



Article

Border Tensions for Rethinking Communication and Development: A Case of Building History in Ticoya Resguardo

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Abstract: This article proposes rethinking communication, development, and social change from a decolonial perspective through the case study of the Ticoya *resguardo*. It examines how the oral traditions of Indigenous elders construct a history of the territory, positioning orality as a practice of communicative and cognitive justice that transcends the dominant structures of the nation-state. Border tensions are explored both as a physical reality between Colombia and Peru and as a metaphor for identity conflicts. The theoretical framework incorporates debates on post-development, pluriverse, and southern epistemologies, challenging social inequalities. A qualitative methodology based on the praxeological method was implemented in four stages in collaboration with the *resguardo*'s communications committee. Producing a radio series narrated by participants was crucial for gathering the elders' narratives through conversations, social mapping, and storytelling. The findings emphasize the break with linear temporality in narratives, the sense of territory beyond state borders, and the identity tensions of river dwellers. The conclusion underscores the necessity of a decolonial perspective, recognizing the impact of monocultures in obscuring diverse forms of life. The Ticoya *resguardo* case illustrates how communicative justice can highlight the local and everyday, considering the territory essential in the pluriverse, aligning with Escobar's and Santos' proposals on transitions toward a pluriversal world.

Keywords: CDCS; oral communication; communicative justice; cognitive justice; pluriverse



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1. Introduction

This article¹ proposes rethinking communication, development, and social change from the perspective of decoloniality in communication. Its proposals arise from the case analysis of the Ticoya reservation and their experience in constructing a history of their territory based on the oral traditions of Indigenous elders. This research experience allowed for the recognition of orality as a practice of communicative justice (Herrera-Huérffano et al. 2023; Hamelink 2023; Fuchs 2021) and cognitive justice, through which Indigenous communities build their sense of local place beyond the dominant structures of the nation-state.

Here, border tensions represent both a reality and a metaphor. A reality because the *resguardo*² is located in the border zone between Colombia and Peru, highlighting the inherent tensions in the identity dynamics of nation-states attempting to overshadow the ethnic territorial identities of Indigenous communities. Moreover, a metaphor, as understanding the path of decoloniality in communication involves recognizing the implications that debate on post-development, pluriverse (Escobar 2012a, 2012b, 2012c), and the epistemologies of the South (Santos 2009, 2010) have in the quest to break down the boundaries sustaining inequalities, inequities, and social injustices. In other words, border tensions also refer to the tensions involved in breaking the abyssal line proposed in the sociology of absences and emergences (Santos 2006).

The methodological proposal began with the arguments outlined from the decoloniality of communication and the reflections of Linda Smith (1999), a Maori Indigenous researcher, who advocates for orienting research toward the fundamental challenges of communities and their struggles for self-determination and control of their destinies. Based on this discussion, a qualitative methodology utilizing the praxeological method was proposed and developed in four stages. The methodological design and its implementation were carried out in collaboration with the communications committee of the *resguardo*. The catalyst for energizing the process was producing a radio series that would document the history of the *resguardo*, constructed and narrated by the committee participants. Through extended conversations, social mapping, and storytelling, the narratives of the grandparents were collected to build the series. The collected information was systematized and analyzed using a matrix to investigate the presence of monocultures and diverse forms of justice in the discourses and practices of the interviewed grandparents.

As a central conclusion, we emphasize the necessity of rethinking communication and development from a decolonial perspective, which involves acknowledging the impact that various monocultures have had in rendering diverse forms of life and experiences invisible. The case of constructing the history of the Ticoya *resguardo* dismantles tensions and abyssal boundaries, allowing voices and actors that have been marginalized for centuries to emerge. Here, communicative justice is presented as a key element that transcends the discussion of the right to communication; it entails a political commitment to unveil the local, everyday, and territory as the essence of the pluriverse.

2. Theoretical Debate

Two fundamental elements come into play in this article: the importance of grandfathers and grandmothers in Indigenous communities and the centrality of orality in their cultures. Both aspects have been worked on from different fields. Regarding orality and Indigenous peoples, two lines of work are evident. The first focuses on research on orality and linguistics (Avoseh 2013; Delgado 2019; Creegan Miller 2020; Jacinto Santos 2021; Domenici 2022; Sheedy 2024). A second line, closer to this research proposal, is where orality allows a holistic understanding of the world for a people or community. Orality fuses cultural (Ong 1994), spiritual, and territorial elements that guarantee community survival by being transmitted from generation to generation. (Carrin 2022; Morton 2023; Vázquez Hernández 2024; Mandal and Singh 2023; Jacinto Santos 2021; Domenici 2022; Sheedy 2024). The role of grandparents in the care, maintenance, and production of identity processes through the transmission of cultural knowledge to new generations is fundamental (Buckingham and Hutchinson 2022; Klein 2011), especially in the maintenance of their languages and ecological practices or care for the environment (Van Lopik 2012).

Building on the contributions of linguistics and socio-anthropology, this research brings a unique focus to the debate on orality and the role of grandparents in communities from communication, development, and social change (CDCS). The research identifies the place of the Indigenous and orality in the trajectory of the three paradigms in the field of CDSC (Servaes 1999; Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte 2008; Waisbord 2020) to point out how the emergence of the decoloniality of communication incorporates new debates into the CDSC field.

