

Collaboration and Historical Writing

Challenges for the Indigenous–Academic Dialogue

More than three decades ago, Delmos Jones proposed that a “native anthropology” would become viable only when it developed “a set of theories based on non-Western precepts and assumptions in the same sense that modern anthropology is based on and has supported Western beliefs and values” (1970, 251). Jones was thinking of minority scholars in the United States who, armed with the double consciousness afforded by their position straddling the boundary between the dominant society and their own subordinated groups, could potentially develop what W. E. B. Du Bois (1989 [1903], 2–3) called “second-sight,” a privileged minority vantage point from which to analyze social life.

While Duboisian concepts resonate in very specific ways within the Afro–North American context, the notion of double consciousness provides fertile ground for the interpretation of the role of intellectuals within Latin American ethnic movements, where efforts have been made to develop what might be called an indigenous second-sight: in other words, the discovery from within Native cultures of those conceptual elements that may enable new interpretations of reality consonant with the epistemologies and political priorities of indigenous organizations.¹ Theorization—the creation of such conceptual tools—is one of the fundamental objectives of intellectuals affiliated with Latin American indigenous organizations.² This process ranges from the development of narrative models that decenter Western notions of historical chronology (Fernández Osco 2000; Vasco, Dagua, and Aranda 1993) to the use of concepts in Native languages as frameworks for adapting Western concepts to indigenous ends. But such conceptual tools not only function as models for interpreting experience; they also assist indigenous

organizations in acting politically upon the social realities in which they live. In other words, the “second-sight” stimulated by these intellectual practices is aimed at transforming reality, not only analyzing it.

In this essay we probe the nature of this moment of indigenous theorizing, inquiring into the intellectual conditions of its emergence and its epistemological character. For us, this process is more than the simple appropriation of primordial values in a modern context. Indigenous theorizing emerges within a multiethnic social sphere, a reality that impacts both its epistemological nature and the ways in which it is put into political practice. It emerges out of a process of appropriation of knowledge systems framed by indigenous thought and sustained by a critical appreciation of other cultures. Such strategies originate in the political context, given that the indigenous movement seeks to build what could be called a radically pluralist democracy (Laclau and Mouffe 1985), a national imaginary in which social justice is constructed through the infusion in the social process of a multiplicity of ethnic demands and political practices.

What this means is that it is not always easy to identify the indigenous in Native theorizing by distinguishing its components as belonging to one indigenous culture or another. Much of the conceptual matrix employed by indigenous organizations has been appropriated from progressive academic scholarship in education, anthropology, history, linguistics, and political science as well as from the methods and concepts developed by popular movements and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). There is a desire to create conceptual vehicles that do not privilege a specific Native culture over the others that comprise indigenous organizations, which are frequently multiethnic. What makes this theorizing indigenous is the space in which it is appropriated—the indigenous organization—and the fact that it is filtered through indigenous languages and, through translation, is transformed. It is more the locus of theorizing and its linguistic practices than its contents per se that are at stake here.

The process of creating conceptual vehicles is at once methodological (in the sense of providing new research tools) and political (because these methodologies make possible the establishment of Native autonomy in specific areas). In this sense, indigenous theorizing is somewhat akin to feminist research, which is simultaneously academic and political. But what is different about the indigenous theorizing we describe here is the fact that it takes place at a great distance from the academy. While it is true that Latin American academics and a small number of foreigners collaborate on an intel-

lectual level with indigenous organizations, their numbers are far smaller proportionally in comparison to the collaboration of academics with the feminist movement or, in the United States, of African American scholars with black organizations. Perhaps the discrepancy is due to the fact that the results of indigenous research rarely appropriate academic formats for their dissemination, being instead directly absorbed into the projects of Native organizations. Moreover, feminist scholars, particularly female academics, have a direct stake in the feminist movement, which is not as true of the mostly non-Native academics who work with Latin American indigenous organizations; the nature of Latin American universities has largely excluded the hiring of Native and African-descended faculty, producing a marked ethnic or racial difference between the academy and grass-roots organizations. In some ways, then, the research currently under way in Latin American indigenous organizations is *sui generis*.

We examine the process of indigenous theory making through a critical analysis of a recent research experience in which we studied the history of the Bilingual and Intercultural Education Program (PEBI) of the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC), a Colombian indigenous organization that over the course of the past thirty-one years has come to occupy an important role as an interlocutor between the indigenous population and the Colombian public at large. In the course of our collaboration, which included bilingual teachers, CRIC activists, and three researchers—one from the Nasa ethnic group, a nonindigenous collaborator with CRIC, and a North American anthropologist—we came to realize that indigenous theorizing finds significant sources in the culture of the indigenous organization, which in itself is a kind of intercultural microcosm, including not only different Native ethnic groups, but non-Native collaborators as well. Several methodologies and key concepts informed our research.

Translating Theory

Indigenous theorizing in Cauca arose out of the intersection of various circumstances. On the one hand, in the mid-1980s a Master of Arts degree in ethnolinguistics was offered for the first time at the Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá to indigenous students sponsored by ethnic organizations. This development afforded activists the opportunity to discover the possibilities that language holds as a source of theoretical frameworks.³ On the other hand, the experience of translating the Colombian Constitution of

1991, which includes provisions regarding the rights of Native peoples (Van Cott 2000), into Nasa Yuwe, the language of the Nasa of Cauca, created a political context in which the linguistic methodologies acquired in the course of graduate study could be appropriated by Native leaders.

