TEJIDO DE COMUNICACIÓN. WEAVING COMMUNICATION: DECOLONIAL MEDIA AND COLLECTIVE PERFORMANCE

Miguel Rojas Sotelo
Duke University

In Cauca, highlands of Southern Colombia, the Nasa people had resisted land occupation and cultural loss for more than five centuries. Today, within the framework of global policies for open markets, the community has developed new strategies or resistance: documentary video and community radio, public and community based performance, and symbolic uses of ancestral objects are threaded with cosmological knowledge. New media technologies and collective performance are part of the strategies that indigenous organizations in Southern Colombia are practicing in order to close the generational divide, build communities in resistance, share, and make visible their struggle. The emergence of the ACIN’s Tejido de comunicación and the “kiwe Ten’za” (the Indigenous Guard) are the result of this process. Developing a communication platform while fighting against resource extraction operations, illegal crops, and land disputes, the tejido and the guard inform and protect Nasa communities targeted by local, national, and transnational forces. The Nasa are actualizing their tactics through a combination of historical means of resistance (military and political), by strengthening their core values, and by processes of autonomy, education, and circulation of inherited means of governance.

Introduction

In 2011 the Ministry of Culture of Colombia awarded the Best Documentary of the Year to *El país de los pueblos sin dueños* (2009) produced by a collective of indigenous filmmakers from the ACIN’s *Tejido de Comunicación*. The documentary tells in a vérité style (the only possibility in such circumstances) the story of contemporary resistance of the *Nasa* people of Cauca (Colombia). The film shows how young indigenous people enter the process of collective knowledge and action by documenting meetings in local spaces and regional encounters while clashing against state forces for control of their lands. The main character in the film is the Indigenous Guard (*Kiwe Ten’za* in Nasa-Yuwe language), a communal body that physically and
The film takes place in the mountains of Southern Colombia during the indigenous struggle against some provisions of the free trade agreement between Colombia and the USA, twenty years after NAFTA, and as part of a global force of market liberalization along systematic extractivist projects in the South, which would affect their autonomy and bring a new wave of developmental projects to their territory. In the midst of the military onslaught, media deception, government lies, and false accusations against them, the Indigenous Guard resisted and prevailed.

What does media (video and radio) means to indigenous culture and resistance in Cauca? How does new-media empower Nasa people, in particular youth in twenty-first century Colombia? What forms of activism does new media offer for the struggle to recover land and to develop sustainable livelihoods for those people? What makes the poorest and most excluded unarmed social body face the most powerful security forces of Latin America—supported and guided by economic, political, media, and transnational capital? Addressing these questions requires an examination of the history of resistance in Cauca, a region with a troublesome reputation in a nation at war; Nasa people live in a cultural borderland between resistance and integration. This inquiry also centers on more complex predicaments about indigenous organization in the Americas in relation to the nation state and globalization. This includes its applicability to the democratic process and community building, as the civil conflict dwindles in Colombia and the intercultural implications across other territories expand. This article outlines the history of the Indigenous resistance in recent years in relation to contemporary strategies developed by Nasa communities related to the use of new media (radio and video), performance (public and community based), and symbolic (aesthetic) uses of ancestral objects and cosmological knowledge. All told, these cultural practices bring a set of dynamic and integral expressions to maintain and re-activate the social cohesion of these communities (rural and urban). Finally, I analyze the documentary El País de los pueblos sin dueños (under the lenses of third cinema and indigenous filmmaking) as an example of situated/contextual media
production and an exercise in crossing media borders from aesthetic to social movement purposes.

La Guardia Indígena del Cauca. Courtesy: Velové, gráfica Solidaria.

*El Cauca, Conflict, Country, and the Rural Urban Divide | Situated Decoloniality*

Increasing military, paramilitary (via organized crime factions) and guerrilla actions against indigenous communities in the Cauca Region has proven how central the Colombian conflict still remains in indigenous, campesino and afro-descendant territories. During the last five decades of internal conflict in the country (on top of five hundred years of coloniality) the *Nasa* (before known as *Paéz*) as many other indigenous nations in Abya Yala have been under siege, nonetheless this period has also been a time for organizing and adjusting strategies of struggles for land tenure, autonomy and cultural revival. The case of the *Nasa* is remarkable.
The genealogy of de-colonial thinking and action is pluri-versal (not universal) and situated. As such, each knot on the web of this genealogy is a point of de-linking and opening that re-introduces languages, memories, economies, and social organizations.\textsuperscript{6}

Indigenous Guard, Miguel Antonio Tumiñá Gembuel was murdered by the FARC in the section of Sesteadero, in the Toribío reserve, Cauca. November 5, 2014. Courtesy: Tejido de Comunicación Nasa, ACIN.