The first dominant communication paradigm is focused on information and social marketing in mass media (Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte 2008) within the framework of a linear vision of developmental and modernizing, as Huntington (2005) points out, with a vision of development from a colonizing and civilizing project of societies culturally different from Western civilization. A perspective from which it is considered is that the so-called Third World countries require a new culture to advance to a modern stage. In this framework, the local or ancestral cultures are “considered wrong, local knowledge is viewed as obstacle and unnecessary in development interventions that prevented the adoption of modern attitudes and behaviors” (Waisbord 2020, p. 128). “Hence, culture and social structure, the essence of society, are seen as the primary impediments to its

“progress” (Servaes 1999, p. 270). Unifying the dynamics of nation-states as an ideal of development (Escobar 2012a) implied that predominantly oral cultures and local languages were part of this obstacle.

Frequently, Indigenous tongues were banned, their cultures and ways of life rejected, and their assimilation accelerated through educational, linguistic and cultural policies. Dispossession of land and resources, save for rare exceptions and to this day, was also continued, as well as discrimination of their cultures, religions and identities. (Stavenhagen 2008, p. 12. Own translation)

The second trend arises from questioning development and recognizing extra-economic aspects in environmental debates, giving rise to concepts such as ecodevelopment (Sachs 1974) and sustainable development (Brundtland Commission 1987). Discussions related to territorial conditions also emerge at various levels—local, regional, and national—introducing concepts like endo-development or endogenous development (Friedmann and Douglass 1978; Planque 1985; Vásquez 2007), regional development, and decentralization (Boisier 1982, 1987). In communicative terms, this trend is identified as the participatory model, which views communication as a process of dialogue and action (Waisbord 2014). This model advocates for democratizing communication through participatory dialogue (Díaz Bordeave 1976, 1982, 1985), proposing a vision of communication as a complex and horizontal social dynamic (Beltrán 1976, pp. 127–29), and a dialogic communicology of liberation and emancipation from oppression (Boal 2008; Bruner 1990, 2002; Freire 2012). The theory of cultural dependence and the struggle for cultural heritage, including Indigenous perspectives, highlights the tensions between the homogenization imposed by nation-states and cultural identities (Alfaro 1985). The theory of cultural dependence reinforces proposals for active social participation (Reyes Matta 1977, 1981).

Alternative communication introduces a communicology of praxis (Kaplún 1978, 1983), emphasizing knowledge for action and a new logic of meaning that prioritizes local context and history. This is connected to the emergence of communication for another development, as noted by Rosa María Alfaro (1993), or addressing the question “which communication for which development”, as proposed by Pasquali (1996).

A third trend is identified as communication for social change (Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte 2008) and the multiplicity paradigm (Servaes 2000, 2011). This perspective emphasizes understanding communication models through the multidimensionality of sociocultural variables (Servaes 1999) and the importance of cultural matrices in sociocultural mediations (Martín-Barbero 2003).

Recent proposals have incorporated ecological and decolonial perspectives into debates on communication, development, and social change (Barranquero 2011, 2012; Barranquero and Sáez-Baeza 2015). These include self-determination, the self-organization of peoples, post-development (Escobar 2012b, 2012c), and their right to autonomy (Bengoa 2016, p. 187). This perspective suggests alternative ways of understanding communication, (post)development, and social change that are more closely related to local senses, ontologies, and epistemologies of Indigenous cultures (Contreras 2014, 2016). Situated knowledge is proposed as a means to decolonize communication “implies a new utopian path in the fight against epistemic segregation and whose purpose is to restore communication that humanizes” (Torrico 2018, p. 80).

Significant contributions to understanding decoloniality in communication include: (1) the exploration of Latin American communication knowledge within the critical framework of Elacom (Latin American School of Communication) and its decolonizing potential (Valencia Rincón 2012; Torrico 2016, 2017, 2018; Olarte 2016; Herrera-Huérffano et al. 2016; Cebreli and Arancibia 2017; Ganter and Ortega 2019); (2) the examination of colonial communicative practices, such as the imposition of cultural logics through religion and language, and their social and political impact (Gómez 2016; Padilla 2018); and (3) the analysis of subaltern discursive practices among Indigenous groups, Afro-descendants, and other popular cultures, revealing forms of resistance and re-existence, as well as the epistemes and ontologies underlying these practices (Contreras 2014, 2016; Valdez et al.

2019; González-Tanco 2016; Maldonado 2018; Cebrelli and Arancibia 2018; Larrea and Saladrigas 2018; Mavisoy 2018).

This research, situated at the intersection of discussions on communication, development, and social change from recent debates on decoloniality, seeks to understand how constructing the oral and intercultural local history of the Ticoya *resguardo* reflects a commitment to cognitive and communicative justice. These dimensions of justice are understood as efforts to expand “worlds and knowledges constructed over different ontological commitments, epistemic configurations, and practices of being, knowing, and making/doing” (Escobar 2012b, p. 49) and as dimensions to “design the cultural, civilizational, and ecological transitions necessary to confront the civilizational crisis”, recognizing post-development and transitions toward the pluriverse beyond the Western culture imposed through modern reason (Escobar 2018, p. xi).

One criticism of modern reason is its failure to recognize the inexhaustible richness of the world and the diverse ways of inhabiting and engaging with it (Santos 2006). Modern reason positions itself as unique and exclusive, rendering it incapable of acknowledging other epistemological forms. We are confronted with a myopic, hierarchical reason that invisibilizes and denies alternative ways of being, effectively rendering them non-existent. To challenge this rationality and seek strategies for its deconstruction, the Sociology of Absences (Santos 2006) emerges. This approach is characterized by its transgressive and insurgent nature, aiming to reveal what has long been dismissed as non-existent, incredible, or discardable. It identifies five modes of absence or monocultures.

