

Plurinationality as an Opportunity for Non-Human Political Representation

I do not share the notion of "mother earth" as a literal translation of Pachamama in the Political Constitution of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, since it implies an anthropomorphic interpretation that limits its original meaning. Rather, I propose understanding Pachamama as a "full assembly" of living beings, both human and non-human, following Tim Ingold's proposal (2021). This approach allows us to see her as a living, relational, diverse, and active entity and not as a humanized mother figure. However, I also recognize that she is an ideological and political construction, which generates ambiguity. On the one hand, she can represent an inclusion without ideological limits, embodying an Aymara identity in permanent transformation. On the other hand, she can be instrumentalized from the logic of power to exclude or domesticate her disruptive potential. For this work, I adopt the first interpretation: Pachamama as life in all its forms, without hierarchies or imposed boundaries.

Figure 1. El Alto cityscape, with La Ceja, the Yatiri, the mesa, and the sacred fire. Photo: Vladimir Llusco Mamani

This vision materializes in the Aymara ritual of the waxt'a, which symbolically synthesizes the relationship between human and non-human beings. In the markets of La Paz and El Alto, one can find ritual elements: herbs and seeds from different ecological zones, llama wool arranged in circles, *illas* or miniature figures representing mountains, rivers, animals, material goods, technologies, and human aspirations, alongside traditional elements such as copal, alcohol, coca, and *sullu* (llama fetus). This ceremony ritualizes a way of conceiving the world in which tradition and modernity coexist, generating a hybrid cosmology deeply rooted in Aymara memory. The waxt'a is not only an offering; it is a living archive of relationships, affections, and knowledge that link territory, desires, reciprocity, spirituality, and conflicts.

Figure 2. Offering table (mesa) prepared for health, work, luck, money, and love. Photo: Vladimir Llusco Mamani

However, this way of understanding life and the world has historically been marginalized and pejoratively classified by the nation-state, both through its institutions and its symbolic apparatus. With Evo Morales' rise to power in 2005, the waxt'a was re-signified as a state ritual. The 2009 Constitution recognized the rights of Pachamama under the figure of Mother Earth, and Morales promoted the creation of the International Mother Earth Day at the United Nations. These actions were presented as part of a "democratic and cultural revolution" (Cherstich, Holbraad, and Tassi 2020). But this revolution has limits. As Igor Cherstich, Martin Holbraad, and Nico Tassi (2020, 18–40) have pointed out, it is a revolution within the framework of the "permitted Indian": that is, a subordinated and controlled inclusion. Pachamama was recognized through a reading functional to the State and a global environmentalist discourse, but without questioning the extractivist economic model or granting real power to indigenous nations. The formally recognized plurinationality did not translate into authentic Aymara self-government nor a deep rethinking of the state apparatus. Extractive industries, the privilege of the Catholic Church, and the centrality of mestizo

institutions remained intact. Aymara memory was accepted as a symbol but domesticated within the state script.

What is at stake, then, is memory—not just any memory, but the relational memory of indigenous people, which includes non-human beings and has been systematically excluded from the national narrative. This memory has no place in official history, nor in its Christian and progressive version. National history has privileged the spectacular, the imposing, the institutionally imposed from above (Nora 2008), leaving on the margins those living, intimate memories transmitted from below, in the silence of rituals, everyday practices, and the objects of the waxt'a.

The memory of Pachamama went from being denied by the nation-state to being appropriated by the plurinational state, but in both cases it was constrained. Meaning it was limited, shaped, and controlled within symbolic, ideological, and political frameworks not defined by indigenous people themselves but by the plurinational state. That is, although this memory was apparently recognized and celebrated, in practice its content, scope, and transformative potential were restricted. This process took place within the framework of a Constitution that declares itself secular, generating expectations of a break with symbolic colonialism. However, as Giraldo (2022) states, conflicts between "worlds" are not merely differences in negotiable worldviews, but are traversed by a history of violence, exclusion, and institutional design. Ethnic memories were not included as sources of power but as objects of state representation.

