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Collaborative Anthropologies, Volume 1, 2008, pp. 1-31 (Article)

Published by University of Nebraska Press

DOI: *10.1353/cla.0.0014*



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Beyond Participant Observation

Collaborative Ethnography as Theoretical Innovation

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The past decade has witnessed a growing interest in collaborative ethnographic methods in North America. Most recently, the Latin American Studies Association introduced a new initiative, *Other Americas/Otros Saberes*, aimed at funding collaborative research between academics and Latin American indigenous or Afrodescendant organizations.¹ A series of collaborative projects with indigenous and African American communities have demonstrated that collaboration is not only a moral choice for progressive ethnographers but a choice that makes for good ethnography (Field 2008; Lassiter et al. 2004; Ridington and Hastings 1997). The growing appeal of collaborative research has also been reflected in the pages of major anthropological journals (Castañeda 2006; Field 1999a; Lassiter 2005b); it is mirrored by a call for a “public anthropology” attentive to pressing public issues and written in a language accessible to an educated general public, and by a turn toward a politically engaged “activist anthropology” (Hale 2007, 104).²

Collaborative ethnography has been defined as

an approach to ethnography that *deliberately* and *explicitly* emphasizes collaboration at every point in the ethnographic process, without veiling it—from project conceptualization, to fieldwork, and, especially, through the writing process. Collaborative ethnography invites commentary from our consultants and seeks to make that commentary overtly part of the ethnographic text as it develops. In turn, this negotiation is reintegrated back into the fieldwork process itself. (Lassiter 2005a, 16)

Such an endeavor is not new to anthropology, nor is it confined to the North American anthropological arena: it can be traced back to Boas and his associates (Berman 1998), and it has been a mainstay of African American activist anthropology (Gwaltney [1980] 1993). It is also practiced widely by Latin American anthropologists working with social movements (Bonilla et al. 1972; Vasco Uribe 2002) and nongovernmental organizations (Riaño-Alcalá 2006). The products of collaborative ethnography include coauthored pieces (Field 2008; Fletcher and La Flesche [1911] 1992; Ridington and Hastings 1997; Vasco Uribe, Dagua Hurtado, and Aranda 1993), edited volumes in which anthropologists and local researchers present their findings (Lassiter et al. 2004), publications for consumption by local communities (Lobo 2002; Reynolds and Cousins 1993), and single-authored books that acknowledge the collaborative context in which they were produced (Field 1999b; Lassiter 1998; Lawless 1993; Rappaport 2005a; Urton 1997).

The bulk of the English-language literature on collaboration focuses on the substantive content that results from this brand of research, ignoring the specificity of its methodology: how researchers come to learn through collaboration. As I hope to illustrate, the local agendas that community researchers bring to the collaborative endeavor are key spaces in which we can begin to discern the potential contributions of collaboration. It is precisely the possibility of constructing alternative research agendas outside of the academic orbit and, correspondingly, pursuing alternative forms of analysis, which make collaborative ethnography different from traditional participant observation or, for that matter, from methodologies in which subjects participate as research assistants but have little control over the research. What I wish to accomplish in this article is to focus on collaboration as a space for the coproduction of theory, which is, I will contend, a crucial venue in which knowledge is created through collaboration. My aim is to discover why such an approach is not only morally or ethically necessary—an argument that has become well represented in recent public anthropology literature (Scheper-Hughes 1995)—but, more importantly, to what extent it bears potential for nourishing and revitalizing anthropological thought (Hale 2007). I also hope to turn the attention of North American readers to the particular brand of collaborative research that has been going on for years in Latin America, and in Colombia, particularly. Using methodologies that

merge research with activism, anthropological collaborations in Colombia function as spaces in which co-theorization takes place, nourishing both the political objectives of community researchers and the academic analyses of scholars. Refocusing our sights outside of the North American orbit will help us build new intellectual genealogies that can potentially nourish our goal of promoting collaborative anthropology.

Colombian Anthropology and Social Engagement

Following the lead of my Colombian colleagues, who are searching for an approach to anthropology originating in the global south, in this article I intend to draw upon Colombian collaborative ethnography as a paradigm that could have an impact on our understanding of what collaboration means, shifting our emphasis from the production of ethnography as a central goal to that of engaging in activist research that is equally productive in a broader sense for both the professional ethnographer and the community. Social engagement lies at the heart of the emergence of a distinctly Latin American anthropology (Ramos 1990). Intense, sometimes radical, engagement characterizes Colombian anthropology in particular, marking it as distinct in style from its northern cousins, which are by nature more academic in focus or aligned to the priorities of mainstream institutions (Oliveira 1999–2000). An emphasis on the political in Colombian anthropology is evident from the choice of topics of study, which today pay close attention to conflict, ethnic movements, and social inequalities, probing the moral and political fiber of Colombian society (Jimeno 2004; Ramírez 2001; Ulloa 2004). Most importantly, however, Colombian insistence upon social engagement has resulted in a distinct way of doing anthropology.³

Myriam Jimeno (2000, 2005, 2008) argues that Colombian anthropologists are “citizen-researchers,” for whom the “exercise of the profession is simultaneously the exercise of citizenship” (2000, 160). This owes to the fact that Colombian academic researchers feel themselves to be part of the social realities they are studying, leading them to share a sense of citizenship with their subjects: “The sectors studied are not understood as exotic, isolated, distant, or ‘cold’ worlds, but as coparticipants in the construction of nation and of democracy” (2005, 46;

cf. Correa 2005). Such a proximity between the researcher and the researched leads to the creation of “a space of meta-academic debate” in which intellectual work “has implications for social life and for the practical significance of the exercise of citizenship” (2005, 51). What this has meant in practice is that Colombian anthropologists tend to privilege the use of workshops and other collective venues as research methodologies (Zambrano 1989), the formation of interdisciplinary research teams, the adoption of historical modes of investigation that uncover the history of existing inequalities (Pineda Camacho 2005), and a brand of participatory action research pioneered in Colombia that inserts anthropologists into grassroots political and social struggles as activist-scholars, fostering collaboration simultaneously on the political level and at the level of ethnographic analysis (Caviedes 2003; Vasco Uribe 2002; cf. Bonilla et al. 1972; Fals-Borda 1991). As a result, the research of the anthropological community only sometimes comes to fruition in classic ethnographic monographs. Scholarly work is reported in articles, essays, and historical monographs, but it also flowers in other written genres that are of greater utility to the communities being studied, including publications aimed at popular consumption, journalism, political documents, testimonial narratives, and primary-school textbooks. Much of what transpires in these activities is not written at all, unfolding in workshops whose contents are only imperfectly captured in the summaries stored in organizational archives but which have lasting impact in communities. As a result, we cannot think of the work of Colombian anthropologists as exclusively encoded in the written channel, nor of fieldwork as embodying entirely scholarly ends, nor, indeed, of ethnography as an applied pursuit mediated by official institutions in the sense that we understand applied anthropology in North America. Colombian anthropologists orient themselves toward broad audiences—not only reading publics but also grassroots organizations and other popular sectors—creating a particular brand of public anthropology.