Translation presents an innovative strategy through which Nasa activists appropriate concepts originating in the dominant society and reconfigure them in an indigenous framework. Nasa-speakers frequently reflect upon the possible array of meanings of a term in their own language, with an eye toward adjusting its significance to bring it in line with their own objectives. This strategy is engaged when translators encounter, for example, terms like *development*, *interculturalism*, and *culture* whose significance has limited resonance within the Nasa sphere, but whose meaning can be adapted to the politico-cultural project of the movement. Following the suggestions of the film critic Rey Chow, we believe that the translating of such words into Nasa Yuwe *improves* the original Spanish term, injects it with a new Nasa significance that liberates it from its original limitations (1995, 186).

The strategy originated when CRIC set out to translate the Constitution of 1991 (Ramos and Cabildo Indígena de Mosoco 1993; cf. Rojas 2000). The intercultural team that was formed to undertake the task was composed of the traditional authorities of the indigenous community of Mosoco, bilingual teachers, indigenous and national linguists, and a range of professionals from the national society, among them lawyers, sociologists, psychologists, philosophers, and economists. The team was forced to confront the challenge of rendering a series of universal political concepts in Nasa Yuwe. The exercise transcended one of preparing a simple translation or of creating mere neologisms. The team sought to rethink these concepts from a Nasa perspective, and the result was something that went far beyond a glossary of new terms in Nasa Yuwe: the exercise in translation opened up the possibility of reconceptualizing the notions of justice and nation from the vantage point of indigenous cultures and organizational needs. That is, the Constitution was not simply translated; instead, its fundamental precepts were *reimagined* from a Nasa subject position, offering a Nasa critique of the Colombian state (Rappaport 2004). In this sense, translation into Nasa Yuwe, as a research—and political—methodology, provided the movement with the philosophical foundations of its pluralist political proposal.

At the same time, the introduction of translation as a methodology fostered new approaches to the indigenous study of social reality, a new form of Nasa “autoethnography.” Two decades ago Talal Asad suggested that ethnog-

raphy is a kind of translation, “addressed to a very specific audience, which is waiting to read *about* another mode of life and to manipulate the text it reads according to established rules, not to learn to live a new mode of life” (1986, 159). Translation is equally crucial to the indigenous project, but its function is the inverse of what Asad proposed for ethnography. When Nasa activists engage in cultural translation they do it “to learn to live a new mode of life”: they appropriate external concepts within an indigenous political matrix with the aim of introducing new strategies for cultural survival. In other words, their objective is to take hold of cultural potentialities, not to textualize cultural differences. This autoethnographic methodology can be better comprehended as one of a series of intercultural approaches that the indigenous movement employs to negotiate a multiethnic milieu.

Interculturalism

The translation of the Constitution sheds light on a fundamental aspect of indigenous theorizing in Colombia: it emerges from an intercultural dialogue. The translation process was, in fact, a double intercultural dialogue: between indigenous activists and professionals from the national society as well as between Nasa philosophies and Western jurisprudence. Indigenous organizations are themselves intercultural contexts in which indigenous militants and non-Native collaborators interact daily, constantly exchanging ideas originating as much in national and international spheres of theorizing as in Native cultures. Although these organizations were intercultural from the moment of their inception—CRIC, for example, was founded by Guambianos, Nasas, and mestizo activists—in the past two decades, as the concept of interculturalism was promoted by Latin American educators, its contents were appropriated within indigenous organizational practice.

Interculturalism developed in Latin America alongside the popular struggles of the 1970s and 1980s, when grass-roots organizations posed concrete alternatives to traditional notions of electoral democracy (López 1995). In the case of Colombia, where the Constitution of 1991 established the legal potential for the creation of a pluralist nation, interculturalism provides a radical alternative to the concept of multiculturalism. The latter poses a threat to pluralism insofar as it promotes a simple tolerance for ethnic minorities, fostering their participation in an electoral system that dilutes their impact upon the nation (Hale 2002). By contrast, interculturalism (on paper,

at least) seeks new forms of establishing conditions of equality and consensus by enhancing the contents of minority voices (Heise, Tubino, and Ardito 1994). The objectives of interculturalism transcend those of multiculturalism because interculturalists seek more than a cross-cultural encounter framed by hegemonic relations. Their objective is to create new horizontal relationships (Gottret 1999) within a pluralist state (López 1999). In addition, interculturalists aim at injecting cultural difference within the demands of the Left for a radically pluralist democracy (Laclau and Mouffe 1985).

Interculturalism is an emergent project, not an existing social reality. It originated in Latin America within indigenous education, where radical educators built local bilingual programs based upon its precepts. Intercultural education makes cultural difference explicit through its aim of fostering the incorporation of new ideas within emergent Native cultural constellations (Mengo 1999). We emphasize the emergent nature of indigenous cultural projects because the notion of cultural revival is oriented not toward the retrieval of customs from the past but toward the future (Heise, Tubino and Ardito, 1994). Interculturalism transcends the task of schooling children in a culturally sensitive manner. It presupposes a link between education and social change, suggesting that the school is a critical scenario for the construction of democracy. The promotion of self-esteem and the creation of nonhierarchical interethnic relations can provide firm foundations for building political pluralism beyond the schoolhouse (Heise, Tubino, and Ardito 1994; Gottret 1999; López 1996, 1999).