Historically, the Nasa and Guambiano peoples of the Andean region of Colombia were some of the last to be defeated by European Colonialism. They are proud of this tradition of cultural cohesion and resistance. That is why their cultural degradation, due to acculturation, has been delayed. In historical terms (linear and based on individual achievements), a group of indigenous leaders have been at the vanguard of struggle for the Nasa; after La Cacica Gaitana, also known as Guaitipán, a sixteenth century Cacica (indigenous leader), a Yalcón from Huila who in 1540 led a united indigenous force to resist the Spanish colonizers, the struggle took another form. Juan Tama de la Estrella and Manuel de Quilo Siclos (now considered Caciques de
agua) Nasa chiefs avoided violent confrontation, and instead through mediation, bilingualism, and knowledge of the Spanish language and legal code, used colonial law and documents to negotiate autonomous indigenous territories. After long battles against colonial forces initiated in 1635, the Spanish crown recognized, in 1701, indigenous “free” territories and created five resguardos (autonomous reservations): Jambaló, Vitonco, San Francisco, Caldono and Pitayo Quichaya, which are still at the center of the Nasa imaginary. The Cédulas Reales (Crown Titles) that support such victories have been used as legitimate documents for centuries. However, due to a provision in the documents that allowed the presence of catholic missionaries, the process of cultural loss was intertwined with the erosion of the economic foundations of autonomy and the gradual trimming of the territory. The program of Simón Bolívar, after 1819, recognized Indigenous resguardos and was conducive to the return of the ancestral lands. This program was not fulfilled and Cauca’s white elites kept reducing, via institutional corruption and violence the extent of indigenous territories and the system of terraje (indebted servitude) was implemented. During the 20th century, Manuel Quintín Lame (1883 -1967), Nasa and Guambiano, became the reincarnation of los caciques del pasado. A son of sharecroppers, Lame fought in the infamous “Guerra de los mil días” (the last civil war of the republican era, 1899-1902) where he became literate in Spanish and well-versed in legal issues. Quintín Lame directed the struggle by using official documents and loopholes in the law, and by land occupation, mostly peacefully, to end terraje. The leader, imprisoned 108 times, was persecuted and exiled away from Cauca, but he fought to continue educating, culturally and politically, various indigenous movements. Manuel Quintín Lame developed a system to share political knowledge, called “proyecto de vida,” which is described in his manuscript, El pensamiento del indio que se educó en las selvas colombianas. Completed in 1939, it was transcribed by his Nasa friend José Gonzalo Sánchez. It was published posthumously in 1971 as En defensa de mi raza. Immediately it became the “red book” for political organization for indigenous peoples in Colombia. Manuel Quintín Lame died in poverty, exiled and without land in 1967, the beginning of another struggle. In 1964 the military in their struggle against leftist factions in the territory (in particular the FARC), created an indigenous Nasa self defense unit, which after years of confrontations signed a peace treaty with the guerrillas. In 1971, the
Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca (CRIC) was founded as a result of the national peasant mobilization (ANUC) which was born out of a land reform law by president Carlos Lleras Restrepo in 1967. CRIC’s mission: to recover and defend the land, and conquer cultural autonomy. At the same time, Alvaro Ulcué Chocué (1943-1984), the first indigenous priest in Colombia, a Nasa, was active. Ordained in Popayán (capital of Cauca) in 1973, he became an outspoken priest, who in many instances suffered discrimination, leading him to make demands for the dignity of his people. Ulcué Chocué became an outspoken advocate for the indigenous cause. Following Quintín Lame’s teachings, Ulcué Chocué created Proyecto Nasa a method to think, to ask, to decide and to act. The Nasa Project, in the frame of a catholic utopianism, helped in the dissemination of indigenous knowledge, the recovery of traditional crops, botanical medicine and communal organization, all under the political ideas of Quintín Lame. The use of Nasa-yuwe became a way to raise the collective memory, and as a form of struggle and cultural identification. Father Alvaro was assassinated by sicarios (paid by local landowners with support from the military in Santander de Quilichao, Cauca) in November 1984.

Learning from these experiences, the CRIC incorporated the planes de vida, local reincarnations of Lame and Ulcué’s projects, and kept publishing in Nasa-Yuwe and Spanish periodicals and special editions for communities in Cauca and the indigenous movement in Colombia. As the organization got stronger, and as the law allowed, they form the ACIN (Asociación de Cabildos del Norte del Cauca) which in 1994 was recognized by the state as legal entity, working under the directive of the Cabildos –the political structure of indigenous governance. Their struggle, marked by repression, assassinations of leaders and massacres, has recovered over 544,000 hectares, and is now recognized as indigenous territory in Cauca. In the process, close to one thousand leaders were murdered; retaliations from all armed actors are still common.
At the beginning, the reclamation of land took two faces: on one hand community mobilization via peaceful take-overs, invasions, cultural and political organization; on the other, guerrilla tactics via armed struggle. After the assassination of father Ulcué (1984) some followers of Quintín Lame joined the *Ricardo Franco Guerrilla Front* (formerly part of the FARC) and took the struggle by force. The indigenous guerrilla commando was renamed, the MAQL (Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame) or *Quintineros*. They developed military/guerrilla style operations in the territory for half a decade. It demobilized during the peace process under the Barco administration (1986-1990) along with the EPL (Ejército Popular de Liberación) and the M-19 (Movimiento 19 de abril) heading towards the rewriting of the Colombian Constitution in 1991. Within that framework, Alfonso Peña Chepe (*Nasa*) represented the *Movimiento indigenista Quintín Lame*. The new Constitution recognizes Colombia as a multiethnic and multicultural nation, acknowledging fundamental rights for indigenous and Afro-descendants. Just four months after the signing of the new constitution, in November 1991, twenty *Nasa*, including men, women and children, were massacred by paramilitaries. *Nasa* resistance does not stop; it has become a day-to-day way of life for the communities in the Cauca region of Colombia. They
continue the process of land restitution and the autonomy of their communities. They claim neutrality in a territory in which several armed actors are still active.

Due to the contextual conditions of indigenous communities in Cauca, forced displacement, relocation of communities, migration, and urban growth in the municipalities are impacting the demographics of what was before a somehow stable rural society.\textsuperscript{15} Today there is a triple dimensionality of contemporary Indigenous \textit{Nasa} experiences, rural, urban and transnational.\textsuperscript{16} In 2012, in Cauca 26 leaders were murdered and 3,608 individuals, 950 families, were forcefully displaced from their territories.\textsuperscript{17} That is how the long-running indigenous struggle in Colombia has happened.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{reporte_de_desplazamiento.png}
\caption{Forced displacement of indigenous peoples in Colombia, 2012. Source: Sistema de Información de la Consejería de Pueblos Indígenas, Derechos Humanos y Paz.}
\end{figure}

In recent years, the community has been severely impacted by the peace process started in 2012 by the Santos administration and the FARC. ACIN has reported the many murders before and after the death of 11 soldiers in La Esperanza (Cauca) in late April 2015 at the hands of the FARC.\textsuperscript{18}

\url{http://alternativas.osu.edu}
This short and incomplete genealogy helps to open a new chapter on *Nasa* resistance, empowering and invigorating not only the indigenous movement in Cauca, but also throughout Colombia and abroad.