Collaborative Research as a Vehicle for Theory Building

One of the most valuable contributions that Colombian collaborative research can make to anthropology across the globe is in the grounding of collaboration in co-theorization. By co-theorization, I mean the col-

lective production of conceptual vehicles that draw upon both a body of anthropological theory and upon concepts developed by our interlocutors; I purposefully emphasize this process as one of theory building and not simply coanalysis in order to highlight the fact that such an operation involves the creation of abstract forms of thought similar in nature and intent to the theories created by anthropologists, although they partially originate in other traditions and in nonacademic contexts. Understood in this sense, collaboration converts the space of fieldwork from one of data collection to one of co-conceptualization.

Let me be more specific about what I mean by co-theorizing. Colombian anthropologist Luis Guillermo Vasco engaged in pointed theorizing with his interlocutors from the history committee of the Colombian indigenous community of Guambía. Their oral history project was conceived and directed by local researchers who did not serve as “consultants” to an ethnographic project proposed by an external researcher but as full team members who engaged the services of the anthropologist once they had set their own research priorities. In the years before undertaking their research, the Guambianos were involved in a process of land-claims that expanded their territorial base and strengthened the legitimacy of their traditional authorities. For them, historical research was a way of connecting cultural revitalization to their objectives of reclaiming territory lost in the nineteenth century and demonstrating that they were native to the reclaimed lands.

Vasco, an anthropologist at the National University of Colombia and an activist in organizations in solidarity with the indigenous movement, worked for several decades with a Guambiano research team to develop theoretical constructs out of local material culture and language use, in the service of creating novel narrative vehicles for recounting the past in what we might call a “Guambiano tonality.”⁴ In particular, they engaged the motif of the spiral, present on petroglyphs and in straw hats, as a vehicle for breaking the mold of Western linear forms of historical narration (Vasco Uribe, Dagua Hurtado, and Aranda 1993; cf. Rappaport 2005a, chap. 5), which allowed them to recount the Guambiano past through circular narrations. These stories constantly sight back on primordial beings associated with key topographic sites that are also locations of significant land-claims activity. The team did not simply interpret the historical narratives they collected from a “Guambiano perspective” but created what we might call theoretical concepts out of their everyday realities.⁵

The co-theorizing done by Vasco and his collaborators might be thought of in a very general sense as an example of a thorough and conscientious ethnography, in which exegesis takes place between ethnographer and subject. However, collaboration is more than “good ethnography,” because it shifts control of the research process out of the hands of the anthropologist and into the collective sphere of the anthropologist working on an equal basis with community researchers. It was the group of Guambiano researchers, themselves aware of what theory is and intent on building it, who appropriated the spiral as a conceptual tool and shared this approach with Vasco. Significantly, the spiral is not a motif that earlier ethnographers of Guambiano culture had identified but a construct that Guambiano intellectuals derived from their own analysis of its ubiquity in their everyday lives as well as in commonly used metaphors identified by Guambiano linguists, which depict social relationships as “rolling and unrolling” (Muelas Hurtado 1995). This process of creating conceptual vehicles to interpret historical materials was grounded in the political objectives of the Guambiano authorities, building upon a model of participatory action research pioneered by Orlando Fals Borda (1991) that explicitly oriented research toward grassroots political objectives and laid the foundations for much of today’s collaborative work in Latin America. By means of historical research, the Guambianos sought to document their ties to their territory.

Vasco’s Guambiano interlocutors took away with them new modes of interpretation that they could engage beyond the academic sphere, in community spaces in which writing is not the ultimate goal (Castañeda 2005), and where the results of historical research could be interpreted in the Guambiano language (which, although it is written, is not widely read outside of the classroom). Vasco (2002) contends that the team’s central objective was the development of a collective ethnographic research methodology, not the creation of ethnographic texts. In fact, he argues that for the first six months of the project, the team had no intention of writing up its research, which was to be translated into picture-maps for internal use; they began to write only when community authorities asked them to do so and provided them with a list of research topics (Cunin 2006, 28).⁶ Subsequently, a host of Spanish-language pamphlets, initially in mimeograph form and later in print, disseminated the narratives within Guambía (Dagua, Aranda, and

Vasco U. 1989; Tróchez T. and Flor 1990). The first of these pamphlets contained pointed critiques of previous anthropological writings on the community, demonstrating that when subordinated groups adopt the ethnographer's craft, they must pay as much attention to what others have written about them as about their own culture, a standpoint that Rey Chow calls "being-looked-at-ness" and identifies as a hallmark of what she calls "autoethnography" (Chow 1995, 180).⁷

However, the results of the research were not confined to internal pamphlets. The most prominent project in which this collaborative history was subsequently incorporated was a far-ranging development plan constructed by the Guambiano authorities, which would guide their efforts at revitalizing an autonomous public administration and incorporating new territory into a land base that could no longer sustain their growing population (Guambía, Cabildo, Taitas, and Comisión de Trabajo del Pueblo Guambiano 1994; cf. Gow 1997, 2005, 2008). The project also resulted in coauthored texts, aimed largely at an academic audience (Dagua Hurtado, Aranda, and Vasco 1998; Vasco Uribe, Dagua Hurtado, and Aranda 1993). What these scholarly texts achieved was the legitimization of Guambiano autoethnography in academic circles (Cunin 2006, 30), bringing to light a new epistemology of fieldwork, where the field is a place for creating conceptualizations, as opposed to a space of data collection.

There is, indeed, a growing recognition on the part of more conventional North American ethnographers of the significance of recognizing that what happens in the field is much more than data collection. George Marcus (1997) argues that traditional methods of participant-observation predicated upon the notion of rapport ignore the broader contexts within which ethnography takes place: they do not pay heed to the colonial or neocolonial contexts in which fieldwork unfolds, nor to the multiple locations from which knowledge must be drawn in order to conduct research in the contemporary world. The recognition of such constraints calls for a new approach to field research which, Marcus suggests, must be premised upon a kind of complicity between the (external) ethnographer and (internal) subject. Complicity is, for Marcus, an intellectual symbiosis through which connections can be made to the multiple global contexts that impinge upon—but range beyond—local knowledge; this is something that he does not appear to think can be accomplished by the internal subject

working in isolation from the ethnographer (1997, 98). Marcus provides various examples of such complicity. In his article he cites a study of highly educated members of the European right (Holmes 1993 in Marcus 1997); also complicit is his own research with the Portuguese aristocracy, written in the form of an electronic-mail dialogue (Marcus and Mascarenhas 2005). The kinds of complicity that seem to appeal to Marcus indicate that it is most likely to unfold in the presence of cosmopolitan and educated subjects, such as the elites he has studied, who can comprehend the big picture that the ethnographer hopes to paint and can expand upon the ethnographer's concerns in lengthy and complex expositions. He argues that this approach, which pays heed to global connections through what I take to be an exegetic dialogue, places the anthropologist "always on the verge of activism, of negotiating some kind of involvement beyond the distanced role of ethnographer" (1997, 100).