The Morales government's attempt to construct a more inclusive national narrative failed by becoming trapped in an anthropomorphic and hierarchical vision of diversity. Instead of promoting true equity among people and ways of life, the state staged a limited plurinationality. In such a case, as Traverso (2007) warns, collective memory in the public space can become a spectacle if it is not grounded in a real transformation of power. Therefore, it is urgent to rethink plurinationality beyond a simple social pact. We need to move towards an environmental pact, as proposed by various critical and activist currents, that legally and legitimately recognizes all living beings, human and non-human, as subjects of rights. This implies dismantling the anthropomorphic logic of the state and opening space for forms of organization that take the shape of nature—not as a metaphor, but as a political principle. Only in this way will it be possible to build de-anthropomorphized nations, capable of generating equitable representations among all beings of the world.

Conclusions

Based on what has been developed so far, I propose the need to critically revise the ethnographic arguments that have given content to the concepts used to interpret the relationship between the Aymara people and Pachamama. This revision allows us to understand how three fundamental elements converge: mestizaje and religious syncretism, the so-called democratic and cultural revolution, and the anthropomorphic representation of Pachamama as "mother earth." Far from being neutral, these concepts operate as forms of limitation, as they solidify and fix the meaning of hybridity or mixture, preventing recognition of the dynamism inherent in Aymara thought and its multiple ways of constructing knowledge, positioning itself ideologically, and understanding life and the world. From a political perspective, this limitation also affects how the relationship with Pachamama is expressed and understood.

For the Aymara, this relationship materializes within a long struggle for self-government —which dates back to the colonial period— for respect for their worldview, and for the affirmation of an Aymara nation that transcends the borders imposed by the nation-states of Bolivia, Peru, Chile, and Argentina in the nineteenth century. In this context, the concept of overlapping identities (*identidades traslapadas*) acquires special relevance, as it allows analysis of how relational practices between humans and nonhumans have been constructed, based on diverse historical trajectories that give rise to different ways of valuing and signifying the bond with Pachamama. Understanding these trajectories implies delving into deep disputes between memory and oblivion, disputes that manifest both in bodies and objects, in sacred places and daily practices. Official history has repeatedly attempted to cut or silence these ties through the logic of the nation-state. A clear example is the Catholic evangelization process, whose desire to suppress the Andean symbolic world continues today, reinforced by religious sects and by an anthropomorphic idea of the nation that has justified the subordination of nonhuman beings under a hierarchical worldview.

Equally urgent is a reconsidering of the content of the plurinational state. It cannot be limited to a symbolic inclusion of the indigenous, but must be founded on the living historical memory of the diverse ethnic nationalities that inhabit Bolivia. However, it is also important to recognize that the Aymara world —like that of other indigenous people— is crossed by capitalist logic. This is evidenced, for example, in the waxt'a ritual, where many believers, including merchants and politicians, request economic

prosperity through offerings that integrate both elements of nature and objects representing capitalist consumption, such as Coca-Cola bottles, beers, or miniatures of computers and vehicles. This symbiosis not only reveals contradictions but also shows how the waxt'a articulates multiple levels of meaning: individual, collective, political, cultural, spiritual. It is a ritual in which are deposited contradicting aspirations, desires, tensions, and conflicts. Therefore, it cannot be reduced to a simple ceremony of reciprocity with "mother earth," but must be understood as a contentious field where memories, powers, and ways of life are negotiated.

This approach invites a questioning of the paternalistic or essentialist visions that have predominated since the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, not only in academia but also in institutionalized indigenous discourses. It is necessary for the academic field to recognize and legitimize other ways of producing knowledge from ethnic nationalities, which would allow progress toward a more equitable relationship between humans and nonhumans. In this sense, I propose thinking about diversity and imaginaries linked to Pachamama not as fixed essences, but as active constructions from a relational worldview. The persistence of plurinationality, despite its contradictions, can be read as an opportunity to open ourselves to other ways of seeing the world beyond the anthropomorphic mold. In that space between history and memory, the political is at stake. Hence the importance of de-anthropomorphizing both the state and the nation, proposing a plurinationality that adopts forms closer to nature itself. This would not only allow progress toward a new social pact but also toward an environmental pact, which recognizes the agency and the right to representation of all living beings, human and nonhuman alike, based on respect for the multiple memories safeguarded in nature by ethnic nations.