**Media Occupation of Rural/Urban Spaces in Cauca | Visualizing Autonomy**

In order to curb such pressures, in the past two decades, ACIN developed collaborative media campaigns that situated them at the top of audiovisual production for indigenous peoples in the country (radio, video, TV, and multimedia) (Mora Calderón 2). Indigenous media in Colombia is relatively new; it wasn’t until 1985 that the *Colectivo de Comunicación Popular* developed events and workshops pushing for the creation and recognition of alternative community based radio and TV operations in the country. However, it wasn’t until 1991 that Article 20 of the new Constitution guarantee the right of every Colombian to “establish their own mass media.” Decree 1447 of 1995, gave the green light for granting community radio licenses. In 1999, community television was approved. This legal framework is at least partially behind the explosion of community radio and television in Colombia (Rodríguez 2011 18-37). By 2008, Colombia had 553 community TV stations, 651 community radios, and 26 Indigenous radios. In 1996, Law 335 of the Communications Code, guaranteed ethnic groups access to state-owned mass media and telecommunication networks, and Law 397 of 1997, stated the recognition of collective rights for ethnic communities and supported ethno-education and circulation of intangible patrimony via mass media (Mora Calderón 6).

*Radio Pa’yumat la voz del pueblo Nasa* was born out of this and from the consolidation of ACIN’s communication program known as *El Tejido de Comunicacion.* It is one of the almost dozen indigenous radios now broadcasting in Southern Colombia. As part of ACIN, the radio is a vehicle of communication for the *Nasa* in Cauca. *Pa’yumat* (for the people) is located in Santander de Quilichao, broadcasting to several indigenous communities in Cauca, Huila and northern Nariño. In 2001, it was named *objetivo de guerra permanente* (permanent war-target) by the *Bloque Central* of Autodefensas Unidad de Colombia (central front of the AUC), a paramilitary group in the region, due to its denunciations of forced recruitment, massacres and
repression of communities; later in July 2012 the radio was closed due to threats made to the station. Dora Muñoz, director of the station, recalls the story of intimidation not only by paramilitaries, but also by guerrilla forces: “in 2008, the guerrillas destroyed our transmission equipment and (we) had to go off-air for eight months. Then in 2010, in rural Caloto one of our reporters, Rodolfo Maya, was murdered. Consistently, the Army and the FARC used the mountain-top where the antennas of the station are located; this affected the transmissions.”

The radio, also known as Nasa Stereo, has been broadcasting in Nasa-Yuwe for almost two decades; it has been back on-air since November 2013. The station serves some sixty thousand households, and gives local daily news of the region: climate, crops, local markets, cultural activities, traditional medicine, heath care in general, local stories, etc. It serves also as an organizing tool for social mobilization, logistical and administrative support for communities and maintains the circulation of messages related to the several “planes de vida” taking place in the region. Most recently, it includes feeds from other indigenous stations in a local and international context establishing networks of solidarity and intercultural dialogue. After its creation the station became a center for radio production generating other radio stations in the region. That is the case of Uswal Nasa Yuwe Stereo 88.1 FM that has been broadcasting from
Caldono, Cauca for a decade. Smaller stations are being created to develop an interconnected system (un tejido), such as the community radio station Pelcam Stereo 92.0 FM broadcasting from the Pioyá reservation also in the municipality of Caldono. The intention of the system is to be able to reach the quarter million Nasa living in rural and urban centers in Southern Colombia. Their social media also reaches urban and exile Nasa in Colombia and abroad.

**Performatics of Decolonization. Aesthetics of resistance**

Today, there are no individual leaders such as La Gaitana, Tama, Lame, and Ulcué (among others). The indigenous organization in Cauca understands that a vertical organization is easily destroyed, that modernity/coloniality has created a cult of individuals and hierarchical structures that are too fragile on which to base their struggle. Nonetheless, an active leadership still exists. That is why they have called the *Kiwe Ten’za* (kiwe=land | ten’za= to keep/ to protect), a body that is composed of the entire community, and active with around seven thousand male and female Nasa in Cauca. Now the Guard includes branches in other indigenous communities and urban chapters in many cities in Colombia and Ecuador. Their work is a constant process of learning and sharing their history and struggle. This collective body is the most visible image of a community that is organized under deep roots of communal, spiritual and political vision. Their work is voluntarily, up to two years, and during that time the *Kiwe Ten’za* are trained culturally to be the collective voice of their people; spiritually to represent the values of indigeneity and the protection to mother earth; and politically to understand and shared their rights and obligations as indigenous citizens. (See video “Sxbwe´s - Conexión con la Madre Tierra”, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WUOjZ1KtFUo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WUOjZ1KtFUo)).

While, the Guard is not a military organization, recently it was involved in the dismantling of military posts in their territory, expulsion of military and guerrilla forces and political mobilization across Cauca. The Guard also has joined social struggles such as peasant strikes (2013 and 2014) and political battles, such as in the case of Bogota’s ousted mayor Gustavo Petro (Silverman Andrews and Ortiz Matallana; González Navarro).
For the *Nasa* being visible in the public space means leaving their territories, their daily routine as people of the land, and being present as one body in meetings, festivities, marches and rallies in massive numbers. Through their actions they take the “word” (orality) and put it to “action/walk” (*caminar la palabra*); they call this the origin of a Minga (a collective word in action) that intends to connect subjectivities and raised consciousness (*otro tejido*) with important implications for their audio-visual platform too. Their struggle has gone beyond themselves and the *Kiwe Ten’za* are now part of a collective imaginary, and the Khabu (*el bastón de mando*) is a bonding symbol, a social needle that weaves collective mobilization.