Indigenous theorizing is an example of putting interculturalism into practice. Interculturalism provides the conceptual tools needed to create indigenous theory, but it does more than that: it has a political objective. Intercultural dialogue is valued by indigenous organizations in Colombia precisely because Native people are also Colombians; they recognize that their participation in popular struggle must transcend purely indigenous demands. But while ethnic organizations participate actively in the construction of a new nation—the best current example is the organization by the indigenous movement of a popular referendum on Colombia's acceptance of the Free Trade Area of the Americas and indigenous rejections of neoliberal policy—the creation of new conceptual tools also impacts upon local efforts at cultural revival, nourishing the emergence of new indigenous cultural forms.

Culture and Political Autonomy

In this essay we problematize the nature of theorizing within the indigenous movement, analyzing it from an intercultural perspective. Frequently, as was the case in the translation of the Constitution, the theoretical vehicles are the product of linguistic research, but cosmological knowledge is also an important source of theory. One of the models most frequently employed by indigenous organizations is the spiral motif, an icon that appears on petroglyphs, is reproduced in the hand movements of shamans during ritual séances, and has been adduced in the grammatical structures of various Cauca Native languages (Muelas Hurtado 1995). Adoption of a spiral sense of time allowed the Guambiano History Committee to generate an alternative to linear chronological narration, permitting them to reorganize historical events by privileging mythic heroines and sacred space as anchors for a political history of the Guambianos (Vasco, Dagua, and Aranda 1993; cf. Rappaport 2005).⁴ But it is also possible to ground theorization in the organizational culture of the indigenous movement, where activists have appropriated universal concepts like autonomy and territory as the primary interpretive threads for historical and sociological research (Allen 2002; Field 1999), transforming their contents so that they are in accord with the principles and demands of the organization.⁵ The discourse of political autonomy feeds simultaneously upon the work of cultural activists and on the demands of nonethnic social movements. The notion of territory, for instance, which has come to replace earlier demands for land, implies a degree of sovereignty over a population and its landscape. But territory also emerges out of a cosmological relationship with that landscape, thus merging political universals with specific Native notions of space.

In reality, discourses of cultural difference and political autonomy operate in tandem within indigenous organizations. As Bruce Albert explains so convincingly in his interpretation of the discourse of the Brazilian Yanomami leader Davi Kopenawa, the indigenous movement must negotiate an ethnically heterogeneous political field. Ethnic organizations survive thanks to their simultaneous appropriation of political universals and cultural specifics: “If the indigenous political discourse were limited to the mere reproduction of white categories, it would be reduced to empty rhetoric; if, on the other hand, it remained in the exclusive sphere of cosmology, it would not escape from cultural solipsism. In any case, the lack of articulation between these two registers leads to political failure” (Albert 1995, 4). The na-

ture of the indigenous project spans both universal political discourses and Native cultural specifics, its objectives interweaving various constructions of pluralism that originate as much from inside as from outside indigenous communities, established through intercultural dialogue among indigenous ethnic groups and with members of the national society. In short, if we are to understand this project, we need to take a dual approach that can infiltrate the interstices where universal and specific discourses meet.

In reality both poles of this equation are heterogeneous. After more than four centuries of colonization and in the wake of decades of dialogue between indigenous organizations and sympathetic popular movements, one cannot speak of two totally incommensurable logics. The process of cultural resistance has forced the ethnic movement to develop contestatory cultural forms that are deeply modern and are in dialogue with national forms. As Paul Gilroy indicates, echoing Du Bois, the power of minority cultural forms “derives from a doubleness, their unsteady location simultaneously inside and outside the conventions, assumptions, and aesthetic rules which distinguish and periodise modernity” (1993, 73). In the process, minority forms are *reimagined*, mixed with appropriated cultural forms from the majority society in a dynamic antiphony (1993, 74). What Gilroy suggests is essential. Minority theorizing appropriates concepts and methodologies from dominant paradigms and reconfigures them within a minority conceptual space, at the same time that indigenous cultural forms are reimagined within the space of struggle. In this sense, there is a certain urgency to maintaining the balance between culture and autonomy, so that one register does not erase the other.

In recognition of this challenge, indigenous theorizing in Cauca centers on the relationship between an inside and an outside. Native researchers have reflected on the meaning of the process of constructing cultural difference within the social system that surrounds them. They seek to define, through research and political action, ways to maintain a cultural inside different from the outside of the national society (Rappaport 2005, chap. 1; 2008). The inside is not a cultural essence as traditional anthropology would have it, although it is based on constellations of values and structures of behavior; the cultural forms of the inside articulated by the indigenous movement do not correspond to an observable cultural reality. After four hundred years of colonial domination, the cultural topography of Cauca is heterogeneous and syncretic, something activists not only recognize but appropriate into their field of action. Yet there are a few localities that demonstrate

the constellation of values that the movement seeks to revitalize and project across the vast expanse of indigenous territory. For this reason, the inside is not really located in a concrete site, but in the utopias that the movement hopes to build on the basis of models generated by their researchers.⁶

Collaborative Theorizing

In what follows we reflect upon the complexities of indigenous theorizing on the basis of our collaborative work on the history of the PEBI, a program of the CRIC. Two members of the team, Abelardo Ramos, a Nasa linguist and PEBI member, and Joanne Rappaport, a North American anthropologist, are the authors of this essay; a third member of the team, Graciela Bolaños, is a non-Native collaborator with CRIC and a member of PEBI.⁷ Since our work assumed the form of an interethnic dialogue—what in the movement is called a *diálogo de saberes*, an exchange of epistemologies—the remainder of this article is written as a script. Our two voices are marked by different fonts.