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The Indigenous Movement in the Worst-case Scenario: The Pitfalls of Decolonization and Denial of Constitutional Recognition in Chile

Salvador Millaleo

This chapter explores the promise and collapse of Indigenous constitutional recognition in Chile, framing the 2021–2022 Constitutional Convention as both a watershed moment and a profound defeat. It contends that Indigenous constitutional delegates embraced a decolonial vision that sought to transform the state's Eurocentric and homogenizing order, yet their radical stance, fragmented leadership, and reluctance to forge broad alliances exposed them to isolation and public backlash. Our central idea is that constitutional decolonization unfolded less as a project of shared nation-building than as a kind of exodus, weakening the chance to reimagine Chile's democracy through intercultural dialogue and mutual recognition.

The case of Chile is insofar special, as it represents one of the situations of least recognition of Indigenous peoples in the Americas at the level of the legal and constitutional system. None of the five Constitutions that Chile has had (1822, 1828, 1833, 1925, 1980) even mention them. This institutional feature is one of the strongest symptoms of the ethnicity policies established in Chile, making the country an anomaly in the region, along with Suriname and Uruguay, although it is a very complex case due to the large population and the relevance of the Indigenous peoples as well as their interethnic relations for the historical configuration of Chilean society.

Relations with the Mapuche people, which according to the 2024 Census (INE 2024) total 1,623,073 persons form the largest Indigenous group in Chile, making up 8.78 percent of the total population, have long been determined by bitter conflict. Until the nineteenth century, moments of war alternated with moments of diplomacy and negotiation that built border relations of reciprocal trade and influence. Still, the belligerent relationship with the Mapuche imprinted on colonial institutions in Chile a sense of fragility that would only be overcome during the nineteenth century, when the colonization process of Wallmapu, the Mapuche country, was completed and the Mapuche lost most of their sovereignty (Ferrando 1986).

During the nineteenth century, pressures from the new Republics of Chile and Argentina, which claimed ownership of the Mapuche Territories,

crushed the Native resistance through several coordinated military campaigns, with both countries occupying parts of their ancestral territories (Kaltmeier 2022). As a result of the military incorporation of the Mapuche lands, Mapuche communities were confined to areas delimited by the state. This forced them to become farmers instead of being rich cattle herders. They were relegated to poor quality lands between the coastal zone and the Andean foothills (Pinto 2003). The formation of large estates through the auctioning of land aggravated the situation, creating a strongly unequal agrarian structure (Bengoa 1999).

In the 1980s, levels of poverty among the Mapuche increased, which led to more migration to the cities (Imilan 2010). It was not until the beginning of the 1990s, that Indigenous law was created with the objective of integrating Indigenous people into Chilean society. The Indigenous Law of 1993 represents the first attempt to reverse the exclusion of Indigenous peoples. However, to this day, the Mapuche are still disproportionately represented in the country's worst social indicators (López et al. 2016). Indigenous poverty is greater than that of non-Indigenous Chileans, access to healthcare is worse, housing shortages are greater than for non-Indigenous Chileans, and illiteracy is double that of non-Indigenous Chileans (Ribotta, Del Popolo, and Rojas 2012).

The Andean Aymara, Quechua and Lickan Antay peoples fell under Chilean rule when their ancestral territories were captured during the South Pacific War (1879–83) at the hands of Bolivia and Peru. Ever since, they have suffered reinforced attempts towards their assimilation and the cutting of their cultural ties with peoples beyond the new borders of Chile. The Rapa Nui People fell under Chilean rule in a brief process of Chilean colonial expansion in Polynesia after the South Pacific War. During the first half of the twentieth century, demands and deceptions against Indigenous communities became common. This resulted in further diminishment of much of their lands and water sources. Combined with demographic growth, these forces produced a flow of migration from rural to urban areas, which has led to a situation that the majority of Indigenous Chileans is living in cities today.

Apart from the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention number 169 (also known as the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention of 1989), the Indigenous Law, and a few other rules, there is no wide legal recognition of Indigenous peoples' rights. In recent decades, numerous conflicts have occurred related to extractive projects of natural resources present in Indigenous ancestral territories. Additionally, there is continued

political exclusion, with little representation of Indigenous peoples at the various levels of government.