The imposition of modern reason is evidenced through the five monocultures: (1) the monoculture of modern and scientific knowledge, (2) the monoculture of the naturalization of differences (religion, race, ethnicity, gender), (3) the monoculture of globality/universality, (4) the monoculture of linear time, and (5) the monoculture of capitalist productivity centered on economic productivity, as outlined in the epistemologies of the south (Santos 2009, 2010).

The construction of this intercultural history, drawing from the diverse voices of the grandfathers and grandmothers of the Ticuna, Cocama, and Yagua cultures, responds to the need for alternative ways of thinking within the framework of cognitive justice—not as an esoteric plea, but as a practical idea, an appeal from marginal and traditional societies seeking to contribute to Western science and its concepts of complexity, time, and sustainability (Visvanathan 2006, p. 167. Own translation).

In response to the monoculture of scientific knowledge (Santos 2009), which is written and linear, it is proposed to give contextual credibility to knowledge about the territory’s history from its inhabitants and their stories, aligning with cognitive justice (Visvanathan 2006).

The effort to construct a narrative about the territory of the Ticoya *resguardo* was undertaken with an acknowledgment of the subaltern position of Indigenous groups in Latin America and Colombia. The starting point was the understanding of communication as a participatory space (Díaz Bordenave 1976, 1982, 1985; Gumucio-Dagron 2011), where symbolic interactions occur and cultural meanings are constructed (Rizo 2007, 2012), producing the social fabric of a community (Magallanes-Blanco and Ramos 2017; Magallanes-Blanco 2022). An intercultural understanding of communication encompasses the complexity of social life within a diversity of cultural practices and frameworks (García-Canclini 1982, 1987, 1989; Martín-Barbero 2002, 2003, 2012), highlighting struggles for cultural heritage and tensions between cultural identity and homogenization (Alfaro 1985).

Silvia Rivera-Cusicanqui (2008) emphasizes that orality, as a historical practice, holds decolonial potential, enabling a shift beyond traditional historical narratives; this opens a space for debating the perspectives from which “legitimate” knowledge about Indigenous communities is constructed.

Indigenous historiographical practices, conversely, reveal deep layers of collective memory: the submerged iceberg of precolonial history, transmitted through myth to new generations, fostering a vision of an autonomous historical process and the hope to regain

control over a historical destiny disrupted by colonial processes (Rivera-Cusicanqui 2008, p. 171. Own translation).

Within the framework of the decolonization of communication, as proposed by previous research, orality is established as a strategy for the survival of communities resisting dispossession, memory loss, and identity erosion (Carrin 2022), and as a means to counteract Westernization and state modernization processes (Morton 2023). In other words, the decolonization of communication should contribute to developing pathways to address the monocultures of Western culture and align communicative practices with post-development perspectives.

In the framework of decolonization of communication, as proposed by some previous research, orality is established as a strategy for the survival of communities struggling against dispossession, loss of memory, and identity (Carrin 2022) and as a strategy to circumvent the processes of westernization and modernization of the State (Morton 2023). Decolonization of communication should contribute to constructed paths to face the monocultures of Western culture and is related to the communicative practice with the post-development.

Our research allowed us to incorporate orality as a historical decolonial source. We hope that in doing so, the memories of the Indigenous peoples' grandfathers and grandmothers can pave the way for future resistance exercises that may consolidate orality as a legitimate form of knowledge insofar as it expresses the cosmovisions of peoples capable of narrating themselves in dialogue with other forms of knowledge and other proposals in the context of the pluriverse.

3. Methodological Development

The methodological proposal of the research engaged in ongoing dialogue with the arguments and pursuits of cognitive justice as articulated by Linda Smith (1999) in her seminal work *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. The research design was oriented toward addressing the fundamental challenges communities face, including survival, cultural preservation, language, struggles for self-determination, and the reclamation of control over their destinies (Smith 1999). Based on this premise, a qualitative approach employing the praxeological method was utilized. This method is characterized by an action–reflection–action dynamic, “where knowledge is constructed through the integration of thought and participatory action within the community, where theory illuminates and energizes action and practice (is conceived as) a process of social interaction to contextualize and solve problems collaboratively” (Juliao 2002, p. 31). The design of the participatory methodology actively engaged the community in the research process and facilitated the project's integration by documenting the formation of the *resguardo* through its oral traditions, primarily those preserved by the elders. The process was further energized by producing a radio series that documented the history of the *resguardo*, as constructed and narrated by members of the *resguardo's* communications committee.

The implementation of praxeology in our research was structured in four distinct yet interrelated stages: seeing, interpreting, acting, and creative return. These stages provided a clear structure for the development of our method in the field with the communities.

The seeing stage began with an inventory diagnosis through a local publication search, with the participation of the members of the radio committee of the *resguardo*. This allowed us to identify which stories have been built around the territory of Ticoya *Resguardo* and recognize from which place of enunciation those historical narratives have been built. We found one grey piece of literature written by the first mayor of the municipality, Puerto Nariño (the policeman, non-Indigenous), regarding the “civilization” of the local place through the statal figure of the municipality.

At the same time, we developed a participatory social mapping workshop to identify the representative places, events, and significant subjects within the community's collective memories. Seven of the 23 communities in the territory that comprise the Ticoya *resguardo* were identified to collect landmarks and talk with the community's grandfathers and grandmothers through storytelling (Table 1).

Table 1. Community selection arguments.