Joanne: Indigenous theorizing is the product of the complex negotiation of the ethnic movement's priorities and discourses aimed at bridging different epistemologies and methodologies so that they are not incommensurate. Thus, as we have argued, the task of the collaborative researcher presupposes a conversation between several subject positions, in particular, between representatives of national society and indigenous groups. But we haven't yet touched upon the organization of the production of such knowledge, which is inseparable from its theoretical qualities. In distinction to academic practice, which in anthropology is generally a solitary endeavor or organized into a relatively homogeneous group of researchers, in the indigenous movement research is profoundly collective; this presupposes a distinct methodology. Given that indigenous organizations include a range of activists, not only Native people from various ethnic groups but also nonindigenous collaborators, the research groups that coalesce within these organizations are also culturally—and epistemologically—heterogeneous.⁸

When external researchers collaborate in such enterprises, their methods and theory are subordinated to those created by the group (Vasco 2002, 449). This implies an acceptance not only of the equality of the different forms of knowledge, but also of their partial commensurability. Above all, it means that indigenous priorities must provide the general framework for

research, although external theory also enters into discussion. That is to say, the contributions of external researchers are appropriated and transformed just as the movement refashions external cultural and political elements in its everyday activities.

It is imperative to understand that a collaborative dialogue is not between two monolithic poles—non-Native academics and indigenous researchers. Given that the research taking place in indigenous organizations emerges out of the joint work of indigenous actors and non-Native collaborators, who construct their research methodology as a team, it might be more fruitful to comprehend this process as a dialogue between activists (both indigenous and nonindigenous) and academics. I have discovered that the epistemological differences between my vision and that of my indigenous interlocutors is easily bridged, thanks to the anthropological training I received, which focused on Native epistemologies. However, I was not trained as an ethnographer to decipher the differences between activist and anthropological methodologies, where distinctions can be considerably more subtle.

Research in an indigenous organization frequently takes place in workshops, whose collective methodology presupposes that the community itself, and not just the researchers, participate in framing the project and analyzing its results. In this sense, workshops are exegetical spaces where theory is produced, not simply occasions for collecting data (Vasco 2002). Under such conditions, theory emerges out of a process of “co-theorizing,” in which activists, the community, and external researchers all play a role. What makes this theorizing indigenous is its articulation with the priorities of the organization, which are developed collectively by traditional community authorities, the organizational leadership, shamans, bilingual teachers, non-Native collaborators, and others. In other words, what makes this knowledge indigenous is the particular way in which it is created and transmitted.⁹

Abelardo: The process of co-theorizing can be conceptualized in terms of local indigenous practice, through the application of the metaphor of the *minga*—collective work activities that benefit the community or a family—to the organization as a whole. It was in the experience of translating the Constitution of 1991 into Nasa Yuwe that we began to reconceptualize research as a *minga* in which various groups of people participated: the bilingual teachers of the community of Mosoco, cultural and political authorities recognized by the community (the *cabildo*, shamans, artisans, midwives),

students from the local high school, and specialists in linguistics and in law, the latter being non-Native. The work done by this collective had a concrete result, a book that could be read by both Native people and members of the national society (Ramos and Cabildo Indígena de Mosoco 1993). Our metaphor merged physical labor, which is what is generally done at a minga, with intellectual work.

Frequently, local indigenous community members do not understand that intellectual labor is also a kind of work. Like work in the fields, intellectual work requires effort, produces fatigue, and creates results. But the comparison goes further than that. In Nasa Yuwe, both types of labor are referred to as *maji*, a term which is also used to describe the ritual activities of the shaman and the collective work of the *cabildo* in the building of territory (in particular, the walking of boundaries). Intellectual labor, when framed by the political priorities of the indigenous movement, fits neatly into this amplified notion of *maji*. The metaphor of the minga transcends the simple definition of collective labor, because it allows us to recognize that the notion of work is multifaceted.

Maji is a concept that unites various interests and collectivities. Similarly, collaboration cannot be reduced to a simple dialogue between individuals belonging to different cultures. The institutional interests of the participants are always in the background—the interests of the university or of academic theory, the objectives of NGOs, the program of the indigenous movement. That is to say, collaboration and co-theorizing involve much more than interpersonal dialogue; they promote a conversation in which individuals articulate the collective interests of the groups they represent or of which they are members. This distinction is important because in some instances such interlocution can lead participants, especially academics, to transcend the interests of their institution and merge, perhaps temporarily, with an interethnic and nonacademic collectivity. When research funding has been acquired by the movement itself, the academic is at liberty to function independently of her or his institution in order to embrace indigenous priorities.¹⁰

The profile of the researcher is equally significant. He or she must recognize that research is not a neutral process, that one must choose dialogue. It is not just a question of respecting indigenous positions, but also of entering in active conversation with them. This is difficult for academics to accept since they are accustomed to treating indigenous ideas as ethnographic data, not as potential conceptual tools.