The history of exclusion in Chile is similar to that of many countries that share their origin in colonial formation. What is distinctive, however, is the weakness of the policies that existed in the rest of the continent, where forms of state indigenism resulted in legislation for the improvement of the living conditions of Indigenous peoples. Indigenism took root in Chile rather late and it was quickly interrupted by the Pinochet dictatorship, which reinstated the colonial logic of division and dispossession of land, as well as assimilation (Parraguez 2020). An Indigenous movement did develop in Chile in opposition to the dictatorship, whose biggest achievements were the promulgation of the Indigenous law of 1993 and the ratification of ILO Convention No. 169 (2008). It failed in realizing one of its most ambitious purposes, however, which was to obtain constitutional recognition in the constituent processes of the Constitutional Convention in 2021–2022 and the Constitutional Council in 2023, when the constitutional referendums rejected the proposals for a new Constitution.

The Decade of Expansion of the Indigenous Movement 2010-2019

Between 2010 and 2019, the Indigenous movement in Chile showed significant growth in its organization and visibility, with a strong demand for rights and a focus on the defense of territory and cultural identity. Despite the challenges, their struggle established the foundation for future demands in the context of the constitutional discussion and the search for fuller recognition of their rights in Chile. In this period, the exhaustion of the ethnicity governance model that had been installed in Chile in the two decades since the return to democracy, between 1990 and 2010, was noted. The Chilean multicultural model was characterized by a very weak recognition of rights, accompanied by compensatory public policies aimed at removing the Indigenous population from situations of extreme poverty in rural areas of the country (Fuentes and De Cea 2017). Indigenous public policies of the governments of the *Concertación por la Democracia* (Coalition of Parties for Democracy) sought to make Indigenous identities visible, and achieve their social and economic integration through government agencies, especially the Indigenous Development Corporation.

Public policies promoted the participation of Indigenous people in decision-making spaces, although with limitations in actual implementation and with limited recognition of the degrees of self-determination and self-

government of Indigenous peoples. The economic development programs had more welfare features, aimed at improving living conditions in rural communities, although without empowering their political structures. A good part of these policies was intended to provide benefits to Indigenous families and individuals, rather than to strengthen the traditional institutions of Indigenous governance, ignoring territorial dynamics, seeking integration into the market of Indigenous economies, while continuing with investment of private capital in extractive projects in Indigenous territories. As a result, most of the ethnic conflicts remained unresolved.

Neoliberal multiculturalism in Chile seeks a balance between the valorization of cultural diversity and integration in an economic framework that prioritizes development and the market. However, this has led to a series of tensions and contradictions in the relationship between the State and Indigenous peoples (Richards 2013; García 2015). Although the public policies of the Concertación promoted certain dimensions of the human rights of Indigenous peoples, they did not advance their collective rights. On the other hand, governments deployed extensive repressive actions against Indigenous protest activities, both violent and non-violent, generating many situations of human rights violations. The murder of the Matias Catrileo in 2008 is a milestone that indicated the repressive nature of the forms of containment applied by the Concertación governments (Pairicán 2017).

By 2010, a large group of Mapuche had been imprisoned in state prisons because of the criminalization of protest activities, many of them involving low-intensity forms of violence. That year, there were massive mobilizations aimed at improving the prison conditions of Mapuche prisoners, in support of hunger strikes carried out by a group of prisoners. In the wake of these protests, new Indigenous political actors appeared. Various organizations that claim territorial rights, such as the Mapuche Territorial Alliance, the Aymara Autonomous Council, the Rapa Nui Parliament, which sought to defend Indigenous territories against extractive projects as well as advance the goal of Indigenous autonomies, through mobilizations of protest. During the past decade, numerous mobilizations, protests and marches were carried out nationwide to make Indigenous demands visible. Faced with them, the state response was often repressive.

Along with the mobilization repertoires, numerous other visibility actions were deployed. Indigenous struggles gained visibility in the media and in the public opinion, which contributed to greater social awareness of their rights. Support networks were formed that included various social and academic sectors. Indigenous political parties were founded—such as

Wallmapuwen—that demanded linguistic rights and recognition of Indigenous languages and identities. Thus, many local governments went to Indigenous leaders, multiplying the number of Indigenous mayors who were grouped in the AMCAM (Association of Municipalities with Mapuche Mayors), which encompassed all the Indigenous mayors of the country. The AMCAM then became a key political actor, since they imported the discourses of plurinationality from Ecuador and Bolivia, establishing them as a goal of the Indigenous movement in Chile. Likewise, it were the Indigenous mayors who supported the demand for a new constitution as one of the axes of the indigenous movement in the last decade (Fuentes, Carril, and Yon 2023).