Community Selection	Argument from Social Mapping Workshop
Tipisca	This is an important community because it is located in a border zone with Peru near Tierra Amarilla and has a high Yagua population.
Atacuari	It is an important community because it is a border zone; it is the only border community populated by Cocamas, a minority in the <i>resguardo</i> . Together with Tipisca, these communities are located on the Loretayacú River.
Patrullero	It is a relevant community because it moved to the mainland in recent years. It used to be an island with very particular dynamics for carrying out its agricultural processes.
San Martín	It is the oldest community and the first settlement that marked the center–periphery relationship with the political and administrative center of the reservation, Puerto Nariño.
Tarapoto	This community has a preponderant place in the stories of origin. The Omaguas—ancestors of the Ticunas—come from the Cotué, and their first place of arrival is El Tarapoto. The community lives on the shores of the lake, sacred territory before the law of origin of the Ticunas.
Ticoya	This community is relevant because it is the political and administrative center of the <i>resguardo</i> and is located in the urban area of the municipality of Puerto Nariño.
Siete de agosto y Boyahuasú	These communities are located in the farthest area of the reservation on the Amazon River, at the extreme limit of the trapezoid, where trade moves due to its proximity to Caballo Cocha (Peru).

The interpretation stage of the praxeological method was not developed at a specific moment precisely because of its intention; it was carried out throughout the entire process and fed by social mapping, observation exercises, daily dialogues, and interviews for storytelling.

The action stage focused on the collection of storytelling with the grandparents in the different communities selected. This mainly was guided by the communication committee members because, as Smith states, “the relevance of the stories is not that they tell something, but that they contribute to a collective story... The intrinsic of storytelling is to focus on dialogues and conversations between Indigenous people to understand themselves” (Smith 1999, p. 145). A total of 15 interviews were conducted during the visits to the seven communities. In parallel, and as part of this stage, a radio series entitled *Gente de Río*³ about the history of the *resguardo* was created and produced. This process was carried out through production and narration workshops with the members of the *resguardo*’s communications committee.

Finally, in the fourth stage of creative devolution, socialization through a *minga* was organized to share with the whole community the history of the *resguardo* built from the experiences, transits, rhythms, and times stored in the memories of the *resguardo*’s grandparents. Once again, the excuse of the radio brought together a whole community to listen to each other and to meet with family stories that were articulated among them to tell a collective story. The creative feedback stage sought to serve “a dream, desire, and anticipation function. . .of initiatives and new outlets for action. . .” (Juliao 2002, p. 103. Own translation), and then, the *resguardo*’s committee of communication discussed the mechanisms for the diffusion of *Gente de Río* through public loudspeakers and spaces such as the scholar institutions. These proposals used what the community calls *La radio sin radio*⁴ (The radio without a radio).

This research project and the production of the radio series *Gente del Río* is the continuity of the research and interaction processes that began with other projects in 2012. A request from the *curacas*⁵ of the communities and the president of the *resguardo* to the *Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios* gave us elements to formulate the project and continue

with the training in radio production for the members of the communities, contribute to the consolidation of the communications committee of the *resguardo*, and generate radio productions for the maintenance of their cultures and history, as indicated in the letter. Additionally, the *resguardo's* request to the researchers guaranteed entry to the territory with the support and permission of the administrative and traditional authorities.

In coherence with our theoretical framework, the research bets built with and from the communities imply a joint action based on the dialogue of knowledge, understood as the implementation of the ecology of knowledge of Boaventura de Sousa Santos in his reflections on the epistemologies of the South, according to which "the search for credibility for non-scientific knowledge does not imply the discrediting of scientific knowledge. It simply implies its counter-hegemonic use" (Santos 2009, p. 115). In this case, the counter-hegemonic use of historiographic knowledge as scientific knowledge was sought by constructing an oral historical narrative from the voices and knowledge of grandfathers and grandmothers of the territory as cognitive and communicative justice.

4. Findings and Discussion

The results presented here are derived from an analysis of the oral narratives provided by the grandfathers and grandmothers, as well as the scripts prepared by the *resguardo's* communications committee for the three chapters of the radio series. This analysis was systematized using a matrix to categorize the stories in relation to concepts of monocultures, injustices, and justice.

The research experience and the process of constructing the oral history of the Ticoya *resguardo* offer valuable insights into the connections between the Communication for Development and Social Change (CDCS) field and the perspectives of the pluriverse and post-development as part of a decolonial approach to communication. The findings are explored through three key reflections: the break from linear temporality in the narratives, the localization of the sense of territory beyond state boundaries, and the identity of the *Gente de Río* as reflected in their daily practices, such as the use of native languages, traditional agricultural methods (*chagra*), and the knowledge shared in *malokas*⁶ and *mingas*⁷ of thought.

4.1. The Break from Linear Temporality

The Ticoya *Resguardo* has been constituting itself for longer than one might think, independently of whatever denomination it has been given. Before the communities were "legalized" by the Colombian State, they had gathered and organized themselves; they have always had political practices and figures of authority in charge of managing resources, collective actions, celebrations, and other everyday life affairs. Accordingly, if one hopes to build an oral history of the *resguardo*, one must disregard the boundaries set up by the State and assume the kind of flexibility that allows one to cross broad chronological demarcations signaled by diffuse and non-linear referents. The articulation of these referents narrates the *resguardo's* relations with the State, their internal interactions, how they have inhabited the territory, and how all of this is consigned to their oralities.