Despite the generosity of the participants, such a dialogue cannot but produce tensions. These may be due to the prejudices each member brings to the table, to the underlying sense of competition, and to the epistemological differences between them, whether academic or organizational epistemologies or those of the Native culture. Such conflict requires that participants act responsibly. Tensions can easily turn into nonnegotiable conflicts, or they can be fruitful. It is the responsibility of the participants to aim toward negotiation, not toward rupture.

The balancing of institutional and cultural interests involves a highly complex process. There are cultural differences even among the members of indigenous organizations, since they include representatives of different ethnic groups and non-Native collaborators. This is to emphasize that conflicts will arise not only among academics and activists, but also in the movement itself.

Collaborative research, with all of its institutional conflicts and cultural differences, is like two roads that cross each other, even if ultimately they are headed in the same direction. That is to say, difference is not necessarily negative, nor is it something that must be transcended. Assumed with responsibility, difference can produce new approaches to social reality, if the participants commit to the objectives of the indigenous organization. In other words, an intercultural framework, not the academic appropriation or concealing of indigenous ideas, must guide the research. The academic, who has been trained through a model of individual intellectual production, must recognize two fundamental realities: that collaborative work cannot be individual and that indigenous elements cannot be subsumed under an academic model. The two paths must nourish one another, being always conscious of their difference but also aware of their common goals. In the course of the research process, individual participants will be enriched intellectually by learning from one another. In the end, collaboration makes a contribution not only to the collectivity, but also to each of the participants.

The History of PEBI: Collaborative Research at the Grass Roots

In the case of the history of PEBI, collaboration was not grounded exclusively in the dynamics of our three-member research team, but also required initiating dialogue with the broader group of activists.

PEBI was founded at the end of the 1970s as an initiative of the Fifth Congress of CRIC and, particularly, of its vice president, Benjamín Dindi-

cué. PEBI was conceived as an organizing space in which communities in struggle could be mobilized around regional demands.¹¹ Although PEBI is an educational program—including curricular design, historical and linguistic research, the generation of theory, and teacher training—its central objectives focus on the creation of schools as a vanguard for the organizing of political, social, and cultural activities in indigenous communities in conjunction with cabildos and other traditional authorities. In other words, from the start PEBI's objectives have transcended pedagogy, and its members characterize their project as contestatory, nourished by a critical and politicized appreciation of intercultural pedagogical methods. In contrast to other popular education projects in Latin America, PEBI originated not from within an educational movement, but in a political organization. Schools were founded in those communities that exhibited intense involvement in political organizing, and the first teachers were chosen from a pool of the most committed activists, irrespective of their level of schooling. Community members served as evaluators and advisors, developing their ideas in workshops and community assemblies. More than a space for training children, the school was conceived as the pivot of the entire community.

In its more than three decades of existence, PEBI has entered into dialogue with educators across Colombia and Latin America, contributing innovative cultural and curricular projects that have served as models for ethnoeducation at the regional and national levels. It has trained a significant number of indigenous teachers and political leaders in Cauca. Its intercultural and culture-specific proposals for the construction of ethnic pluralism have permeated CRIC as a whole, and increasingly CRIC's leadership has drawn upon PEBI members to fill important political roles in the organization.

Around 2000 PEBI undertook the task of researching and writing its history. The project was conceived as a learning experience and a space for collective analysis, requiring the broad participation of program members in the research. To this end, a series of workshops and meetings were held in 2000 and 2001, gatherings at which activists, including staff members in the regional program as well as local bilingual teachers and leaders, compiled a list of fifty-one questions meant to orient the research process and prepare grass-roots activists for collecting relevant information in their localities. PEBI's program is crystallized in these guiding questions. The questions exhort researchers to illustrate how education is a political vehicle, how it leads

communities to develop a cosmic and historical relationship with their territory, how this project lays the basis for forging political autonomy, economic reconstruction, and community development. The questions emphasize the centrality of intercultural appropriation of ideas within a project that is not merely educational, but political. They outline how PEBI objectives are directed at the entire organization and not just at its educational sector. They illustrate how the program acts as a vanguard promoting indigenous content in the organization at large.

However, almost all of the questions engage PEBI's current policies. They are not at all retrospective, in part because so many of the workshop participants were young, most with a scant decade of experience in the organization. Their presentist cast posed a challenge for the research team, which was charged with writing a history of the program.

Abelardo: For me, those fifty-one questions were challenging methodologically because I felt that they constrained the nature of the project, forcing us to focus on current organizing strategies instead of engaging in a political-historical analysis. The latter was my primary political interest. For some of us who are Nasa-speakers, the idea of doing history was appealing because it would help us to trace the educational process retrospectively. We wanted to study the political nature of the process over time. In particular, we hoped to communicate to future generations the hopes of the elders who founded CRIC and PEBI at the end of the seventies: how they fought to build a feeling of dignity as a people and how they gained their rights by building an educational system based upon our own culture. Doing history would permit us to engage in a dialogue with those first generations. In the final workshop we built a consensus in favor of the history project, with testimonies collected from the protagonists in the process.¹²

The truth is that the guiding questions were composed before we made the decision to write a history of PEBI. As a result, our team was forced to adapt them to the historical framework we had chosen. This meant we would have to engage in a negotiation, using the questions as conceptual guides for thinking retrospectively, and in the course of this reflection we would have to find a way to engage and foreground the voices of the narrators. I think that the questions helped me to see that a history of education was of necessity a political history. We would need to interpret the testimonies within this framework, bring together today's political priorities with the memory of the past.