The implementation of ILO Convention No. 169, limited by various internal regulations and with poor application by government agencies, prompted dialogue and negotiation procedures with Indigenous organizations, but did not achieve macro-level agreements with the state for an institutional accommodation of Indigenous peoples in the Chilean political system. Despite the greater visibility and presence of the Indigenous movement in the political system, its discursive focus on plurinationality, self-determination and Indigenous autonomy demonstrated evident signs of weakness.

Since 2010, the number of Indigenous political mobilizations decreased, while violent protest actions have steadily increased (Cayul et al. 2022). Sectors of the Mapuche world that have called for an armed struggles since 1997 entered into a logic of greater radicalization characterized by an escalation in the number of direct actions or attacks, the intensification of the level of violence in terms of injuries to life and physical integrity, the fragmentation of their organizational structure and proliferation of new organizations with more belligerent strategies. These organizations are separating themselves strategically and discursively from the indigenous organizations that opted for institutional political ways.

The Arauco-Malleco Coordination (CAM), inspired by a revolutionary Marxist interpretation of Andean Indianismo and Mexican Neo-Zapatismo, develops a discourse of self-determination that will not go through any kind of agreement with the State or its recognition (Pineda 2018). The CAM defines decolonization as a process that it calls integral, which seeks the recovery and defense of the ancestral territories of the Mapuche people, reaffirming the Mapuche cultural identity as a break with the Chilean State and the neoliberal model. It defines the Mapuche project as radical anti-capitalism that must put community forms of production and traditional

forms of thought first, breaking ties with state political and cultural institutions. Within the CAM, in the last decade the number of territorial resistance cells—decentralized forms of its operation—has grown and other expressions appear, such as the Weichan Auka Mapu, the Mapuche Lafkenche Resistance, the Mapuche Malleco resistance, Mapuche National Liberation, Mapuche Cautín Resistance, among others.

In this way, the Indigenous movement and in particular the Mapuche political leadership appears as two-headed, without communicating vessels between institutional political strategies, of a plurinational nature, and on a path of violent political struggle, since both are inconsistent with each other. The only thing they share is a progressive distancing of rural communities from indigenous elites. Then the protests of October 2019 took place.

The Major Failure of the Constitutional Convention Process

The Chilean social uprising of 2019, though predominantly urban and cross-sectoral, prominently incorporated the historical claims of Indigenous peoples, granting them unprecedented public visibility. The Mapuche flag, the *Wenufoye*, emerged as a powerful emblem of dissent, displayed alongside the national flag in mass demonstrations. This symbolized broad support for Indigenous struggles over autonomy, territorial rights, and resistance to exclusion. The state's historical violence, long denounced by Indigenous communities, was mirrored in the repressive police response, producing solidarity through a shared experience of state coercion. The uprising thus functioned as a catalyst, embedding within the national imaginary that any future Chilean project must entail recognition and reparation for Indigenous peoples.

Therefore, the Chilean October Protests quickly found an Indigenous interpretation. Firstly, the mobilizations of early 2019 against the Indigenous consultation process of the Sebastián Piñera government, which sought to make the framework of Indigenous law more flexible to allow the alienation of community lands, were a direct part of the development that led to the protests between October 2019 and March 2020.

Secondly, symbolically, many of the Chilean October Protests took the form of a set of demonumentalization actions, which attacked state symbols in urban settings, statues and other sites of memory, which included symbols of the colonization of Native populations. Also in this context, protesters showed feelings of solidarity for the struggles of Indigenous peoples, raising

Indigenous emblems and claiming their demands as victims of oppression by state institutions (Rojas and Alvarado 2021).

A window of opportunity was generated for Indigenous claims, as the political system had to accept the demand for special representation in the constituent process that was called to institutionally redirect the resulting unrest (Charney y Marshall 2021). In the year following the protests and in the midst of the pandemic, 17 reserved seats for indigenous peoples were established in the Constitutional Convention among a total of 155 representatives. In addition, there were other forms of Indigenous participation, such as Indigenous norm initiatives—forms of popular initiatives for constitutional proposals put forward by Indigenous organizations—within the participatory procedures of the constituent process (Soto et al. 2025).