Through the use of national and international juridical frameworks indigenous communities are activating not only human rights organizations but also introducing an environmental dimension to their cause. Mother Earth has always been at the center of their cosmology; *Nasa* people are bounded by their territory and their history, lands do not belong to them, they belong to the land.
The Needle: symbolic/aesthesis of resistance

The Khabu, Chonta or Tama (Bastón de mando – the stick), is not only a symbol of power, it carries the spirit of the community and the ability to govern. Until the recent past, the power to speak given by the Khabu was in the realm of elders (men and on occasion female), its power invested by the Thē Walas (shamans) the real holders of ancestral knowledge for the Nasa.

Usually the Khabu is made of dark wood from the Chonta Palm (originally from the Amazon), it is decorated with braids of wool or colored ribbons and sometimes wore a silver handle. Red and green are the colors of their flag; the braids and ribbons show this symbolic uniformity, where red is man and green is nature (culture and nature) always in balance. To hold a Khabu is a commitment to the community, it does not gives power over others; instead it takes subjectivity toward a higher cause. Each individual has to decorate his/hers Khabu to make it precious. The Khabu is a common object present in the everyday of the nasa; it is used in communal spaces and replaces weapons for a symbol of pride. The Khabu symbolizes also a connection to nature; the fruit of the palm, called chontaduro, the wood from it is made of, was once a staple of their diet (as with most indigenous peoples of the Amazon basin). Today in Colombia it is considered an aphrodisiac and it is sold in the streets of major cities as a delicacy. In addition, each Khabu is washed/cleansed in rituals performed by the traditional healers, Thē Walas, in the sacred lakes of the highlands of the Andes. We should emphasize that the ancestral territories of the Nasa are located strategically in the watersheds of the most important rivers in the country (Magdalena, Cauca, Caqueta and Patía, as well as many other tributaries of the Amazon and Orinoco), known as “la estrella fluvial” (fluvial star). The Nasa people consider themselves, first of all, guardians of the water.

The Khabu is seen in public displays as a connector and organizer of space in public performances; it becomes a barrier, in which members of the Guard create rings of protection, human/sacred walls built to denote a territory in which important rituals, meetings, dialogs, and encounters take place. Its use and presence evidence a four-fold movement: 1) a sacred ritual that connects time, space, and ancestral knowledge; 2) a social/communal transfer of power and commitment that implies a generational as well as technological transition (which is
enabled and shared via radio, YouTube clips, social media, digital photography, text message, etc.; 3) a political discourse that is actualized, shared, and amplified as the ritual and the communal pertain to the maintenance of self-reliance, land restitution and cultural sovereignty; and, 4) participation via intercultural exchanges, where outside audiences take part in virtual and real ways, sometimes taking a role in spaces that were exclusive before. Today, even small children are invested with them, to start a process of training and responsibilities towards the community, as shown in Marta Rodríguez’s short documentary, No hay dolor ajeno (2010) about the death of a little girl due to a bombing campaign by the guerrillas in a combat with the military in indigenous territory. She had recently been given a Khabu. It also underlines how the Nasa recognize and interact with frontier/urbanized Nasa collaborators (NGO’s), scholars, media and social movements (even inviting political leaders in strategic modes of operation).

“El país de los pueblos sin dueño”

In the Latin American context it is well know that by late 1960s and 1970s film became a militant tool working in concert with social mobilizations. A part of the work of Getino and Solanas (Argentina), Rocha (Brazil) and the Cuban generation of the so-called “tercer cine,” the work of Bolivian filmmaker Jorge Sanjinés and the UKAMU collective was the only one undertaking indigenous subjectivity at the time. Freya Schiwy already presented a good case on the difference between third-cinema and indigenous media. She understands how “indigenous media production and circulation recall the efforts of the New Latin American Cinema of the 1960s and 1970s. Imbued with the revolutionary enthusiasm... (and) understood cinema as a revolutionary weapon that lends itself to a socialist mode of production” (Schiwy 5). However, this approach has been challenged when looking at experiences such as the video nas aldeias in Brazil and some of the audiovisual products coming from the Chiapas Media Project in Mexico, in that audio-visual media becomes an inner mirror that connects ancestral ways of knowledge production, consumption, circulation, with liberatory (not revolutionary) purposes and against the archive (the institutions and the market). Schiwy argues that “instead of subscribing to the division between orality and literacy, indigenous media suggest that indigenous cultures have always been audiovisual, that is to say, oral and iconographic” (9). In other words, a sort of
qualitative jump from the oral to audio-visual narratives in action is enabled by the use of audiovisual technologies. What is relevant here is what indigenous subjects are doing with the medium, regardless of its limitations related to the coloniality-of-the-visual.28

Indigenous communities in Southern Colombia have been exposed to film and film crews in the past, as subjects of chronicles, ethnographic work, and documentaries; most notably by the work of the legendary documentary filmmakers Marta Rodríguez and Jorge Silva. The couple developed a long-standing relationship with the community (the early leadership of CRIC), developing a collaborative audiovisual project about the history of land claims in indigenous territories, during the early 1970s. Their feature length documentary *Nuestra Voz de Tierra Memoria y Futuro 1974-1980* presents the story of creation of the Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca (CRIC), featuring many the founding leaders, among them the legendary Daniel Dindicué and Juan Gregorio Palechor. The documentary is a testament of the commitment by Rodríguez and Silva who at the time were debating the usefulness of theoretical approaches such as Dziga Vertov's eye-camera objective cinema, Flaherty's participant cinema, and Rouche's film-observation in their work. Rodríguez and Silva, working in a situated/contextual way, went a step further. They were not gratified with just having achieved a truthful, real insight, and active participation of indigenous and campesinos in their films (a pure aesthetic decision and approach). Rather, they wanted an approach that broken the objective distance of the camera, a work in-relation and in-service to the cause, as a praxis of the indigenous, the excluded other, and as an appropriated means for the appearing of these communities as social and political actors, in other words as a decolonizing (not revolutionary) tool.