Joanne: The workshop participants did not seek answers to their questions in a historical narrative that highlighted the earlier experiences of PEBI but hoped to resolve them through reflection on their own experiences, which, on the whole, went back only a decade. In a sense, their questions contained the answers they sought, calling up accepted discourses instead of historical explanation. But although the questions expressed the concerns of the present, they would have to serve as a fulcrum around which we could organize our interpretation of the past. At the outset I resisted this arrangement because I did not fully comprehend it.

The three-person research team began to debate the ways in which we hoped to frame this history. In numerous PEBI meetings, ranging from curricular planning and program evaluation to political meetings, I had observed that local teachers frequently made use of the spiral motif to organize their presentations. At one curricular meeting, the teachers from the experimental school in the community of Juan Tama presented their pedagogical projects—community history, organic agriculture, the school garden, Nasa literacy—in a chart organized into a spiral. PEBI's magazine, *Çxayuçe*, published a board game to stimulate use of Nasa Yuwe among schoolchildren, also organized as a spiral (Anonymous 2000).¹³ I enthusiastically recommended that we consider the spiral as an organizing motif for our history project.

The lukewarm response I received indicated that PEBI hoped to produce a document whose analytical character and sphere of circulation would be considerably wider than that which the culturally specific spiral motif could assume. There was a great desire to produce an intercultural history that incorporated the experiences of the various ethnic groups under the CRIC umbrella, despite the fact that the bulk of PEBI's work had been with Nasa speakers. Such a set of objectives obviated the possibility of employing the spiral as a conceptual model. I was confronted with the naiveté of my understanding of indigenous theorizing as something that could arise only out of Native cultural forms. The regional space of indigenous politics, where concepts originating in national and international debates could be appropriated, was a more apt space for theorizing the history of PEBI. Despite their presentist orientation, the fifty-one guiding questions provided us by the workshops supplied useful tools for conceptualizing movement history from the vantage point of a discourse of political autonomy, as opposed to one with a culturalist perspective.

Community Control, Interculturalism, and Cosmovision

Joanne: In my three decades of ethnographic research in Colombia I had never followed such a conceptual itinerary: a research agenda that was more political than academic, a research plan for historical study based on presentist referents, a project whose conceptual framework originated outside of the academic community and whose objectives were determined by a group of nonacademics who were not directly involved with the research team. I quickly learned that when a social movement conducts research, its methodology is vastly different from that employed by academics.

However, the broad participation of PEBI members in the establishment of our conceptual framework does not mean that activist research lacks rigor. In the course of collecting oral narratives from early indigenous activists and collaborators, I discovered that activist researchers have access to a much more extensive range of information than academics, and they are constantly submitting these data to collective evaluation and analysis. Where they differ from us is in their objectives, which lead them to produce analyses based upon explicit political criteria, whereas the politics inherent in academic research is frequently made imperceptible by academic discourse.

The book that resulted from our research (Bolaños, Ramos, Rappaport, and Miñana 2004) draws its three conceptual threads from the political program of PEBI: community control (an educational program that stimulates community organizing), interculturalism (the construction of an intercultural dialogue framed by indigenous values), and cosmovision (the need to maintain harmony in the universe). All three guiding ideas have been embraced throughout the continent by ethnic organizations and NGOs; however, we instrumentalized them in our narration of PEBI history by emphasizing the specific constellation of political contexts in which they were articulated. Community control provided the conceptual framework for a chapter dealing with how and why education is politics for CRIC. The concept of interculturalism allowed us to take a critical look at relations over time between nonindigenous collaborators and Native activists. Cosmovision, embodied in a creation story generated through collective research by PEBI with almost two hundred shamans, provided us with an alternative historical chronology rooted in how notions of culture evolved within the organization.

Joanne: The way I visualize the interaction of the three conceptual threads we selected is that community control provides the political foundations for the educational activities in which PEBI has always engaged. Interculturalism allows for an outward-looking orientation, permitting educational activists to never lose sight of the larger picture, the fact that education is part of a general political struggle for recognition as participants in the construction of the Colombian nation. Cosmovision provides the tools for an introspective orientation that values indigenous lifeways and ideologies, providing a specific cultural framework for interculturalism and, ultimately, for political action.

Abelardo: Our organizing strategy has always consisted in strengthening an indigenous cultural identity that has been impacted by colonization. This objective cannot be undertaken without the participation of the community, yet it also permits us to relate to other peoples and resolve our problems in conjunction with them. Our concept of identity is intimately related to one of community power. This is a principal axis in our political work and must necessarily mediate our analysis of our historical experience. The notion of interculturalism is related to the conceptual thread of community control. Cauca is a multicultural province, one in which the future of the Nasa people can be strengthened only by forging links of cooperation with other indigenous groups as well as with the rest of the social fabric, including mestizo peasants, Afrodescendants, and popular urban sectors. This means that we must stake out a clear intercultural position founded in respect and the sharing of survival strategies. Interculturalism is profoundly political for us: it leads us to demand that we be recognized as culturally different peoples and as national actors. Cosmovision is the accumulation of ancestral knowledge that, from our point of view, affords us important tools for interacting with others. Cosmovision defines our cultural difference, marking our participation in a diverse nation. It is only through recourse to cosmovision that we can put interculturalism into practice because cosmovision provides us with the conceptual model that permits us to act as Natives.