Indigenous demands had a moment of greater acceptance in public opinion after the protests. Firstly, it became plausible that a good part of the difficulties in resolving ethnic conflicts were related to the failures of the constitutional framework, which did not provide a place for Indigenous peoples within the political system. Secondly, the situation of systemic or structural exclusion of Indigenous peoples in the long term turned them into a symbol of the demands of all groups that have been victims of exclusions which could be corrected in a constituent process characterized by an open call to all citizenry—the first constituent assembly in Chile since its establishment as an independent state (Aylwin 2021).

These circumstances opened the way for a Mapuche academic to be elected as the first president of the Constitutional Convention, the body chosen to propose the drafting of a new Constitution. The President of the Convention, Elisa Loncón, called in her inaugural speech to refound Chile, as a Plurinational, Intercultural country, “a Chile that does not violate the rights of women, the rights of caregivers, in a Chile that takes care of the Mother Earth, in a Chile that cleans the waters, in a Chile free of all domination” (Loncón 2021).

The references in this vision not only included elements of political justice but also of epistemic justice, validating Indigenous languages and local identities as a legitimate part of common life. Within the political justice approach, the conception of the constituent process as the beginning of reparation for the centuries of violence against Indigenous peoples stands out. As is known, the proposal for a new Constitution that included a Plurinational, Intercultural and Plurilingual State failed in the referendum of September 4, 2022.

Until now there is a debate about the factors of said failure, when a significant percentage of Chilean citizens (near 62 per cent), with one of the highest voter turnouts in Chilean history (82 per cent), opposed the proposal (Cruz 2023; Piscopo and Siavelis 2023; Issacharoff and Verdugo 2023; Larraín et al. 2023; Escudero 2024; García Huidobro 2024; Ginsburg and Alvarez 2024; Heiss and Suarez-Cao 2024; Landau and Dixon 2024; Palestini and Medel 2025). Without a doubt, it was a great failure. In terms of the Indigenous vision, it is the greatest political failure since the consolidation of the violent occupation of indigenous territories by the Chilean State at the end of the nineteenth century. For the first time, an institutional process brought representatives of indigenous peoples to the table with other decision-makers to draft the political constitution, with high expectations of securing the rights that had long been recognized under international law. However, this seemingly promising outcome ultimately ended in a major failure.

Some approaches have attributed the blame for this outcome to political and misinformation campaigns, media bias and even fake news (Riquelme et al. 2022; Saldaña et al. 2024; Charney, Mayer, and Santander 2025). Others have said that the proposal did not correspond to the preferences of the average voters, due to radical changes in the proposal (Alemán and Navia 2023). Some attribute the result to the lack of experience of independent representatives, their careless behavior in political communication that eroded the initial support of citizens (Cruz 2023). Other factors highlighted are the procedural rules that contemplated an exit referendum, as well as contextual factors (Larraín et al. 2023), such as the unpopularity of the current president, the worsening of the economic situation, and the immigration and security crises.

The campaign against the Constitutional proposal singled out the Indigenous contents and turned them into symbols of what supposedly was distancing the Convention from citizens. As this campaign followed a traditional pattern of dismissing Indigenous rights as divisive for the national community, Indigenous representatives experienced many difficulties in building an agenda for the recognition of their rights within the constitutional convention process. According to such an interpretation, the Indigenous movement collided with the traditional refusal of Chilean society to recognize Indigenous peoples' rights, which continues to block the construction of interculturality in Chilean society.

The constituent process of the Constitutional Convention that emerged from the protests of 2019–2020 meant an historic advance for Indigenous

peoples in terms of representation in public debate, but ended up being contained and reversed by the elites of the political system with the defeat of the Convention proposal and with the substantive reduction of Indigenous participation in the following process, which itself also failed in 2023. The negative result in 2022 would be therefore a scenario derived from the persistence of the traditional logic of exclusion, based, on the one hand, on an idea of a mestizo national community that was threatened by the plurinationality proposal of the Convention; and, on the other hand, in defense of the extractivist economical model that could have been disturbed by the recognition of Indigenous rights over their ancestral territories. As Fernando Pairicán states: "the continuation of a deeply ingrained Chilean mindset that does not recognize Indigenous people as holders of rights" (Pairicán 2023, 182).