As a result, *Nuestra voz* is not a pure documentary that records a given reality with a political edge; by combining documentary styles with surrealism and experimentation, the film deals with what cannot be documented. In the midst of struggle, to get their lands back, indigenous faced also metaphysical forces –the devil and phantoms of the colonial era, which still-hunts the present of communities a the long arm of colonialism.29 After the sudden death of Silva (1984), Rodriguez made a commitment to the indigenous cause. For four decades she has been documenting-in-collaboration their struggle, collaborating, giving workshops as part
of her own initiative, sometimes supported by local or national organizations, academia, or even financed by international NGOs. She and her collaborators, including Bolivian filmmaker and media organizer Iván Sanjinés, had been bringing technologies and resources, and developing work together for decades. Most recently she produced Testigos de un etnocidio (2011), in which she actualizes the current state of things on indigenous issues in Colombia. This last work is a call for a new generation; a passing of one that struggled between art/film as militancy, now standardized by academia as a style/genre in the historical line, and art/film as a communicating, weaving and building book for communities in resistance.

In July 2012, a series of clashes between the Kiwe Ten’zas and the Colombian military for the control of strategic military posts in indigenous territory in Cauca resulted in the expulsion of the military from Nasa territory. Immediately, attacks by the Colombian (corporate) national media against the Indigenous Guard and the organization started. They argued that the indigenous are citizens and that Colombia is a sovereign nation, and therefore the military have the right to be there. Leaders of the organization were invited to be part of news-shows, to give
their account of the facts; however, they were at a disadvantage due to language, format, and context. Their arguments were not heard among the media frenzy over the public indignation about the military force-out from indigenous territories. The organization had to make their position clear, supported by the Law, and then presented in a documentary form, Somos alzados en bastones (2006-2009), a twenty-five minute documentary, a short and direct piece, developed by El Tejido de Comunicación, and broadcasted nationally –by a progressive channel, Canal Capital, on July 26, 2012, and later posted on YouTube. (Somos alzados en bastones: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNaXDvDgLzk).

The piece shows the events that lead to the expulsion of the military from their territory; the failed negotiations and the multiple confrontations with state forces in response to the menacing laws imposed by the local version of the Patriot Act (seguridad democrática). Finally, it intends to emphasize indigenous participation, via previous consultation, before the signing of the free trade agreement (Colombia-US) on the works during those years. Somos Alzados
works as a counter balance to the corporate media that at the time was treating the indigenous as anti-patriotic and even calling them supporters of terrorists.

_Somos alzados_ is the antecedent of _El país de los pueblos sin dueño_, which shows another perspective of the facts Colombians saw on TV, opening a limited space of debate on the side of the indigenous of Cauca. The documentary shows how the indigenous organization responds to the government, which has been pushing new policies over natural resource extraction as the only developmental policy in rural Colombia. In particular, it brings attention to regulation in regards to industrial mining and agribusiness, and the general economic direction of the country, which marginalizes, segregates and alienates indigenous and peasant communities. The documentary, in _veritè_ style, allows an insight view, made by indigenous filmmakers in real settings, amidst confrontations against the military and police. The documentary challenges arguments given by state forces and the government on the fact that indigenous organizations were working with the armed left (specifically the ELN and FARC) and other terrorist organizations. The documentary responds, through video-quoting footage shown by national TV news outlets, with their own footage, underlining how they are in the middle of a media/real war in which guerrilla, paramilitary and military are using heavy weaponry while the indigenous only use the collective body, represented by the Indigenous Guard, oral arguments, the Khabu and finally the Minga.

The documentary portrays an organized civil society where men, women and children, not only indigenous-descendants but also peasants and afro-descendants, are depicted as part of one body; the objective is a call for autonomy and the stop of militarization and policing in their territories. The main character is the Indigenous Guard, which functions as the organizing force of the piece; where groups of people in action as a choreographed dance (in training, domestic spaces, in confrontation, etc.) are followed by scenes of radio transistors, TV broadcasts and the Khabu, secondary characters in the film. Radio and the Khabu symbolize tools of organization; the two elements are constantly present in the documentary, collapsing space and time (one modern the other ancestral). A TV broadcast, on the other hand, shows the perspective of the military, the police and the government (that ironically called themselves victims of the violence exercised by the indigenous). The documentary establishes a
conversation: on one side, TV broadcasts present unsubstantiated facts, due to its hegemonic status (the so-called “trusted evening news”) whose “taking heads” give accounts that support the state forces and governmental perspectives.

On the other, indigenous filmmakers present the facts from within the organization, challenging the arguments given by the hegemonic media. The footage produced by the indigenous group shows military abuse of force and the dismissive way governmental officials treat the indigenous leadership. The narrative structure of the film is based on the long struggle of the indigenous for autonomy. It is based on oral tradition more than on scripted linear structures.

Vilma Almendra, a spokesperson of ACIN, who participated in the filming process, while representing ACIN at the hemispheric encounter of Indigenous Media in Mexico in 2013, explained “what we have been doing is using ‘orality’ as the bases of our processes of weaving empowered communities. Ancestral memory can also use new technologies to share, circulate, make visible, and challenge the system, which attempts to divide, co-opt, and take over our lives and our territory.”

País de los pueblos sin dueños (2009). Produced by the Tejido de Comunicación of the Asociación de Cabildos del Norte del Cauca (ACIN).
The film ends when the indigenous organization calls for a Minga, a collective mobilization of word and action (*La Minga Social y Comunitaria*) a celebration of diversity that changed the location of the documentary, from the mountains of Cauca to the streets of the cities. By taking the struggle to the capital of the country, via bodies in motion through the Colombian landscape, the film builds in its most relevant feature, a shared destiny, one that is only possible by weaving individuals one by one into an open network of change. The minga has become a powerful tool used by the indigenous organization. Now it has been extended to social movements that are calling for “collective, peaceful, but active” engagement in many of the issues to be resolved in the country – another way of creating knowledge, based on weaving communities via orality, mobility and situated conciseness.