Joanne: Each of us experienced conceptual conflicts in the course of the process. Once having constructed our conceptual framework, we began the task of historical interpretation. It was not an easy process. Having opted for a retrospective approach, as opposed to a systematic organizational analysis, we had to construct a narrative of the evolution of the three unifying concepts. That meant accepting that some of these concepts, particularly

cosmovision and interculturalism, were only incipient during the first decade of the organization, not full-blown as we observe them today. Cosmovision was a particularly difficult concept to historicize. As it is articulated today, cosmovision is the product of an intensive research process that was undertaken in the 1990s, giving rise to an integrated cosmology and ritual complex that is being adopted by Nasa communities throughout Cauca. It is thus a recent arrival on the scene in the sense that although much of this knowledge existed among shamans, it was piecemeal and had never been verbalized in a coherent narrative. Cosmovision is an attempt to integrate cosmological knowledge and to give it a didactic form that can be internalized by the indigenous population. The challenge for us, as historians, was to explicate the origins and evolution of this concept without denying the millenarian existence of cosmological knowledge. But cosmovision was not the only sticking point we encountered.

Abelardo: My personal preoccupation, as both an actor in and an interpreter of the process, was with transcending anecdotal narrative. This meant negotiating the constant tension I felt between these two roles, which implied a movement between orality and writing. The founding leaders of CRIC eloquently expressed their political thought orally. With the exception of Manuel Quintín Lame, the elders had no experience in writing down their ideas.¹⁴ Therefore, in the development of a contestatory political process writing was not necessarily a task of the leadership, although they controlled the written production of other indigenous activists and of the non-indigenous collaborators. I was educated in such contexts, not as a leader, but as a cultural activist, a role that implied a command of written communication. Because Nasa Yuwe was my first language, my entry into the activity of written reflection has been an ongoing process, one in which my training as an activist unfolded parallel to the development of my literate sensibilities. I have written works in various genres, including educational documents, texts inspired by Nasa mythology, and linguistic analysis. But this was the first time in my experience that I was to participate in the production of a historical narrative, a story in which I was also an actor.

For me, writing the history of PEBI has been a process of confronting the difficulties of thinking retrospectively in dialogue with other team members. I had to strive to transcend a recounting of everyday experience, which was what I, as an actor, could most easily narrate. Instead, I had to attempt to elaborate an interpretation that included, simultaneously, my own experi-

ence, the objectives of the bilingual teachers and PEBI activists who formulated our guiding questions, and the evaluation of the actions of the elders.¹⁵ To weave all this into a written narrative that was pleasing to read and at once preserved the voices of the protagonists and situated them in their historical contexts: all of this forced me to be attentive to my responsibilities within the team. I could not adopt the role merely of an informant but had to exercise political and cultural responsibility, not only as a member of PEBI and of the indigenous movement, but also as a Nasa. I needed to transcend the biases that indigenous actors generally felt toward academics and collaborators, but in addition I had to ensure that what we wrote reflected an indigenous ideology. This was my role: to ensure that in the course of the project the intercultural team maintained the transcendence of the indigenous discourse.

Conclusion

What did we learn in the process? That collaboration necessarily implies being open to other modes of thought, to different ways of formulating research questions, to the possibility of political analysis. But these differences do not always arise out of the fault lines between Western academic culture and the radical cultural alterity of an indigenous researcher; they more frequently result from the disparities between academics and activists, whose cultural differences are more subtle and not as easily recognizable. We must also understand that the political aspirations of cultural activists are frequently embedded within a cultural discourse that obscures their political nature—at least, for the external observer, but not for the internal participant. What we must accomplish is to build methodological and conceptual bridges across divergent but not always completely apparent positions. This can be achieved only by adopting a framework in which academic analysis occupies a secondary position that respects and does not violate organizational priorities; even if academic contributions introduce concepts external to the indigenous culture, the objective is to internalize them by resignifying them through translation. If an academic accepts these rules, she or he also accepts the intercultural orientation of the project.

Such are the priorities that determined the nature of our work. When we entered into conversation, we came to realize that the guiding concepts of PEBI history would have to assume a discourse of political autonomy,

not one of indigenous culture and much less one of an academic nature. To theorize from an indigenous perspective does not always mean that cultural alterity is foregrounded, but it does mean that cultural difference must be grounded in an intercultural perspective.

Rey Chow (1995, 180) distinguishes between ethnography and autoethnography by suggesting that the autoethnographer is simultaneously the subject and object of her research: as she engages in study she is cognizant of the fact that others have studied her, something that Chow calls a state of “being-looked-at-ness.” Autoethnography is thereby more contestatory than conventional ethnography. In a way, our history of PEBI arose out of a sense of being-looked-at-ness: the fact of being an *object* of conventional education influenced CRIC’s desire to achieve indigenous protagonism, to become a *subject* in education. Equally, the three members of our history research team experienced being-looked-at-ness. This was certainly the case for Abelardo, who, as actor and analyst, was simultaneously a subject and object of historical research. But by virtue of the collaborative nature of the project, Joanne and Graciela also came to experience this effect, as each of us was exposed to the gaze of the other team members and of the PEBI collective whose questions guided our work. The complex dialogue that arose out of this exercise helped us understand the deep and multifaceted meaning of collaboration and interculturalism.