So, the Chilean right wing, provided with unsurpassed communication power, raised the fears of Chilean society about Indigenous peoples, carrying out fake news campaigns that reduced the popular support of the indigenous constituents. Considering things this way, the negative result in 2022 is temporary in the history of Indigenous struggles. This would be a "continuation point" rather than a "final point" in the Indigenous movement's politics (Pairicán 2022), in the face of a temporary setback, which can be overcome by giving continuity to the strategies, discourses and political leadership of the Indigenous movement during the constituent process.

The Failure of Decolonization as an Exodus from a Common Country

This chapter advances an interpretation that departs, at least partially, from the perspective outlined above concerning the outcomes of Chile's constituent process. The involvement of Indigenous peoples in the Constitutional Convention was grounded in what can be described as a decolonial Indigenous constitutionalism (Millaleo 2020). This perspective sought to transform the legal and political structures inherited from colonial power. It was not confined to multicultural inclusion or the mere expansion of rights within the existing constitutional framework; rather, it challenged the very architecture of the Chilean state, historically built on the denial of Indigenous rights. Its objective was to liberate the Constitution from monist, Eurocentric, and homogenizing logics, thereby opening the way for genuine pluralism that would recognize Indigenous peoples as collective political subjects.

Yet this critical perspective was not translated by Indigenous representatives in the Convention into politically realistic strategies capable of achieving the desired transformations. Internal fractures soon emerged: the faction advocating for the incorporation of all rights enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples dominated the more moderate group. The prevailing view was that such an opportunity for recognition had never before existed in Chilean history and therefore had to be seized to secure the broadest possible catalogue of rights. From this standpoint, it was deemed irrelevant that some of these rights—such as legal pluralism—represented profound innovations with little grounding in Chile's judicial system.

Initially, Indigenous representatives had the opportunity to pursue a pragmatic and gradual path toward plurinational transformation, grounded in dialogue and negotiated pacts designed to avoid social resistance. This approach, framed as a "Chilean way to plurinationality" (Millaleo 2021), envisioned a step-by-step process in which plurinationality would be built through sustained dialogue between the state and Indigenous peoples, generating trust and ensuring stability. The principle was to make plurinationality the outcome of a broad agreement between the Chilean state, Indigenous peoples, and Chilean society at large. Stability and legitimacy required that the non-Indigenous citizenry understand and accept the project rather than perceive it as an imposition. This "Chilean way" explicitly sought to allay fears commonly associated with plurinationality, such as the "divisibility of sovereignty," the "creation of first- and second-class citizens," or the "loss of national unity." Its central aim was to construct a narrative in which plurinationality enriched and strengthened Chilean democracy and national identity rather than undermining them.

However, the form of plurinationality advanced in the Convention lacked a realistic political strategy capable of generating acceptance among non-Indigenous Chileans. It was articulated as an abstract concept, easily demonized by opponents as "a state within the state," without concrete or reassuring explanations of how coexistence between the state and Indigenous nations would function in practice. Influenced by the Bolivian and Ecuadorian experiences, Indigenous delegates pursued a more maximalist and less conciliatory path. The most visible positions among the reserved seats were those marked by sharp critiques of the Chilean state and stronger demands for self-determination, privileging direct confrontation with the unitary and centralist model over gradual adaptation. Consequently, constitutional decoloniality came to be understood less as a shared pact with

the state and society, and more as an exodus of Indigenous peoples from the political framework in which they were embedded, in search of affirmation as autonomous political subjects. The emphasis fell on purging subordination and demanding reparations for historical injustices, while deferring the reconstruction of the common bond linking Indigenous and non-Indigenous citizens. This occurred in a context in which public support for Indigenous demands was relatively recent and Indigenous peoples remained a demographic minority.

The intercultural dimension of the constitutional proposal was overshadowed by the insistence on a radical decolonial stance that positioned Indigenous peoples primarily as historical victims of the socio-political order, framing them as absolute moral creditors of reparations rather than as co-authors of a shared future. In this way, Indigenous representatives largely avoided the task of persuading non-Indigenous citizens or Indigenous individuals with weaker identity affiliations. Instead, they adopted repertoires of global identity politics characterized by particularism, emphasizing their distinct identities over the need to construct spaces of intercultural dialogue. At times, this also translated into exclusionary or "cancellation" practices directed internally against dissenting Indigenous voices.