A remarkable aspect about the documentary, besides its capacity of capturing the organization from within and responding to outside views of the movement, is the fact that it was awarded “Best Documentary in 2011” by the Ministry of Culture, maybe assuming it as cultural product, to be “apolitical” per-se or as a *de facto* apology by some sectors of the white cultural elite and progressive factions of the government to the harsh portrayal of the communities in resistance.

**Conclusion**

New media heralds other networks of information and identification along with other sites of confrontation in the ongoing struggles of indigenous and campesino organizations in Colombia. The dialectic between urban, industrial society and rural-dwelling indigenous peoples is no longer the only adequate analytical framework in regions with major indigenous populations. *El país de los pueblos sin dueños* shows another map, one made of threads weaved with images, territories, stories, geographies and bodies in motion. It is through ancestral knowledge, de-linking, autonomous organization (the Cabildo and the Resguardo that is at the center of Nasa political organization), and by being situated outside of history in a transmodern movement (beyond the borderland) that communities such as the Nasa shared decolonial strategies. The Guard has been stigmatized by the Colombian media as barbaric, uncivilized and
uncooperative in the fight against terrorism. However, it is by thinking and doing, doing and thinking that the Nasa are sharing with other sectors their experiences and struggles.\(^3\) It is by weaving (tejiendo) as the practice of connecting ancestral memory, resistance and action that they confront the realities of new developmental projects in their territories. Meanwhile, violence is still directed, selectively toward their most visible leaders, and targeted to dismantling their organization.\(^3\) Regardless, the communities have developed ways of maintaining and sharing their worldview: *El Tejido*, the Indigenous Guard, and more recently the Center for Education Training and Research for Integrated Community Development (CECIDIC, based on Father Alvaro Ulcué Chucué model) in Cauca, the Nasa University, and the Coconuco archive, which offer spaces of training to help support the organization, in particular in regards to media and communications.\(^3\) The objective of this short essay is to seek out more complex ways of understanding intercultural spaces where media plays a role, specifically in the example of indigenous organization such as this in the highlands of the Colombian Andean region. What the local and central governments as well as technocrats and the military do not know about the indigenous movement in Colombia and specifically about the Nasa is that they have been involved in long processes of “empowerment” not easily broken; these can teach us more about participatory democracy and situated media production than any other experience in contemporary Colombia.

**Works Cited**

[http://alternativas.osu.edu](http://alternativas.osu.edu)


PACIFISTA plataforma. 2015. La Guerra y la paz de una dinastía nasa. Online-documentary: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AYM-7MJ9UyQ. http://prensarural.org


NASA VIDEOS AND AUDIO in this article:
Pais de los pueblos sin dueños:  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=REeyPEGYAWM  
Somos alzados en bastones:  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNaXDvDgLzk  
Sxa bwe’s - Conexión con la Madre Tierra:  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WUOjZ1KtFUo  
For a video history of the CRIC, told by co-founder Jesús Avirama see:  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BjdQkJ4POqM  
To explore some of the media work by ACIN visit:  
http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=ACIN+tejido+de+comunicacion+nasa  
Audio by Radio Pa’Yumat:  
http://www.nasaacin.org/multimedia-2013/zona-de-audios

Notes

1 ACIN, Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte del Cauca – Čhhab Wala Kiwe. ACIN is a branch of Comité Regional Indígena del Cauca (CRIC), which was created in 1994 as a result of processes of organization of “cabildos” in Nasa territory responding to the increasing violence caused by illegal crops, guerrilla and paramilitary activity in indigenous territories. The Ministry of Interior recognized ACIN by resolution 052, October 2, 1994. It has been organizing and connecting communities in the northern territories of Cauca.

2 The film takes place during 2008 and 2009, previous to the signing of the free trade agreement between Colombia and the US. As indigenous started peaceful demonstrations against the treaty in their territory, the administration of president Álvaro Uribe Velez responded as if it were a violent revolt, deploying riot police and military forces to mitigate the indigenous uprising, leaving a toll of two dead and 120 wounded. The trade agreement was, paradoxically, confirmed on October 12, 2012, under the new administration of president Juan Manuel Santos.


4 Recent attacks by organized crime and guerrilla factions in the Pacific coast against indigenous and afro-descendants are a demonstration that the conflict still persist in rural areas with proven natural resources and military value. “FARC se pronuncian sobre asesinato de indígenas en Cauca: La guerrilla en un comunicado manifestó su ‘pesar y preocupación’ por estos hechos.” El Tiempo, November 8, 2014. FARC members assassinated two indigenous guards, Antonio Tumiñá and Daniel Coicué, in the municipality of Toribío, in the area know as San Francisco on November 5, 2014. Soon after, members of the indigenous guard captured and presented the perpetrators before a community justice council in Toribío, more than one thousand Nasa participated. The perpetrators were condemned to 40 years in prison; two youngsters (who happened to be Nasa) were castigated in front of the community and sent to a juvenile institution. For more information about indigenous and peasant leaders targeted by violence go to: http://prensarural.org

5 This is shown by the intellectual production coming from the communities in relation to scholars from Colombia and abroad. In particular, see: Marcos Yulé & Alcibiades Escué, “Valores Nasa: cultura,

6 The modernity/coloniality working group has been developing a body of work on the understanding of the colonial matrix of power for the past 25 years. For a title that presents a critique on the notion of progress and summarizes the work of the collective see Arturo Escobar (2010).