Oral memory is manifested in the voices of grandfathers and grandmothers through the storytelling sessions, with their silences, gaps, length in the stories, the slowness of their speech, the emphasis on events, people, and places, and even their names in their own language. These referents delimit a time-events framework, in which the historical narration does not follow the path of temporal linearity but establishes a nucleus of significant events and places that inhabit the collective memory of the community.

Understanding a narrative within a multidirectional dispersion of time-events referred to also involves the notion of an open-dimensional space-time bereft of pre-established directional frameworks and strict and rigid laws that determine events (Valera-Villegas 2008, p. 6. Own translation).

This multidirectional dispersion of time-events, analyzed in the orality of the grandparents, configured the organization of the three chapters of *Gente de Río* from three time-events:

the creation of the *resguardo*, the spaces and inhabitants of the first communities, and the mobility described in the arrivals and decisions of the grandfathers and grandmothers to stay. This order was given to the narratives by the communications committee of the *resguardo* ropes with the rigidity of a chronology. It does not appeal to the identification of the history of events or facts concatenated diachronically but to the synchrony of senses of experience and place.

Based on the collective memories and the oral history of *Resguardo* Ticoya in the Amazon, we can underscore that:

Thus, we do not have history but diversely profound histories [...] However, the existence of these horizons does not constitute a linear succession permanently outrunning itself and advancing toward a “destiny”: what we have are inherently conflicting referents, live parcels of the past that inhabit the present and block the emergence of totalizing and homogenizing mechanisms (Rivera-Cusicanqui 2008, p. 20. Own translation).

The construction of an oral history of the Ticoya *Resguardo* must acknowledge that this construction takes place beyond the boundaries of historical linearity, private space, and official authorship. This represents the first break with the monoculture of linear time of Western culture (Santos 2009). The referents that allow for the construction of the history at hand are the rhythm originating in the flow of the river, the spatial dynamics of collective property inherent in the *resguardo*, in coherence with the proposals on post-development according to which “local knowledge is a place-based mode of consciousness, a place-specific way of endowing the world with meaning” (Escobar 2012c, p. 121).

4.2. The Sense of Territory beyond Borders

When asked about the constitution of the *resguardo*, few of its inhabitants refer to its legal conformation; their sense of territory is bound to narrations about the families that lived in each community. These communities had their denominations and traditional authorities—the first *curacas*. They allude to their territory as inhabited and denominated since before its establishment through the figure of *resguardo*. The establishment of the Ticoya *Resguardo* is perceived as a landmark that has influenced how its inhabitants interact with the non-Indigenous world, their access to public funds and resources, and their interaction with the Colombian State.

The sense of territory relates to how the communities were constituted through familiar units, three or four houses, where few families began to grow before the establishment of the *resguardo* and municipality. Those who joined these communities came from Peru or Brazil; they decided to stay because of work, in the pursuit of starting a family, or because of the availability of common life-sustaining resources. The grandfather, Albino Ríos (in personal communication, 4 May 2017), remembers that in 1970 when he arrived, he was paid 300 Soles. Like him, many referred to the work in the lumber mills as a driving factor in moving from one community to another, independently of the geographic nation-state borders drawn to separate Peru, Brazil, and Colombia.

Ticunas, Cocamas, and Yaguas have moved across this territory through the years, decades, and centuries, because their territory, as a symbolic entity, is the jungle and the river; beyond the *resguardo* or the municipality, as institutional figures and denominations.

One of the senses of the territory in opposition to the institutional vision is related to the perception of the dynamics of the river. Thus, during the fieldwork, it was found that from the Territorial Organizational Plan (*Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial—POT*), government institutions considered these communities at high risk during the annual flooding season (April to June). Due to this, the State assigned houses for the communities, located near the municipal head of Puerto Nariño, a highland at a safe distance from the river and seven hours by little boat (*peque-peque*) from the place where the families were initially settled.

The perception of the local administrative figures about the “floods” contrasts with the communities’ representation and sense of the river as a fundamental component of their territory. For the communities, life follows the rhythm and flow of the river during high tide and low tide, whereas for the State, the same territory is a “zone of high risk.”

The dialogues with the grandparents reflect that everything in the Amazonian trapeze moves to the rhythm of the river and its cycles of low and high waters. The river's rhythm determines a permanent adaptation to the dynamics of each cycle. The Indigenous communities of the Amazonian trapeze have experience and wisdom about adaptation, allowing their people to survive in the jungle for centuries. This is marked by the cycles of fishing, planting, and other practices derived from their relationship with the environment, which is a relationship based on living in harmony. This is what they declare in their life plan:

The territory is both support and principle of life, where the cultural and the environmental are integrated: it allows to inhabit, live and grow in family and community, produces food sustenance, offers medicine, is the birthplace of water, lakes and fish, where the dead are buried and sacred sites are found; it is the place where we live with other immortal beings that are the basis of spirituality as Indigenous (2008, p. 44).

The *resguardo* legal existence began in 1990. From the communities' perspective, the organizational process within the *resguardo* followed the simultaneous consolidation of the Colombian Indigenous movement. The strengthening of this movement was marked by the creation, in 1982, of the National Indigenous Organization (Organización Nacional Indígena—ONIC). From the perspective of the Colombian State, the creation of the *resguardo* followed the formal organization of communities in the borderlands, which, by the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, constituted an institutional measure to guarantee legal protection to territories under threat of being colonized by illegal groups and being forced to enter into the drug trade (cocaine and marijuana).