Consistent with this orientation, Indigenous representatives declined to engage in dialogue with other political sectors to broaden support for their agenda. They relied on the Convention's internal majority and assumed that rejection of a proposal produced by a constituent assembly was unlikely. This stance revealed a lack of experience, particularly in the absence of effective efforts to communicate the contents of the constitutional proposal to territorial communities and to build networks capable of linking the Convention's work with Indigenous territories—where the proposed constitution was ultimately rejected by wide margins.

Another critical factor was the escalation of violence carried out by radicalized Mapuche groups, which increased both the frequency and intensity of political violence while simultaneously rejecting the constituent process as staged and state-driven manipulation. Mainstream media coverage blurred distinctions between the agenda of radicalized groups and that of Indigenous representatives in the Convention. This was compounded by the reluctance of the latter to call for disarmament, reinforcing public skepticism and distrust.

In the end, the plurinational path chosen by Indigenous representatives did not take into account the essentialist risks inherent in its radicalism. While it affirmed Indigenous peoples as political subjects, it also exposed them to

isolation and greater vulnerability, a reality made evident after the constitutional defeat of September 2022. Internal fragmentation deepened, and representatives effectively forfeited influence in broader political arenas by neglecting the need to build transversal alliances. In doing so, they lost sight of the interdependence required to forge new forms of coexistence. The absence of horizontal and critical dialogue across knowledges and cultures meant that decoloniality failed to serve as a mechanism for renegotiating the terms of coexistence in Chile in a more just manner—one capable of valuing subalternized knowledges without lapsing into essentialism.

Conclusions: Between Silence and Reconstruction

The impact of the constitutional defeat has been devastating for Indigenous actors and their political agenda. In the immediate term, it reduced Indigenous representation in the 2023 constituent process from seventeen reserved seats to a single seat and excluded the concept of plurinationality from debate altogether. The 2023 proposal was likewise rejected—this time due to its conservative content and the procedural limitations that undermined its legitimacy. That process rested on identity politics designed to reinforce hegemonic national identities, while portraying Indigenous peoples and migrants as threats to the cohesion of the Chilean nation.

Beyond its immediate consequences, the broader effect of the 2022 defeat was the dismantling of gains that the Indigenous movement had consolidated during the previous decade. Discourses centered on plurinationality lost traction, not only among Indigenous communities but also within Indigenous intellectual and political elites. At the same time, established forms of coordination within the movement were demobilized, as the representatives who participated in the Convention lost legitimacy and were not replaced by alternative leadership. While Indigenous organizations continue to operate at the territorial level, they currently lack mechanisms for effective transterritorial coordination.

Radicalized groups have sought to expand their influence in this vacuum, both through armed actions and political discourse. Nevertheless, rejection of violent strategies has grown within Indigenous communities, even as the escalation of Mapuche political violence has provided the foundation for the predominance of internal security discourses in contemporary Chilean politics.

In this context, the attempt at constitutional decolonization has failed to generate a renewed decolonial project capable of unifying or revitalizing the Indigenous movement. Nor has it produced frameworks for building durable alliances with other social movements, including those engaged in national and global debates on issues such as human–non-human relations or responses to the climate emergency.

From this perspective, several conclusions can be drawn:

i) Rather than confronting only external obstacles, the Indigenous movement adopted strategic and discursive choices that themselves contributed to the defeat of its bid for constitutional recognition.

ii) The constitutional defeat represents the most significant setback since the consolidation of colonial domination in the late nineteenth century. The current situation has marginalized the Indigenous movement from the hegemonic public sphere and simultaneously fractured its own spaces of political deliberation.

iii) The decolonial vision articulated in the Convention was internally inconsistent, revealing a destructive tension between armed strategies and institutional-political approaches. Although the Convention initially opened real possibilities for change, Indigenous representatives failed to develop strategies adequate to consolidate progress in the recognition of Indigenous rights.

iv) The communicative power of conservative sectors, amplified by mainstream media, was reinforced by the reliance of Indigenous representatives on particularist identity politics and by their failure to adopt persuasive strategies grounded in intercultural dialogue.

v) Far from constituting a "continuation point," the constituent process represents a turning point that will require a prolonged and profound period of reflection within the Indigenous movement. This will necessitate discursive transformation, the development of new decolonial strategies and practices, and stronger connections with international debates and experiences.

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