7 This story has been now highlighted as a demonstration of how war was brought to indigenous and campesino communities by the military, but also how peace can be achieved among armed actors in the Colombian conflict. An on-line documentary was produced in 2015 featuring the story, supported by the Centro de Memoria Histórica and VICE in Colombia, produced by the PACIFISTA platform. Watch the documentary at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AYM-7MJ9UyQ

8 CRIC represents 116 Cabildos and 11 associations, divided in nine strategic zones. There are 84 recognized indigenous reserves in Cauca representing eight indigenous nations: Nasa-Paéz, Guambianos, Yanaconas, Coconucos, Epiraras-Siapiriras (Eberas), Totoroes, Inangos, and Guanacos. The added population is of around a quarter million. For a video history of the CRIC, told by co-founder Jesús Avirama see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BjdQkQ4POqM

9 It would be relevant to locate father Alvaro’s work within the framework of the Liberation Theology, developed by Latin American priests working with poor and marginalized communities during the 1960s and 1970s, which was particularly pertinent in the context of indigenous struggles that at the time were also close to leftist armed struggle in the region. See Gustavo Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation. London: SCM Press, 1974.

10 The Nasa-Yuwe tongue has been synthesized at different times; starting in the 1755 grammar and catechism produced by Fry Eugenio del Castillo y Orozco, the parish priest of Tálaga in Tierra Adentro (Huila). Since mid 1970s, Florence L. Gerdel and Marianna C. Slocum ethno linguists from the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) also worked on Nasa-Yuwe including some English phonetics in the mix. SIL started as a protestant missionary institution based initially in Arkansas and later in Dallas, Texas. Since the 1940s SIL has been standardizing indigenous languages in the Americas. But it was the CRIC, which took the task in the 1970s with a number of Nasa trained people as linguists in the 1980s (by SIL and other Colombian institutions), which finally presented a formal grammar of the language. The Nasa-Yuwe language is used in domestic settings and in public spaces in Cauca and by the CRIC and ACIN in print, radio and now in new-media platforms. Paul S Frank, Robert J. Van Zyl, Recuerdos y reflexiones: la AILV y su labor en Colombia (1962-2000). Asociación Instituto Lingüístico de Verano, Bogotá, 2000. Also mentioned in, Joanne Rappaport, “A Note on the Orthography of Nasa Yuwe” in Intercultural Utopias (2005).

11 His death came following his most outspoken campaign during the recovering of lands in the Hacienda López Adentro, and after two members of his own family were murdered by the police in a peaceful occupation of indigenous lands in 1982 (his father, an indigenous governor was also injured in that occasion). See, Hugo García Segura, “El legado de Alvaro Ulcué Chocué.” El Espectador, November 12,

11 ACIN was recognized by the binding resolution 052, October 2 of 1994.


13 There were only three indigenous individuals participating in the new constitution; Alfonso Peña Chepe (Nasa) representing the Movimiento indigenista Quintín Lame; Lorenzo Muelas (Guanbiano) representing the Movimiento de Autoridades Indígenas de Colombia, who acted as vice-president of the First Commission during the Constitutional reform; and Francisco Rojas-Birry (Embera) representing La Organización Nacional Indígena (ONIC), who also acted as vice-president of the Second Commission. See, Daniel Bonilla-Maldonado, La constitución multicultural. Siglo del Hombre, 2006.

15 Forced internal displacement in Colombia continues to be a matter of serious concern. According to official figures of March 2013, over 4.7 million people were internally displaced. This figure takes into account new variables under the Law on Victims and Land Restitution (Victims Law) of 2011. However, it does not yet take into account the Constitutional Court’s decision of June 2013 to review all previous decisions that did not include cases of displacement caused by violence perpetrated by some armed groups following demobilization. UNHCR anticipates that at the end of 2013 the number will reach over 5.2 million people. Accessed in April 2014 from: http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e492ad6. The violence employed by the guerrillas, Bacrim and the military gives Colombia the world's largest population of IDPs. It is to a great extent a rural crisis, in which Afro-descendants and indigenous peoples are disproportionately affected. Although constituting just 14% of society, they comprised an estimated 83% of those driven from their homes in 2010, according to a Global Humanitarian Assistance report. Chloe Stirk, “Resources for humanitarian response and poverty reduction.” in Global Humanitarian Assistance (2013). “250 mil nuevos desplazados” El Espectador. May 31, 2013. “El más reciente informe de la Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento (Codhes) señaló que en Colombia fueron desplazadas forzadamente 256.590 personas en 2012. Los departamentos en que más se ha evidenciado el desplazamiento son: Antioquia Cauca, Nariño, Valle del Cauca y Putumayo. Igualmente, agregó que las principales víctimas de las 65.792 familias que fueron desplazadas el año 2012, fueron comunidades indígenas, con el 20.23% de los casos y poblaciones afrocolombianas con el 23.78%.” Accessed in April, 2014 from: http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/judicial/articulo-425366-250-mil-nuevos-desplazados-colombia

16 As Joanne Rappaport states in her discussion about “Frontier Nasa/Nasa de Frontera”, there is a tension between individuals that left their communities but that are still working for the community as mediators. Some Nasa activist (cultural workers) that had left their communities and embraced academic, non-profit, political, and governmental positions, as well as the number of individuals and families forced displaced in the years (decades) of conflict are establishing new ties with the communities, this inside-outside creates tensions, misunderstandings, and sometimes conflict. What is clear is that new networks of solidarity thanks to the visibility of Nasa resistance and parallel cases in the country and in Abya Yala is attracting a mass of indigenous youth to the process, see: Joanne Rappaport, Intercultural Utopias (2005).