Within global monoculture, we recognize the dominating dimension of "the global" due to the political forms of an organization centered around the nation-state and guided by a modern, literate, and developmentally aspirational civilizational project. As a consequence, local and territorial organizational dynamics are invisibilized by globally oriented prerogatives. National and global organizational models and frameworks are superimposed on the recognition of everyday forms of social organization within micro-social dynamics.

Due to the legal standing of the *resguardo*, there is tension between the municipal administration and the *resguardo*'s own administrative association—ATICOYA—which has led to disputes over the decision-making processes within the territory. These institutional tensions represent what Vieco (2014) calls a tension between an official national history (that of the municipality) and a local history (that of the *resguardo*). It is the relation of the center of the periphery with the periphery of the periphery, from the persistence of colonial economic, cultural, and political structures and institutions that are used by national elites to exploit and marginalize their own population (González-Casanova 1965). The tensions are caused by the different interests between those who live in the urban center of Puerto Nariño (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) and those who live in the more remote communities (majority Indigenous).

In everyday life, recognizing the territory as *resguardo* has contributed to the preservation, endurance, and maintenance of the Ticuna, Cocama, and Yagua cultures. Especially since 2008, a year in which a series of exercises oriented at the recognition of the *resguardo* began to take place guided by the Cocama leader Emperatriz Cahuache, and the Corporation for the Defense of Biodiversity in the Amazon (Corporación para la Defensa de la Biodiversidad Amazónica—CODEBA). Within the territory of the *resguardo*, at the southern end of Colombia (see Figure 1), and along the Loretoyacu, Amacayacu, and Amazon rivers, lay the settlements of 23 communities; the continuity and permanence of the rivers and settlements are mirrored in the collective memories of their inhabitants.

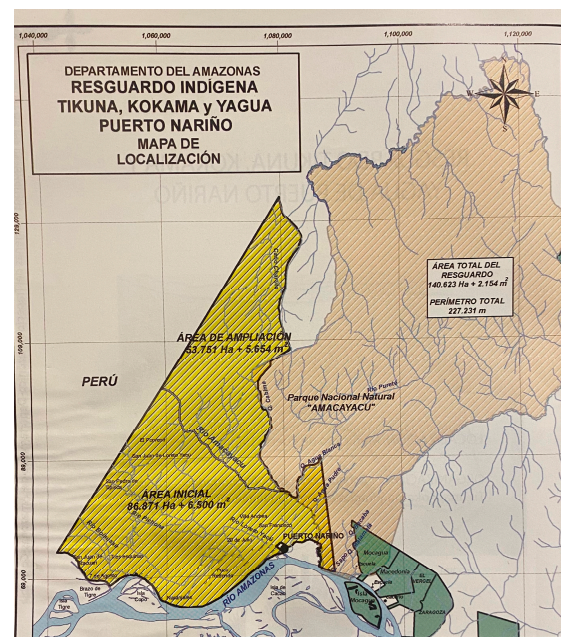


Figure 1. Map of the Indigenous *resguardo* Ticoya. Source: *Altas de los resguardos indígenas del Trapecio amazónico*, CODEBA-Corporación para la Defensa de la Biodiversidad Amazónica (2008, p. 52).

4.3. *Identitarian Tensions of the River People*

Finally, tensions arise from the intersection of collective identity and cultural configurations, as referenced by Grimson (2011). By conducting this research exercise with communities located close to international borders, our results highlight the existence of these identitarian tensions and the responsibility that comes with inhabiting a space in order to preserve it from the presence of the other. What is interesting is determining from where the other is constructed.

The place from which we relate to others and construct them is mediated by our understanding of how the State has impacted the configuration of Indigenous people's cultures and identities. This mediation has generated particular modes of coexistence within the territories. The presence of the State establishes national identities, which implies the necessity of defining the other, which allows the individual, based on a sense of belonging (Grimson 2011), to be a fellow citizen of the same country.

The cultural configurations that arise from the need to define an identity bound to a territory and a nationality undermine, invisibilize, and devalue the cultural configurations of those who cannot exclusively self-identify from said place. From the monoculture of naturalization of differences (Santos 2009, 2010), this type of process is favored, where priority is given to the homogenization of the population, eliminating any hint of ethnic difference, consolidating the idea of national citizens willing to enter into dispute with non-national others. This monoculture has at its core a colonizing and civilizing project that sweeps away communities that are culturally different from those of the West (Huntington 2005).

Through this lens, it becomes visible that the cultural configurations of the Ticunas, Cocamas, and Yaguas are constantly subjected to processes of inequality, invisibilization, and denial in the hegemonic construction of history, since they do not coincide or share interests with the national identity.

The Ticunas, Cocamas, and Yaguas are settled in three different countries: Colombia, Peru, and Brazil. Their ethnic configurations have been permeated by the borders of the three countries. Thus, the Ticunas are not just Ticunas anymore, but rather Colombian Ticunas or Brazilian Ticunas, which, in living close to the national borders, represent the presence of citizens on the edges. The recognition of oneself as belonging to the same ethnic group, while having a different nationality from others within said group, because of one's

geographical location, leads to an understanding of national borders as porous and fluid, and to conceive of one's identity as untethered from official national territories.