I must admit, however, that I am perplexed by Marcus's assertion, given that there is a great deal of distance between complicit dialogic involvement and activism, which to me are not necessarily coterminous, and should not be, in some ethnographic contexts (such as the study of the European right, which I, for one, would not promote). I also think that his assertion misinterprets the political role that ethnographers can play, which most certainly can involve collaboration through joint creation but does not necessarily imply activism, which, I would argue, entails a skill set that anthropologists as scholars do not bring to the table. There is also a gap between the one-way question-and-answer dialogue that characterizes ethnography in general (Tedlock and Mannheim 1995; cf. Marcus and Mascarenhas 2005, 103) and the reciprocal dialogues of Vasco, in which questions and answers are coming from both parties in a bidirectional movement.

The kind of complicity called for by Marcus can, however, hold the potential of converting collaboration into a charged and fruitful methodology, if we take his suggestion further, to comprehend not only complicity in an ethnographic dialogue (which is frequently of greater interest to the ethnographer than to the subject), but complicity in achieving the goals of the subject through conducting joint research. This can occur only when we shift control of the research process out of the ethnographer's hands. In this scenario, the external ethnographer is not so much on the verge of activism as of enhancing activist agendas

by entering into dialogue with methodologies already chosen by the community. When Vasco left the fundamental decisions concerning the research agenda to the Guambianos, the team began to ask questions of local history that an external anthropologist might not necessarily have considered and interpreted historical materials within novel frames of reference. Clearly, this called for a deep external knowledge on the part of the Guambiano researchers, including a comprehension of academic forms of analysis, an appreciation of what theory is, and an understanding of the broader history of indigenous land loss in Colombia as well as a facility in data gathering.⁸ What Vasco brought to the table was a broad command of comparative ethnography, a familiarity with indigenous organizing beyond Guambía, a knowledge of anthropological theory that could be placed in dialogue with Guambiano “concept-things,” the experience and legitimacy of a successful academic author, and a willingness to subordinate his own objectives to those of his coresearchers.⁹ The border between the internal subject and the external ethnographer, as Marcus describes it, was blurred in this project, given that both the Guambiano researchers and Vasco had access to distinct forms of external knowledge, and above all, because this was not a team of “internal subjects” and of “external ethnographers” but was composed of highly sophisticated and well-read ethnographers, both external and internal, with different knowledge sets and methodologies that were placed in dialogue with each other.¹⁰

Co-Theorization with the Colombian Indigenous Movement

In the remainder of this article, I will argue the significance of co-theorization for a revitalized ethnographic practice by thinking through my own collaborative experiences in Colombia with an interethnic team of indigenous researchers, Colombian anthropologists, and North American scholars studying politics in the department of Cauca in southwestern highland Colombia since 1991, when a new constitution recast the country as a pluriethnic and multicultural nation (Van Cott 2000). The starting point for our methodology emerged out of the work of the Guambiano history committee, our central objective being cotheorization. Our team operated in association with several regional and grassroots indigenous organizations whose goals are to promote

Native rights in a country that only recently recognized the existence of indigenous citizens and to reform the Colombian state by injecting into it a radical brand of democracy in which minority participation is not diluted by an insistence on the rule of an electoral majority (Mouffe 1995). As a result, the indigenous team members participated in the project, not in the spirit of promoting ethnographic research for academic ends but with the express intention of harnessing the research experience to the goals of their organizations.

The aim of our project was to study local politics as a scaffolding upon which we could establish a horizontal dialogue that would recognize and build upon our different research agendas, conceptual approaches, and methodologies. Cauca is unusual in Colombia, given that a plurality of its population is indigenous, whereas only some 2 percent of Colombians in general would identify as Native; Cauca is also the home of the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC), Colombia's oldest indigenous organization, which has the capacity to mobilize tens of thousands on short notice. CRIC's membership includes numerous indigenous groups, the Nasa being the largest group in the region, numbering approximately 120,000. In our project, we intended to look at indigenous organizations as significant players in the formation of multicultural policy, most frequently from a contestatory position in negotiation with the state. In particular, we hoped to explore the multiplicity of levels at which indigenous activists are organizing—from national and regional organizations to subregional associations of community authorities and local councils.¹¹ The team included two Colombian academics from the Universidad del Cauca, two foreign academics, and two community-based Nasa researcher-activists.

We did not write together, nor did we conduct fieldwork as a group. Instead, each member had his or her own research project (mine focused on cultural politics in CRIC), which was brought to the table in written or oral form and collectively analyzed at periodic team meetings (which were recorded, transcribed, and available to all team members). We agreed that such an approach would encourage professional anthropologists and indigenous researchers to operate on a more equal basis. In other words, the team was essentially a space of reflection and theory-building. Our understanding of what constituted theory derived from CRIC's own research experience, from our knowledge of the Guambiano history project, and from our scholarly reading (which

all of us had engaged in from distinct disciplinary perspectives in anthropology, linguistics, and pedagogy).

The methodologies we employed in our individual projects varied. While the academics tended to privilege participant-observation and in-depth interviewing, the Nasa members also engaged in a form of introspective analysis in which they constructed typologies in Nasa Yuwe (their native language) in order to organize their ethnographic data according to what they identified as Nasa criteria (Rappaport 2005a). All of us participated in projects spearheaded by various indigenous organizations and local communities in addition to conducting research on our own; our collaborations ranged from lending assistance in development plans, serving as note-takers at regional meetings, cooperating with organizational research projects, writing bilingual intercultural curricula for primary schools, and assisting Nasa women's organizations. The aim was to allow our activism to enter into dialogue with our individual research projects, so that, in a sense, we were simultaneously external analysts and internal actors, something I will return to at the end of this article.