17 The weekend of May 10 and 11, 2014 one hundred fifty families were forced displaced from the highlands of Toribio in northern Cauca by increasing fights and bombings by the Military and factions of the ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional). Between October and November 2014, seven members of the Guard were murdered. “Sistema de Información de la Consejería de Pueblos Indígenas, Derechos Humanos y Paz.” ONIC (Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia), Bogotá, September, 2012.

http://alternativas.osu.edu

19 ACIN developed initially a group of community radios, "Voces de Nuestra Tierra," "Radio Nasa" and “Radio PA’YUMAT”, and later its “Telecentro Comunitario ACIN," where they starting producing videos and prints. See a history of ACIN: http://www.nasaacin.org/sobre-nosotros2013/historia-de-nuestro-proceso


22 This station has been also developing videos and social media approaches to their work as cultural center. See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PZxlw9ZQPgk

23 To access audios of Radio Pa’ Yumat, go to: http://www.nasaacin.org/multimedia-2013/zona-de-audios. To explore some of the media work by ACIN visit: http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=ACIN+tejido+de+comunicacion+nasa

24 Leaders in Cauca are still targeted by violent agents, some of the most visible in the current struggle are: Feliciano Valencia, Daniel Piñacué, Avelina Pancho, Aída Quilcué, and Leider Quilcué. Some others had abandoned the territory due to dead threats, such as the case of Jesús Avirama (Cocono), who was a young leader during the creation of the CRIC, his siblings were imprisoned, tortured and finally disappeared. Jesús is living in the United State, from where he advocates about their indigenous struggle.

25 “A story of an Indigenous Guard.” The first contact Edilfredo had with mother earth was the day of his birth. In the tradition of the Nasa indigenous people in Colombia, the mother buries the umbilical cord because it is the earth that fed her womb. The umbilical cord is the first cycle of Edilfredo with Mother Earth. However, the challenges of growing up in poverty in the rural sector are enormous and Edilfredo ties to the land were delayed. At 13 Edilfredo began harvesting coca leaves and consider joining one of the illegal armed groups. Edilfredo is now 17, he has rediscovered his connection with the earth, with his mother, and now works with the Kiwe Ten’za and within his community teaching the cultivation of various products that nourish the body, the indigenous spirit and the environment. (My translation)

26 In Nasa cosmogony (as in other peoples of the Andes), lakes are the origin of life; they are connected with the sky as they reflect the stars. Juan Tama was born out of one, as one of the Caciques del Agua. They are the funding beings of the Nasa. Thé-walas read the lakes and count time cycles in which Nasa culture is sustained. See, Miguel Rocha-Vivas, Antes el amanecer, antología de las literatures indígenas de los Andes y la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Ministerio de Cultura, 2010.

27 That is a way in which the organization has strengthened their network and are sharing their forms of governance and knowledge to other communities.

28 Even in the last edition of the Visual Cultural Reader, that included an entire section on Post, De, Neo Colonial Visualities and documentary, not a single indigenous film, filmmaker, or scholar was featured. See: Nicholas Mirzoeff (Editor), The Visual Culture Reader, 3rd edition. Taylor and Francis, 2013.

29 By the use of two figures in the film, the devil and a phantom of a white colonizer, the filmmakers introduced narrative elements that completed the neutral and somehow detached documentary work. On Marta Rodríguez as decolonial art, see Gomez (2014).

30 Marta Rodríguez and Jorge Silva worked for ANUC (Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos). ANUC was created in 1967 as a by-product of the Land Reform of president Carlos Lleras Restrepo. Rodríguez and Silva documented many “land grabs” during the process. By 1970, with a change of presidency, the conservative Misael Pastrana Borrero, violence and targeted assassinations came to
dismantle the *campesino* leadership, and a division within the ANUC made Rodríguez and Silva leave. However, they got to know the CRIC leadership. CRIC introduced an indigenous cosmovision to land struggle that ignited a long-term relationship between the filmmakers and the organizatons. See Cadavid (2015).


32 The name of this policy was “democratic security” (seguridad democrática) that was a copy of the Bush era, Patriot act, an internal counter terrorist package that took away individual and group liberties for security purposes.

33 News outlets produced a series of journalist pieces against the autonomy of the indigenous communities in Cauca, giving the voice to experts in conflict-resolution. As a result, the video was published on Jul 26, 2012, with the title: *Somos alzados en bastones de mando*, as part of the TV show Hagamos Memoria of Canal Capital. The video produced by the Tejido de Comunicación ACIN, an organ of the Indigenous Movement in Cauca, situates and presents the *Kiwe Ten’zas* (Indigenous Guard) actions against the destabilizing forces in their territories.

34 On the context of the production of the documentary and a brief review of the trade agreement on the works at the time that ignited the indigenous struggle, see: http://alternativa.blog.pangea.org/2011/11/09/pais-de-los-pueblos-sin-dueno/


37 Back in the mid and late 1990s, I had the opportunity to participate in dialogues with peasant and indigenous organizations in Cauca as part of a governmental team. We worked with CIMA (Comite de Integracion del Macizo Colombiano), which blocked the Pan-American Highway as a means to bring the government to the table. Surprisingly enough the community was asking for cultural tools, in particular media workshops and the creation of cultural centers to share their stories. This territory had been a pilot for a program of crop-substitution, the scars of drug money changed cultural values in the previous decades, those scars were too vivid to move forward. The level of political and theoretical discourse of our counterparts surprised us; I came to the realization that what we considered to be “isolated” communities were more interconnected and sophisticated that many of us. This crosspollination of social organization is clear. Their particular history had made them not only resilient and flexible but also had given them the discourse to engage in any kind of political debate while maintaining their core values.

38 The government of Uribe Velez started creating alternative indigenous organizations in order to co-opt leaders, divide, and dismantled independent organizations such as ONIC, CRIC, and ACIN.

39 The CECIDIC was born on December 28, 1991, implementing the ideas of Father Alvaro Ulcúe Chocué, to create a center for holistic education for their NASA people. The center is located in an area appropriated by several landowners and recovered by the lands claims of the NASA. The CECIDIC is part of 'Proyecto Nasa' covering three reservations (Toribio, San Francisco, and Tacueyó). It offers a series of educational programs, among them: a specialization in arts and communications that links the work of...
CRIC and ACIN’s “planes de vida” in programming developed and distributed by the interconnected system of radio and video, via social platforms. Visit CECIDIC at” http://www.cecidic.edu.co/