Grandmother Silvia Bastos understands her presence in the territory as important for the country. She explains that her grandfather fought for their land, and that, if her community moves, it is possible that the Peruvians will take over the territory:

[...] my grandfather used to say that this land, here, was Peru right up to Leticia, and, after, they fought in the conflict which made the land become Colombia. That is why they ended up staying here, and that is why my deceased grandfather used to tell us: "the day I die, grandchildren, you will stay here, and I do not want you to ever leave this land, because it was for this land that I went and suffered in the conflict"... I am never leaving this place, because my grandfather told us that, so that we took care of the land; because he suffered in times of conflict. (S. Bastos, personal communication, 2 May 2017)

In the narrative of Grandmother Silvia Bastos, the tension between national and cultural identity is evident. The grandmother constructs the other as different, not in cultural terms, but in national terms. That is to say, the logic of the nation-state given from the monoculture of naturalization of differences (Santos 2009, 2010) has constructed a discourse of the other as an enemy from whom I must take care of my territory, denying the most evident and clear, the ethnic identity that has been shared for many years before the consolidation of the national states.

This idea of the other as an "enemy" has also been molded from the monoculture of capitalism productivity (Santos 2009, 2010), since it deprives individuality, and competition, the division of yours and mine is strongly built, denying any commitment to the community and ours.

The rumors that Peru had intentions to reclaim the territory it once considered its own—during the Peruvian occupation of Leticia in the early 1930s—still reverberate in many of the narratives:

What we want is not to leave this place, this land, border territory, borderland, [...] a Peruvian lady, running for the presidency, you know what she said? This is the truth and God is listening; she said: "On the day I win, I will take Leticia back, like we did before". That is why I am scared to leave this place and leave this land. Can you imagine? If we leave, they will come [he refers to the Peruvians] and, who is going to get them out? That is what we are afraid of: to take the land back, we will have to fight like we did before. (C. Benítez, personal communication, 2 May 2017)

The "enemy", Peru, is the birthplace of many of them and their close kin, whom they visit frequently, and because of this, they have easier access to some consumer goods and medical services in the country from which they believe they are defending themselves.

However, and despite constructed fears, the Ticunas, Cocamas, and Yaguas maintain relations of *paisanismo*—relations of kinship—that are separate from national identities. The given practices among the Indigenous people of the three countries, unlike the discourses, are friendly, collaborative and exchanges of different types, and are based on their cultural identities. It is as if those imaginary lines of the nation-state are not capable of untying the cultural dynamics woven throughout hundreds of years by the modes of being Indigenous inhabitants of the Amazon. *Paisanismo* relations are practices that appeal to the ecology of recognition and make visible forms of sociocultural and spiritual justice by prioritizing community relations, cooperation, and solidarity (Santos 2009, 2010). The discourse about a "Peruvian" enemy belongs to the State, but it is not practiced among the inhabitants who, for the most part, share common cultural identities.

Consequently, Yagua children from Tierra Amarilla (Peru) go to school in Tipisca (Colombia); Ticoya youths celebrate the local festivities in Caballo de Cocha (Peru); all of the communities along the Amazon River have access to only one radio station, that of Caballo Cocha; and there are no migration checkpoints nor ID requirements to prevent the use the

fluvial transportation services that connect Tabatinga (Brazil), Leticia (Colombia), Puerto Nariño (Colombia) and Caballo Cocha (Peru) on a daily basis. The constant changes in the populational configuration of the territory, and the interactions of the ethnic groups among themselves and with the different states, give way to tensions regarding their identities—tensions that reflect the appropriation and transformation of practices, knowledge, and customs, among others.

Building the oral history of a *resguardo* that borders with another country involves contrasting official borders with those that have been historically acknowledged free from national imperatives nor imaginary lines; the reason for this is that the people whose lives are sustained by the river, move through the river. This history, made into memory from subalternity, as [Rivera-Cusicanqui \(2008\)](#) highlights, came into dialogue with a kind of cultural asymmetry that runs through the speakers' tongues. Hence, in this exercise, we came to encounter the oral memories of some Ticunas, Cocanas, and Yaguas, for whom their mother tongue is an Indigenous tongue, and others, despite sharing the same Indigenous identity, for whom their mother tongue is Spanish or Portuguese. If we understand that a tongue contains within itself an entire universe of cultural meaning, we can also acknowledge that within the territory of the Amazon there is a cultural and identitarian wealth and diversity. This wealth and diversity sustains the fluidity and rhythm of everyday intercultural exchanges, which ebb and flow in consonance with the dynamics of the rivers and the territory during periods of high tide and low tide.

Building the oral history of a *resguardo* that borders another country involves comparing official national boundaries with those historically recognized as existing beyond national imperatives or arbitrary lines. This is because the people whose lives are intertwined with the river navigate its course daily. According to [Rivera-Cusicanqui \(2008\)](#), this history, rooted in subalternity, intersects with a form of cultural asymmetry inherent in the languages of the speakers. Consequently, this study revealed oral memories from some Ticuna, Cocama, and Yagua individuals whose mother tongue is an Indigenous language, while others, despite sharing the same Indigenous identity, speak Spanish or Portuguese as their mother tongue. Recognizing that a language encompasses a complete universe of cultural meaning allows us to appreciate the cultural and identity richness and diversity within the Amazon territory. This richness and diversity facilitate the fluidity and rhythm of daily intercultural exchanges, which ebb and flow in harmony with the rivers' dynamics and the territory during periods of high tide and low tide.

5. Conclusions

Exploring alternative approaches to communication, development, and social change requires challenging the hegemonic parameters that have constructed the borders and tensions discussed above. These boundaries create abysmal frontiers that obscure the inexhaustible richness of the world and the diverse ways of inhabiting and engaging with it ([Santos 2006](#)).