The indigenous members of the team continually emphasized that although they appreciated the ways in which our dialogue helped develop their writing skills, in the final instance they hoped that the collaborative space could engender new methodologies revolving around their indigenous subject position. For them, the team was all about subjectivity, about forging a place at the table as indigenous researchers and developing an intellectual agenda that met the needs of their organizations. Susana Piñacué and Adonías Perdomo, the two Nasa members of the team, saw the development of a collaborative methodology as an urgent task that would build bridges between indigenous researchers and communities, and between those Native researchers and their academic counterparts, something that Piñacué observed at one of our meetings:

I would say that more than writing a thick tome (*mamotreto*) I hope to consolidate a methodological proposal. . . . In the coming year I hope this work will produce methodological points that can impact the different spaces in which we operate. There are many Native people who are doing research. What kind of approaches are they using? How are they writing it up? Where are they publishing? What

are they writing? For whom are they writing? From an indigenous perspective. . . . But there are also many professionals from different disciplines who are still writing with that archaic mentality: you are the informant, I am the researcher, tell me in so many words. . . . So, thinking it out somewhat ambitiously, how can we have an impact in those circles? (Susana Piñacué, August 8, 2001)

Conversely, many of the academic members of the team entered into collaboration under the assumption that we would engage in scholarly publishing, but we swiftly discovered we were to be absorbed in a more far-ranging project that involved methodological innovation, something that could potentially have a greater impact than would the contents of our research. As scholars familiar with academic discussions about reflexivity, we were drawn into a new arena of conversation about the topic, focusing on why identity is central to the construction of theory by Nasa autoethnographers. As will be apparent in what follows, self-consciousness about being Nasa or an outsider was not only central to our exchanges but became the conceptual vehicle through which we made sense of our research.¹²

Central to our objective of transforming methodology was the creation through collective dialogue of a number of key concepts—theoretical vehicles—that would guide our research. Contrary to the Guambiano example I described above, these concepts did not originate in specifically Nasa cultural forms but were grounded in the rich organizational culture of the Caucan indigenous movement in which all of us were to some degree enmeshed. The remainder of this paper will focus on one of these theoretical constructs, looking at how it developed in our open-ended team meetings. My analysis centers on the meetings (and not on our individual research methodologies) because they functioned as the principal site in which our co-theorization unfolded. I conclude with a discussion of the utility of co-theorizing for anthropologists and our interlocutors.

“Inside” and “Outside”

During the five years our team worked together, we developed a conceptual framework that revolved around an opposition between “inside” and “outside,” a construct that arose out of the reflections of the indigenous members of the team regarding their own problematic insertion

into Native communities. Inside and outside are metaphors frequently used by CRIC members to contrast Native and non-Native social, cultural, and political spaces. At first glance, the inside/outside opposition appears to be a rigid and essentialist dichotomy that simplifies a complex reality, since it imposes an exclusive topographic metaphor upon a dynamic and heterogeneous social landscape. But in the course of our team discussions we discovered that the inside was more than simply the indigenous community in opposition to the outside of the national society. In our analysis, the two spaces could be almost juxtaposed, depending on the context. Indigenous intellectuals—the political leaders and cultural activists in these organizations—move between the space of the Native community and the urban world of indigenous organizing and regional politics, yet they feel alienated from their indigenous base and constantly seek nourishment in constructs of indigenous culture. Longtime non-Native collaborators—*colaboradores*, in CRIC parlance, who along with the organizational leadership, form the backbone of the organization—inhabit a kind of an inside in concert with indigenous activists, in opposition to members of other sectors of the regional society. CRIC leaders who participated in the ideological training of an interethnic but largely indigenous guerrilla organization active in Cauca in the 1980s, the Quintín Lame Armed Movement, were positioned outside while non-Native combatants affiliated with the organization were on the inside. The inside of the culturalist discourses used by indigenous educational activists comes into conflict with the more pragmatic discourses of indigenous political leaders, who are seen as moving on the outside. In other words, we began to see a constellation of dynamic forms of identification functioning within an intercultural space that could be comprehended through the use of an opposition whose contents were entirely relative to the political juncture. What this paired notion allowed us to do was to evaluate the broader constellation of indigenous politics from the standpoint of organizational actors at particular political junctures.

Such distinctions extended beyond the purview of our discussion group. Debates over inside and outside were also taking place on a more general level in the organization, particularly over whether collaborators should more properly be considered as external “advisors” instead of their present status as integral to the movement. The political leadership of CRIC and many of its militants questioned whether indig-

enous cultural activists should be associated long-term with programs in the regional office, or whether they should more properly rotate into community-based positions. Nasa-speaking activists repeatedly noted the differences between their political practice and that of monolingual Spanish-speaking Nasas, who make up a good half of the Nasa population. In other words, our adoption of the inside/outside conceptual pair echoed the concerns of many of CRIC's activists.

A brief excursion through our team meetings illustrates how we engaged this pair of metaphors, both to interpret the political developments we were studying and to evaluate our group methodology. The inside/outside opposition was employed by Nasa team members to refer to cultural revitalization efforts meant to "protect" those inside from external influences. However, they asserted that it is only by straddling the boundary between inside and outside that indigenous leaders (or researchers, for that matter) can innovate, thereby maintaining the integrity of the inside. Inside and outside are necessarily intermeshed; control of movement across the two poles is an urgent political responsibility of Native researchers. Perdomo (at the time of our meetings, a "traditional authority"—as local elected leaders are called—in the community of Pitayó) reflected on this issue at a team meeting, speaking simultaneously as a leader and an analyst:

We've had to reorient ourselves to reach the frontier. The great thing that might happen is that . . . as people reach the border in the course of the [organizing] process . . . [this reorienting] will be useful so that they establish other proposals, other strategies, so that the people who must reach the border return stronger. . . . I think that the frontier isn't as dangerous if I'm inside it. . . . But I am concerned, one, that this research project strengthens us on the inside; two, that it strengthens those of us who are on the frontier; and three, that this research helps the . . . Nasa community to seek strategies, so that they become conscious about what is happening and so that they no longer have to wait for us to reorient ourselves and go to the frontier to value what is ours and return to rework it. (Adonías Perdomo, August 3, 1999)

This is a very complex statement because it indicates that the actors themselves are acutely aware of the ambivalences and the borrowings that accompany processes of cultural revitalization. In fact, our methodology required that all of us straddle the frontier.

Perdomo's statement demonstrates that inside/outside was key not only to making sense of our methodological objectives but also to the way research could nourish the political objectives of indigenous intellectuals. Myriam Amparo Espinosa, the Colombian anthropologist on the team, employed the opposition to question traditional ethnographic research and to underline the ways in which our nascent collective would have to rethink the purpose of our collaboration. In one exchange, Perdomo argued that we needed to move away from defining research through the individuals who engage in it (he employed the Spanish form *por*, or "by," used to denote authorship) to a reconceptualization of research with a collective purpose (*para*, or "for"). Espinosa responded that we would have to rethink what it meant to write up our research:

As to the results of the research, I think it would be a good exercise if they came out as a text. But that already limits the "para"—that is, the external "para." For whom externally? For the outside researchers. Or for whom internally? For the Nasa researchers. For whom especially? (Myriam Amparo Espinosa, June 10–11, 1999)

In this exchange, the inside/outside opposition did not force us into rigid dichotomies but enabled us to explore the heterogeneity of both the indigenous movement and of academia.