Notes

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1. The Duboisian notion of double consciousness arose at a particular moment in the history of interracial relations in the United States and out of the very specific intellectual trajectory of Du Bois himself. But notwithstanding its origins in the highly polarized racial atmosphere of the United States in the early twentieth century

and its insertion into a discourse of racial pride, the concept of double consciousness presupposes a complex and heterogeneous experience, not a simple essence (Chandler 1996, 85). In this sense, it is a metaphor that can be fruitfully applied across geographic and historical contexts. In a workshop with some forty bilingual teachers affiliated with the CRIC, the concept was reconfigured according to indigenous political priorities as “a revaluing of our own culture as difference.” One of the participants offered the following rereading of the concept: “The pain of being indigenous, with all of the implications of rejection to which we are subjected and, at the same time, pride in being different, with a clear and defined identity” (Chocué Guasaquillo 2000, 14). For an analysis of this exercise, see Rappaport (2005, chap. 1).

2. Theory is a major challenge today, when Native groups across the Americas have proposed the creation of indigenous universities (Pancho Aquite et al., 2004).

3. Abelardo Ramos graduated from this program.

4. There is not sufficient space here to describe other attempts at indigenous theorization in Bolivia (Fernández Osco 2000); Guatemala (Montejo 2002; cf. Warren 1998, chaps. 5, 6); and New Zealand (Bishop 1994; Smith 1999), which also present rich sources for the creation of Native conceptual tools.

5. Both Allen and Field employ the term *sovereignty* in their analyses because it is a fundamental demand of Native Americans. However, in a country like Colombia, where indigenous communities exist on the basis of colonial royal titles instead of treaties, the notion of sovereignty is not as relevant as that of autonomy, which permits them to think of themselves simultaneously as Native people and as Colombians.

6. Our use of *utopia* to signify a dream that is partially attainable comes from the usage in CRIC itself.

7. The final product of our research (Bolaños, Ramos, Rappaport, and Miñana 2004) was also coauthored by Carlos Miñana, an anthropologist at the National University of Colombia in Bogotá who has worked on a number of PEBI projects; Carlos assisted in the writing of the final chapter on PEBI’s pedagogical activities.

8. We refer specifically here to CRIC, whose various programs in education, health, agricultural production, and gender operate with interethnic personnel. In the Indigenous Authorities of Colombia (AICO), a parallel indigenous organization that works in Cauca, there are no non-Native collaborators. Instead, nonindigenous supporters formed a distinct solidarity movement parallel to AICO; however, even in this case, research takes on the character of an interethnic dialogue, as the two organizations enter into collaboration (Vasco 2002).

9. The term *traditional authority* is used in Cauca to refer to annually elected reservation councils (*cabildos*). The executive council of CRIC was recognized recently as a traditional authority after a protracted struggle with the national government, entitling them to carry staffs of office, as *cabildo* members do. However, in practice there is an implicit distinction made between community authorities and *líderes* (leaders) in the organization.

10. Joanne: Colombian academics are frequently constrained by their institutions in ways that are unfamiliar to those of us who work in U.S. universities. For instance, their research must be approved by the university administration if they are to conduct it during the academic year—which extends for considerably more weeks than in the United States. The constraints that operate upon academics in the United States are more subtle, generated by the venues in which we publish our research. Nevertheless, Abelardo, who has an M.A. in linguistics from a major Colombian university and was trained by French academics, is acutely aware of the ways in which the international academy limits the activities of its members.

11. Until 2004, PEBI was called PEB, the Bilingual Education Program. As a result of research into PEBI's history it was decided that interculturalism was a critical component of the program, and so its name was changed to the Bilingual and Intercultural Education Program.

12. Joanne: Until the last of the three workshops, the general membership of PEBI did not have an opportunity to discuss the nature of the project. Many of them assumed that it would take the form of a *sistematización*, a collective analysis of current goals and objectives, evaluating their progress in the different components of the education program. In fact, the guiding questions were prepared with a *sistematización* in mind. It was only at the third workshop that the idea of writing a history was broached and subsequently chosen as a viable option by the Nasa-speakers at the meeting, who were in the majority. For more on these negotiations and on the nature of the guiding questions, see Rappaport (2005, chap. 5).

13. A universal orthography for Nasa Yuwe was adopted in 2000. In an earlier alphabet used by CRIC, *Çxayuçe* was written as *Cayuçe*. We will cite articles in the magazine that were published before the adoption of the new orthography in the earlier alphabet.

14. Manuel Quintín Lame was a Nasa leader who, in the first half of the twentieth century, organized indigenous communities in the provinces of Cauca and Tolima. His demands form the basis of CRIC's political program. Lame wrote a treatise, *Los pensamientos del indio que se educó dentro de las selvas colombianas* (Thoughts of an Indian educated in the Colombian forests), which has become a foundational text for the Colombian indigenous movement (Lame 2004 [1939]).

15. Graciela Bolaños, the third member of the team, also had to confront this challenge, given that she was a founding member of CRIC.