Eliminating the abysmal lines that deny and obscure other ways of being involves rethinking and questioning the perspective that regards literacy and archivists as the sole vessels of histories and memories of social groups and territories. It is essential to evaluate this perspective to accommodate a diversity of voices and actors, from their oralities, which can offer a broader sense and meaning beyond a linear historical narrative. Adopting a post-development perspective, which considers the dynamics of the interstices between borders, involves recovering other discourses that highlight alternative ways of understanding spatial configurations and, consequently, cultural identities. This approach may also facilitate non-human interactions (i.e., with the river), such as those occurring within the local territory in everyday life.

Oral narratives about interstate confrontations led us to recognize the border as a physical boundary or demarcation, separating the territory and its inhabitants from the "others". This dichotomy reveals how the *resguardo* is connected to the larger territory defined by the border in terms of both separation and unity. On one hand, there is a

separation from those who ended up on the opposite side of the national divide and were assigned different citizenship. On the other hand, unity is fostered by the shared cultural identities of the Ticuna, Cocama, Yagua, and other ethnic groups inhabiting this region of the Amazon.

Thus, the border emerges as both a geographical and administrative boundary that delineates a territory. As an institutionalized space, the *resguardo* is characterized by the economic and administrative logic of the national territory regarding resource use and appropriation—reflecting a monoculture of capitalist productivity. The territory, as a repository of collective memory, is perceived as a cohesive whole from which daily dynamics emerge; these dynamics, in turn, sustain the local culture amidst tensions with externally imposed practices of Western education and commerce. Consequently, everyday practices such as *paisanismo* are not engaged in the migration dynamics between national territories and, therefore, are not meaningfully differentiated by the peoples of either nation. On the contrary, identity is more profoundly shaped by interactions among kinfolk within the shared territory and by the customs and practices of the three ethnic groups inhabiting the area: Ticuna, Cocama, and Yagua. The notion of sovereignty contrasts with kinship-based cultural configurations expressed through holidays, sports events, celebrations, and daily rituals. This contrast arises because kinfolk share common identity origins independent of national affiliations, advocating for relational practices grounded in sociocultural and spiritual justice, thereby bridging the incommensurable gaps created by the monoculture of naturalizing differences.

Similarly, the storytelling sessions fostered intergenerational dialogues between the *sabedores* and the younger members of the *resguardo's* communications committee. The voices of the grandfathers and grandmothers were prominently featured in the oral narratives. The creation of the *resguardo's* history, as presented in the radio series *Gente de Río*, facilitated the recognition of cultural and institutional elements that were in tension within the diverse histories that interpret and give meaning to the territory. The narrative, both gathered and analyzed in this document and showcased in the radio series *Gente de Río*, represents an effort to decolonize the past and to keep the community's collective memory vibrant, oral, and plural. This effort is grounded in an interpretation of the continuities and events that have shaped the current existence and situation of the Ticoya *Resguardo*. The intergenerational dialogue is a component of cognitive justice, giving central importance to the grandparents' narratives and experiences. Their stories embody the culture that seeks to be preserved in the memory and daily practices of future generations. Oral culture and the ability to transmit this memory across generations resist the monoculture of modern knowledge, the privileging of writing as the sole method of knowledge transmission, the construction of a singular national history, and, above all, the denial of the existence of multiple cosmovisions and epistemologies.

Communicative justice involves constructing the history of the *resguardo* through the oral traditions and memories of grandmothers and grandfathers, thereby bridging the gap of absences by proposing narratives that reflect the logic of each context, grounded in local and everyday cultural forms. This form of justice emerges from the creation of local meanings through their languages, their ways of understanding and relating to their territory, and their practices of *paisanismo*, while resisting global dynamics that homogenize identities through hegemonic impositions.

In summary, conceptualizing decolonial communication involves transcending the mere right to communication; it requires a political commitment to dismantling, surpassing, and deconstructing the borders that produce tensions and erasures. Decolonial communication cannot be conceived without communicative justice, where the local context, territory, daily practices, and languages themselves reveal the essence of the pluriverse.

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Notes

- ¹ Results of the research project: Intercultural communication, collective memories and orality: a history of the Ticoya reservation in the Colombian Amazon, financed by the Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios-UNIMINUTO.
- ² The *resguardo* is a special legal and socio-political institution formed by one or more Indigenous communities that organize themselves autonomously to manage the territory and community life, through their own normative systems.
- ³ The series is available for listening at <https://davidfayadsanz.wixsite.com/amazonas> (accessed on 4 August 2024).
- ⁴ This is the title the Indigenous Committee of Communications gave to their own radiophonic project, by which they make reference to their experience in producing audio content shared by other means than by radiophonic frequencies. For more on the *Radio without a radio*, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bvMIgJDQ04A> (accessed on 4 August 2024) to the documentary and <https://x.com/rtvnoticias/status/1767309681167327404?s=46> (accessed on 4 August 2024) to the interview on the *Radio without a radio* (both links are included in the cover letter during the double-blind evaluation process).
- ⁵ *Curacas* are the political and administrative leaders of every individual community.
- ⁶ *Maloka* is a traditional circular construction of communal rituals used by Indigenous peoples in the Amazonian regions of Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru. The maloca is not simply a physical place; it is a central ritual space in the Indigenous cosmovision, where the community and nature are in perfect harmony.
- ⁷ A *minga* is a form of organization and assembly meeting, based on collective work. Initially conceived as a means to organize collective activities, such as the sowing of the *chagra*, communities currently refer to *mingas* of thought in which they gather to deliberate and make collective decisions.

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