In particular, it led us to deepen our appreciation of the variety of audiences on the inside and the relationship among them. Piñacué repeatedly questioned the culturalist discourses of the urban-based regional intellectuals of CRIC, including herself, who have constructed a proposal for "Nasa culture" that is to be propagated in local communities: "Should we speak of a Nasa identity? Or of identities at the level of the community?" She asked this because she felt that

we are undergoing a cultural crisis at the cultural level among the [Nasa] people. Because in effect, I see my future as fragmented, fragmented in the sense of being immersed in many political, economic, religious interests, so that ultimately, we are folklorizing or romanticizing the discourse of an elite that has left its community and attempted to frame its culture to benefit its own interests. (Susana Piñacué, August 3, 1999)

Here, Piñacué critiques the very work of the cultural “insiders” located on the frontier. Implicitly, she is questioning her own frontier position as inherently dangerous.

Piñacué wonders whether, in the final instance, her own work is written from the “outside,” a general problem for autoethnographers that North American team member David Gow expressed by noting that some of Perdomo’s work “was clearly written from the inside,” while in other instances, it “could have been written by an external anthropologist, who’d worked so many years with the Nasa that he knew them, had their trust” (David Gow, July 2, 2000). Such tension originates in the anthropological models that have persistently dogged Native researchers and cultural activists, restraining the kind of methodological and theoretical innovation that we were attempting to pursue.

But Piñacué’s preoccupations with the outsider status of indigenous intellectuals also points to the very real methodological differences between Nasa researchers and academic ethnographers, which our project sought to bridge, although not to erase. Earlier, I suggested that Piñacué and Perdomo employed introspective approaches centering on the creation of typologies in Nasa Yuwe. Their insistence upon the inside/outside opposition and the ways in which they speak of it in relation to their own positionings indicates that their research methodology also involves using themselves as measures for making sense of the dynamics of the regional indigenous movement. Piñacué’s individual research project centered on the relationship among a heterogeneous set of Nasa women within CRIC. Employing what she hopes is a Nasa frame of reference, she places them in three categories framed in Nasa Yuwe: elderly, monolingual women who “live like Nasa”; those, like her, who work in the regional office in the city of Popayán and “think as Nasa”; and those occupying local-level leadership roles who only “move about as Nasa,” a subtle set of distinctions that positions different types of activists at distances relative to everyday Nasa experience (Piñacué Achicué 2005; Rappaport 2005a: 100–102). The three categories occupy distinct grades of “insiderness.” While the elderly women anchor her typology, activists who “think as Nasa” and have the ability to mentor those who simply “move about as Nasa” hold, in Piñacué’s interpretation, the ultimate responsibility for cultural revitalization (although they also run the greatest risks). Her typology leads me to surmise that more than the collection of ethnographic material, research

by CRIC's cultural activists involves soul-searching and deeply reflexive attempts at tracing political relationships, providing interpretive frameworks steeped in subjective sentiments.

Clearly, Piñacué is no essentialist. However, our debates about the heterogeneity of the inside led us increasingly to consider why the exigencies of politics internal to organizations force leaders and cultural activists to deploy discourses of ethnic difference and cultural stasis. Numerous scholars have dwelled upon the essentialism that appears to characterize indigenous identity politics, ranging between those who critique such discourses out of hand as inauthentic (Hanson 1989; Linnekin 1983) and those who see essentialist discourses as politically strategic (Friedman 1994; Spivak and Grosz 1990; Warren 1998). Les Field (1999a) transcends what is perhaps a sterile disagreement to assert that the deployment of constructionist and essentialist discourses in Native American circles in the United States is more a product of the balancing of political priorities than the either/or debate that has raged in the academic literature (see also Fischer 1999). Myriam Amparo Espinosa notes such a tension in the work of both Perdomo and Piñacué, leading her to question how they use the notions of inside and outside:

It's the constant duality between inside and outside. I don't know if Nasa culture identifies dualisms or if it is in the construction of the text. Because this problem of the inside/outside dyad lends an essentialist character [to your argument], as though something already existing were being constantly disrupted. (Myriam Amparo Espinosa, July 2, 2000)

Piñacué responded to Espinosa's question by stating that the inside/outside dyad is constantly voiced in communities, making it a discursive reality. However, Piñacué's political positioning on the inside, coupled with her need to move between inside and outside in the conduct of her research, leads to a very particular use of the dyad that constantly shifts between essential culturalist discourses and more constructivist social analysis.

While external analysts have expressed an overriding concern about the essentialism of ethnic actors, the indigenous members of our team worried about the inverse: that collaborators were the ones who were guilty of essentialism, not indigenous activists. In the following quo-

tation, Piñacué points to the persistent desire of nonindigenous academics to privilege specific political junctures that capture the attention of the broader public, such as, for example, regional mobilizations in which the indigenous movement comes into confrontation with the Caucan elite and with nonindigenous popular movements. At such moments, we appreciate indigenous actors as a homogenous group that stands as a counterpart to an equally homogenous dominant society, losing sight of the conflicts, negotiations, and ambivalent positions within the indigenous sphere. Piñacué, who belongs to an influential Nasa family—her brother, Jesús Enrique Piñacué, is a former president of CRIC and currently a member of the Colombian Senate—has long been dogged by the criticism that she is not “culturally Nasa.” The ambivalence of her own identity becomes a point of departure for her critique of academics in an exchange she had with Espinosa:

Maybe it's because you're Amparo and I'm Susana, and I identify more [as a Nasa]—although they say that they identify me more as a [nonindigenous] *mestiza* but also as indigenous—that I look at my problem in a panorama. So I have no single focus, I try to explore everything without situating myself or obligating myself [to a single position]. But the fact is that Amparo has an academic trajectory and a point of reference among other academics, a profession that absorbs her and to which she must belong, so that you don't observe the panorama around us and what's important in this space is to register the entire dynamic. (Susana Piñacué, January 17, 2000)

Piñacué chides Espinosa—and the rest of us—for not appreciating the complex dynamics at work on the “inside,” which would mitigate our appreciation of indigenous actors. She implores us academics to shift our perspective and look beyond the dyad, to think more in terms of a set of nested categories than a simple opposition. She can do this because she perceives the inside and the outside to be nested within herself, a sensation akin to Espinosa's experience as a political collaborator with CRIC:

At first they told me that I was really a Nasa at heart. Right? And later I discovered that I was more Nasa than the Nasa themselves. OK? That happens to many of us collaborators, although we really never stop being the Other. (Myriam Amparo Espinosa, June 10–11, 1999)

What Espinosa ultimately recognizes is that a collaborator's positioning "inside" in the service of the indigenous organization will always remain under debate, given the fact that the movement speaks for the Native community. In this sense, it is only through dialogue that we outsiders can appreciate the extent to which inside and outside are nested in the interior of the indigenous sphere. It is not so much that we are unable to capture the richness of the operation of this opposition but that we do not have the authority to do so. That authority only comes through collaboration with our Nasa colleagues, whose self-reflexive interpretative moves entered into a corrective dialogue with our academic analytical tools. Inside and outside were thus not only analytical tools but the very spaces in which we were forced to continually position and reposition ourselves as researchers.

Conclusion: Why Collaborate?

The process of co-theorizing we engaged in brought forth tangible intellectual results in the academic arena. In particular, it provided alternatives to current debates over whether or not the discourse of indigenous activists is essentialist (or strategically essentialist). It emphasized the sophistication of these actors and underlined the fact that we cannot compare their culturalist constructs to those of anthropologists but must begin to comprehend them on their own terms. It also opened an important window onto the pluralist nature of indigenous organizing, a political project in which Native activists work side by side with nonindigenous collaborators. Finally, it furnished a viable alternative to current ethnographic practice, taking methodologies like Vasco's in new directions and suggesting that as North American ethnographers we might look toward the national anthropologies of Latin America as sources of methodological innovation.

Would those of us on the outside have heeded the suggestions of our Nasa colleagues had our conversations not been framed by a collaborative project? I do not think so because we would not have been as aware of the possibilities that lay before us. I conclude by considering how the inside/outside opposition was of use to me as an anthropologist. (I leave it to Piñacué and Perdomo to reflect on its utility in their activist lives.) In my opinion, this pair of concepts helped me understand the conceptual impasse between anthropological notions of ethnicity of

the sort pioneered by Barth (1969) that emphasize “groupness” or ethnic boundaries without paying heed to the broader political context in which indigenous organizations have affected the national conscience, and the new social movement literature, which does not effectively explain the place of culture in these movements.

The Barthian notion of ethnicity is problematic for making sense of the multiple and contradictory processes of identification that have been harnessed by indigenous political actors to contend with both their organizational needs and their own subjectivities as cosmopolitan intellectuals. Anthropological treatments of ethnicity focus on how individuals negotiate ethnic boundaries, not how political organizations—which are themselves palimpsests of multiple ethnic boundaries that are continually negotiated and renegotiated—create and maintain them. What is needed is a new look at who participates in identity politics, at how intercultural organizations create new forms of identification and negotiate the fluid boundaries of their constituencies. The participation of nonindigenous collaborators in indigenous movements seems crucial to me in this necessary move away from an ethnicity paradigm, as it homes in on the intercultural space in which new indigenous identities are under discussion. Nevertheless, I know of only two scholarly takes on indigenous organizing that recognize the role of non-Natives in these movements (Caviedes 2003; Laurent 2006).

Central to the processes of identification going on at the heart of indigenous organizations are culturalist discourses, which appear essentialist because they promote Native practices as though they were contained within stable and bounded cultural frameworks. The Barthian model of ethnicity eschews culture in favor of examining the dynamics of boundary negotiation. But culture, particularly as a self-conscious process of construction, is fundamental to indigenous discourses and cannot be neglected in our analysis. At an early team meeting, Piñacué drove this home by turning the idea of authenticity on its head: “To be authentic is to increasingly demonstrate what we dream. . . . To be authentic is to *draw closer*, to make our dreams a reality, so that as we approach our dreams we become more authentic” (Susana Piñacué, January 17, 2000; italics mine). What Piñacué is telling us is that for indigenous activists, culture is not an existing constellation of practices and meanings located on the “inside” but a projection of how future lifeways should look, driven by a process in which elements

of the inside are revitalized through the incorporation of ideas from outside; that is, culture necessarily straddles the frontier. This is not a strategic deployment of essentializing discourses to describe what exists “out there” but a model of what “should be,” a blueprint for the future.¹³ As a result, indigenous activists’ deployments of culture cannot be equated with ethnography. Their purpose is different. While ethnographers engage in cultural description with an eye to analyzing it, indigenous autoethnographers study culture to act upon it (Asad 1986; Briones 2005, 61). Piñacué and Perdomo were forced to examine their own subjectivities to accomplish this task, to question how and why they, as intellectuals, experienced their Nasa identity and whether that experience could lend them the authority to construct a new cultural practice for other Nasa. Their participation in the team was introspective, self-conscious, practical, and utopian.

Now, such blueprints are heterogeneous and constantly under debate, adopted within certain contexts and rejected in others. This was apparent in our team discussion, where Piñacué and Perdomo spent a great deal of time critiquing various models for intercultural democratic participation, the reintroduction of indigenous cosmologies, the construction of house-gardens, and other CRIC projects which, on the surface, appear as though they were ethnographic descriptions of what exists, and not proposals for what should be. They also devoted discussion time to exploring the political intentions and the actors behind some of these projects, emphasizing that what looks like objective ethnography is shot through with interests not always apparent to the outside observer. The very appreciation of whether indigenous research produces ethnographies or blueprints marked multiple positionings inside and outside of the movement. Collaborators and academics, located on the nonindigenous outside, frequently take Native research to be an objective description of existing culture, while Nasa-speaking activists on the inside saw them as projections toward the future. Similarly, local activists sometimes adopt blueprints uncritically in their presentation of self, as though they were stable cultural traits. Of course, the dynamics of our team also sometimes led Perdomo and Piñacué to represent cultural forms as ethnographic (as opposed to projections) in an effort to differentiate themselves from the rest of us, in a kind of “It’s a Nasa thing. You wouldn’t understand.” On these occasions our Nasa colleagues, tongue in cheek, very consciously deployed essentializations strategically.

Rodgers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper (2000, 1) offer a compelling critique of antiessentialist arguments as they had been employed in the study of new social movements, one that is highly pertinent to the topic of collaborative theorizing. They argue that constructivist apologies of strategic essentialism leave scholars without a conceptual handle with which to analyze the power of the categories used in identity politics. They distinguish between “categories of practice” and “analytical categories,” the first embedded in the essentializing discourses of groups advocating identity politics and the second the province of constructivist analysts (2000, 4, 33). It is the gap between the two, they argue, that precludes effective analysis of identity, forcing observers to uncritically adopt discourses that are more appropriate to political action than to analysis.

In the course of our collaborative theorizing, we merged these two poles in various ways. We all engaged in organizational work as an integral part of our projects, either as indigenous activists or as collaborators, forcing us to move back and forth between the practical sphere and the analytic sphere. Although this exercise was particularly important for Perdomo and Piñacué, who continually had to rethink in the space of team discussion the conceptual categories they employed in their activism, it also left a significant mark on the academics, who in the past had either assumed a purely observational stance or had compartmentalized research and advocacy. Our team dialogue provided an important window onto how each of us, from our distinct subject positions, experienced this required movement between practice and analysis, albeit in different ways, as we simultaneously engaged these constructs in the work of conceptualizing our team methodology and collaborated in ongoing organizational projects. Piñacué and Perdomo conceptualized our meetings as *mingas*, an Andean form of labor-sharing, conveying through metaphor how we reconceptualized the “work” in fieldwork. In other words, we were transformed through collaboration in ways that both exposed the fallacies of Brubaker and Cooper’s dichotomy and demonstrated that it is possible to derive new insights as analysts as a result of the realignment of our agendas and conceptual toolkits in conversation with activists.

While much of what we learned about Caucaan politics can be acquired through close proximity to an indigenous organization, collaboration provides access to the kinds of internal discussions an external eth-

nographer would not normally be privy. But it goes further than that. Perdomo and Piñacué's constant deepening of the nested meanings of inside and outside provided a conceptual handle through which we were able to make sense of the complex situation that was unfolding. They not only provided us with opportunities for ethnographic observation but also shared their own analytical tools. This sharing compelled the nonindigenous team members to radically shift our understanding of the nature of ethnographic dialogue. We were not led to essentialize. In fact, we were entreated to do entirely the opposite: to focus on the ambivalences and heterogeneities of indigenous politics because Perdomo and Piñacué's appreciation of the movement provided them with an approximation of the shifting ground upon which they could construct and negotiate their cultural blueprints. They had to engage in constructivist analysis in order to propose seemingly essentialist futures for the Nasa. We had to follow their line of reasoning in order to maintain the dialogue. I do not think we academics would have comprehended as profoundly what we were seeing, if not for the ways that Perdomo and Piñacué forced us to mine the depths of the inside/outside distinction; instead, we would have remained mired in CRIC's culturalist discourse, which looks essentialist. Of course, in the end, we would write ethnography, while they would develop blueprints, something that was never in dispute. But our ethnography would be different from what it was before, adopting what Paul Gilroy (1993) has termed an "anti-anti-essentialist" perspective, which, through complicity—and not just intellectual but also political—melded the urgency and utopian standpoint of Perdomo and Piñacué with the thick description of "good ethnography."

The kind of ethnographic methodology I espouse in this article is not for everyone. It demands a level of commitment to long-term dialogue that is not possible for all scholars, a degree of trust that comes from years of working in the same place (particularly in the delicate situation of Colombia, where grassroots organizations' integrity is at stake) and, most important, a group of interlocutors who can take the lead in co-theorizing. However, our experience also bears lessons for those who do not choose to engage in collaboration. Contemporary discussions of how anthropology operates in the world (Field and Fox 2007) force academics to engage ideas and methodologies beyond the ivory tower of the university, something that many Colombian (and other

Latin American) anthropologists realized long ago. The concepts we encounter when we step out into the world should be incorporated into ethnographic interpretation. Indeed, conceptual vehicles that emerge from spaces that we have ignored in the past (the writings and discourses of the indigenous intellectuals of whom I write are but one example) can be discovered outside of a collaborative research relationship by simply paying attention to their presence, at the same time that we pay heed to other anthropological approaches that have historically engaged them. By entering into an intellectual dialogue with these ideas, we establish a horizontal form of complicity in which we acknowledge the capacity of ethnography's Other to theorize and to occupy locations similar to those of academic ethnographers.

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Notes

The research from which this article is drawn was conducted with southern Colombian indigenous organizations between 1996 and 2002, with the support of the Graduate School of Georgetown University, the Instituto Colombiano de Antropología (under a grant awarded by Colciencias), and an international collaborative grant from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. I am particularly grateful to the two interethnic collaborative teams with which I worked during this period, and which served as a space in which indigenous and nonindigenous researchers could engage in coanalysis: Graciela Bolaños, Myriam Amparo Espinosa, David Gow, Adonías Perdomo, Susana Piñacué, Abelardo Ramos, and Tulio Rojas. I am also indebted to a number of Colombian researchers whose ethnographic practice and thinking has served as a model for me, especially Orlando Fals Borda, Myriam Jimeno Santoyo, Pilar Riaño-Alcalá, and Luis Guillermo Vasco, as well as for critical comments, to Denise Brennan, Claudia Briones, Les Field, Gelya Frank, Charles Hale, and the anonymous reviewers for this article. Versions of this paper have been presented at Georgetown University, Harvard University, Universidad de Antioquia, and Universidad Nacional de Colombia; I thank the students at these institutions for their enthusiastic and perceptive commentaries. The work of Luke Eric Lassiter, Elaine Lawless, and Robin Ridington and Dennis Hastings has prodded me to deepen my appreciation of what constitutes collaborative research.

1. See the program description at <http://lasa.international.pitt.edu/specialprojects/crossaberes.html>.

2. The public anthropology Web site www.publicanthropology.org/Defining/definingpa.htm defines the collaborative endeavor in the following terms:

Public anthropology demonstrates the ability of anthropology and anthropologists to effectively address problems beyond the discipline—illuminating the larger social issues of our times as well as encouraging broad, public conversations about them with the explicit goal of fostering social change. It affirms our responsibility, as scholars and citizens, to meaningfully contribute to communities beyond the academy—both local and global—that make the study of anthropology possible.

Hale's definition of activist anthropology is, "the institutionalized practice of collaborative and politically engaged scholarship" (Hale 2007, 104).

3. If we focus exclusively on the research topics of contemporary Colombian anthropologists, we will not mine the depths of social engagement among academics there, given that in the past two decades scholars writing from northern locations have paid equal attention to Colombia's pressing social and political issues, including the study of violence (Riaño-Alcalá 2006), but also racial and ethnic politics (Ng'weno 2007) and human rights discourse (Tate 2007). For one, Colombian scholars were probing such issues long before the rest of us comprehended their importance (Arocha 1979; Friedemann 1975; Jimeno and Triana 1985). The earliest anthropologists, now in their eighties, actively pursued the study of such issues as sharecropping and land loss, forging contact with the forerunners of the indigenous movement.

4. A Colombian archaeologist, Martha Urdaneta, was also invited to engage in collaborative research with a Guambiano archaeological team (Urdaneta Franco 1988).

5. There are also North American examples of what I am calling co-theorizing, although they are less explicitly political than my Colombian example. In *Holy Women, Wholly Women*, Elaine Lawless (1993) recounts her experience with female ministers in mainstream Protestant denominations. In addition to collecting their life stories, Lawless engages in what she calls "reciprocal ethnography," a process of interpreting the autobiographies with the narrators themselves through her interventions in focus groups that these women invited her to attend; her exegetical exchanges with them are an integral part of her text, allowing the reader to follow closely the collaborative process. The result is a series of new insights into how women recount their life experiences, demonstrating crucial differences from characterizations of women's life history made in the academic literature.

6. The construction of picture-maps drew upon the previous experiences of Colombian activists with the neighboring Nasa ethnic group, by whom a series of thematic maps depicting key moments in Nasa history were produced as a tool for teaching and reflection, and for stimulating land-claims activities (Bonilla 1982). Bonilla's picture-map project was part of the program of La Rosca de Investigación y Acción Social, the organization that pioneered participatory action research in Colombia.

7. Chow's usage of the term "autoethnography," which I will return to later in this article, is most appropriate for those whom she calls the "formerly ethnographized," (1995, 180) those who have traditionally occupied a subordinate position in the ethnographic encounter.

8. Among the Guambiano members of the research team were individuals with advanced degrees as well as elders who had read widely. My own experience in Colombia

indicates that older activists with limited schooling are not unaware of the ethnography and history of their region and of the even larger corpus of political analysis by the left. That is to say, they are as sophisticated as elite informants, albeit in different ways.

9. I frequently come into contact with students anxious to engage in collaborative research. What the Guambiano history project suggests is that the academic counterpart in a collaborative venture must bring a wealth of experience to the table and that the challenge of collaborative research—at least, in the sense I am proposing, of co-theorization—can be better met by someone who already knows how to do good ethnography. This does not, however, cancel out the value for both ethnographer and community of more modest forms of collaboration, such as engaging in research at the request of a community, followed by a communal evaluation of the results of that work (Speed 2007), or assisting research subjects in a broad range of endeavors, such as translation, note-taking at meetings, or providing essential information (Sawyer 2004).

10. The joint interpretation of Guambiano history exemplifies a collaborative project in which external ethnographers and internal autoethnographers cooperate on a common research objective. Co-theorization can take a different tack, however, permitting groups of researchers, both internal and external, to use material they have collected in the course of their individual research projects to solve pressing issues that transcend their research agendas. The example I have in mind is an Argentine research group studying indigenous affairs at the University of Buenos Aires composed of academics and native people (Briones et al. 2007). Here, it is difficult to draw the line between ethnographer and subject, in part because some of the Mapuche members of the team are also academics, while some of the academic team-members are from Patagonian cities with large Mapuche populations, thus departing from the stereotype of the Buenos Aires–bred academic. In addition, all of the team members would see themselves as simultaneously engaging in research and activism. In this article, the four authors came together to evaluate the context in which neoliberal governments have opted to recognize indigenous rights, a topic that has received attention from other anthropologists (Hale 2002). Their discussions sought to counter the solitary task of the anthropologist, who is frequently seen as an “expert,” in contrast to local people (2007, 72). At the same time, the four discussants hoped to break down dichotomies between ethnographers and “informants”:

We also wanted to question the fragmentation that underlies the notion of polyphony, which leads us to the formation of contrasting, closed discursive blocks emphasizing the differences among our trajectories and coincidences. We wanted to avoid formats in which the “indigenous voice” would appear as an ethnographic record in the service of “anthropological writing.” (2007, 72)

In contrast, they hoped to illustrate that it is possible to engage in collaborative analysis as actors who draw as much on their ethnicity and profession as on their generational positions, the places in which they were raised, their specific articulations with the indigenous movement, and the theories with which they buttress their remarks, that is, as actors with heterogeneous social trajectories (2007, 73). The reader cannot identify any distinctly “Mapuche” discourse, although there are clear differences in the level of specificity at which each of the participants situated her or his analysis. There is no one who can clearly be identified as “ethnographer” or as “subject,” although there is an intense collaboration taking place. This is a case of co-theorizing in which the distinct lines of analysis are not so clearly drawn between ethnographer and subject but merge in myriad ways.

11. CRIC has a strong institutional presence in Cauca, controlling the educational systems of most Nasa communities and administering health programs for the indigenous population. Notwithstanding its legitimacy as an organization providing assistance to communities, CRIC also has a long history of clashes with the state, beginning with its early policy of occupying lands stolen from communities and its support in the 1980s of an indigenous guerrilla organization (Rappaport 2005b). Thus, its position vis-à-vis the Colombian state is contestatory and critical, and it has been at various moments in its history branded as leftist. Colombian indigenous communities are organized in *resguardos*, collective landholding corporations validated by colonial title. The *resguardo* is governed by a *cabildo*, an annually elected council that is commonly referred to in movement parlance as a “traditional authority.” Regional indigenous organizations are not generally recognized as “traditional authorities,” although their leaderships are selected by *cabildos*. For more on the tensions that have erupted around the legitimacy of the leadership of regional and national organizations, see Jackson (2002).

12. It is difficult to gauge the impact of our collaboration on the organizations with which we worked, particularly CRIC. The team’s major contribution to the Cauca indigenous movement was in its commitment to a horizontal dialogue and to the creation of a common research methodology, a significant goal given that Colombian indigenous organizations are engaged in a broad array of research projects in the areas of customary law, education, and health, frequently operating at odds with the provincial academic establishment. Our methodology was aired among cultural activists affiliated with CRIC’s bilingual-intercultural education program but was not discussed with the political leadership. Thus it would be presumptuous on my part to suggest that co-theorization had an impact on CRIC’s general politics, although it was engaged with interest by the programs in which many of CRIC’s research activities take place. However, our work did culminate in a number of tangible results, such as a history of CRIC’s bilingual education program (Bolaños et al. 2004) and a text on gender relations in Nasa society for use by local women’s organizations (Pancho, Bolaños, and Piñacué 2004), both of which have a wide readership in the organization. Team members also participated in a range of local workshops on gender, the Nasa alphabet, alternative development, local history, and customary law; these were much more about the content of our projects than about our methodology. The Nasa team members have intimated to me that the experience profoundly influenced their continued practice in the organization, especially in boosting their self-confidence and rigor as activist-researchers and in helping them with their writing. At an internal CRIC meeting in the late spring of 2008, held to discuss the expansion of their research agenda through the training of several hundred new researchers in an indigenous university that CRIC had recently founded, Piñacué made it clear to me that her position on indigenous research was forged in the cauldron of our team meetings.

13. Researchers who participated in the founding of CRIC in the early 1970s called this a process of “critical recuperation” of cultural forms, which were subsequently reappropriated in the interests of struggle (Bonilla et al. 1972, 51–52).

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