

# Emancipatory Methodologies: Knowledge Production and (Re)existence of the Misak People in Colombia

*Metodologías Emancipatorias: Producción consciente y (re)existencia del pueblo Misak en Colombia*

Rigoberto Banguero Velasco; Valerie V. V. Gruber

## ABSTRACT

Indigenous communities such as the Misak people in Colombia continue to struggle against the consequences of colonization and violence, but at the same time, they propose emancipatory methodologies of knowledge production. These practices towards epistemic justice are crucial to assure the (re)existence of indigenous peoples and their wisdom in *Abya Yala*. In this vein, our article sheds light on research methodologies rooted in Misak cosmogonies and processes to validate ancestral knowledge production. Through ethnographic and participatory action research in the indigenous reserve of Shura Manéla in the Colombian Cauca Department, we got insight into the spiral of persistent existence (*espiral de pervivencia*) and the law of origin of the Misak people. On this basis, we describe the *Latá-Latá* methodology reinvented by the community to recover their ancestral knowledge, and the *Pachakiwa* social cartography applied to depict their territorial relations. Moreover, we explain how collective validation processes work in practice. This serves to open up a transdisciplinary discussion on the potentials and the limitations of such vernacular research methodologies. We observe that healing from the trauma of colonization and inferiorization is a key driver of indigenous research processes. Therefore, developing further emancipatory methodologies based on equal subject-subject relations is an urgent task in the field of decoloniality. Learning from communities like the Misak is an invitation to become aware of the pluriversal complexity, listen to silenced sagacity, and find methods to pursue epistemic equality.

**Keywords:** Indigenous Research Methods; Emancipation; Misak; Colombia.

## RESUMEN

Comunidades indígenas como el pueblo Misak en Colombia continúan luchando contra las consecuencias de la colonización y la violencia, pero al mismo tiempo proponen metodologías emancipatorias de producción consciente. Estas prácticas destinadas a la justicia epistémica son fundamentales para asegurar la (re)existencia de los pueblos indígenas y su sabiduría en *Abya Yala*. En este sentido, el artículo enfoca las metodologías de investigación arraigadas en la cosmogonía Misak y los procesos de validación del conocimiento ancestral. Por medio de la etnografía y la investigación-acción participativa en el resguardo indígena de Shura Manéla en el Departamento colombiano del Cauca, se profundizó en la espiral de pervivencia y la ley de origen del pueblo Misak. A base de eso, se describe la metodología *Latá-Latá* reinventada por la comunidad para recuperar sus saberes ancestrales, y la cartografía social *Pachakiwa* aplicada para representar sus relaciones territoriales. Además, se explica cómo funcionan en la práctica los procesos de validación colectiva. Esto sirve para abrir un debate transdisciplinario sobre las potencialidades y las limitaciones de estas metodologías vernáculas de investigación. Se observa que sanar el trauma de la colonización y la inferiorización es un impulsor clave de los procesos de investigación en las comunidades indígenas. Por lo tanto, continuar desarrollando metodologías emancipatorias basadas en relaciones sujeto-sujeto igualitarias es una tarea urgente en el campo de la decolonialidad. Comunidades como los Misak nos invitan a una concientización con respecto a la complejidad del pluriverso, la sabiduría silenciada y los métodos orientados hacia la igualdad epistémica.

**Palabras clave:** Métodos ancestrales de investigación; Emancipación; Misak; Colombia.



## INFORMATION:

<https://doi.org/10.46652/pacha.v3i8.95>

ISSN 2697-3677

Vol. 3, No. 8, 2022. e21095

Quito, Ecuador

Submitted: febrero 14, 2022

Accepted: junio 03, 2022

Published: junio 20, 2022

Dossier Section | Peer Reviewed

Continuous publication



## AUTHORS:

 **Rigoberto Banguero Velasco**

Universidad del Valle - Colombia

[rigoberto.banguero@correounivalle.edu.co](mailto:rigoberto.banguero@correounivalle.edu.co)

 **Valerie V. V. Gruber**

Universidad de Bayreuth - Alemania

[Valerie.Gruber@uni-bayreuth.de](mailto:Valerie.Gruber@uni-bayreuth.de)

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

El autor declara que no existe conflicto de interés posible.

## FUNDING

This article is the outcome of research conducted within the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence at the University of Bayreuth, funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) under Germany's Excellence Strategy – EXC 2052/1 – 390713894.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank Dr. Gilbert Shang Ndi for his valuable collaboration in the translation of this article into English.

## NOTE

An earlier version of this paper was presented in the Knowledge Lab of the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence at the University of Bayreuth on 07 January 2021.

## ENTIDAD EDITORA



## 1. Introduction

“You can kill people – genocide – but you cannot kill ideas” – epistemicide (Mignolo, 2018, p. 191). The (re)existence of indigenous thought in *Abya Yala* and elsewhere is a living proof of that dictum, although ancestral knowledge systems continue to be inferiorized and minoritized due to historical and ongoing processes of colonization, capitalism, enslavement and violence. The Misak people from the Cauca Department in Colombia provide an important, but little-known example of such (re)existence against the supposed superiority of Western thinking and doing. While they are named *Guambianos* in the Colombian census – a denomination that has its roots in Spanish colonization, they self-identify as Misak, meaning ‘children of the water’. Their Misak University and the research processes within the community are illuminating initiatives in the struggle for epistemic justice. Therefore, we explore and discuss emancipatory methodologies of collective knowledge production developed by the Misak community in this article, as well as the indigenous cosmogonies in which they are rooted. We are guided by the following questions: How can we reclaim indigenous research methodologies and make them visible within and beyond *Abya Yala*? How can we validate processes of ancestral knowledge production?

Indigenous communities like the Misak elaborate emancipatory methodologies inscribed in their everyday realities, since existing scientific theories hardly conform to their life-worlds. Even in the field of decolonial thinking, publications on indigenous research methodologies such as the ground-breaking work of Bagele Chilisa (2020) from the University of Botswana are still rare. A South-South exchange on these topics between Latin America and Africa, for example, is further complicated by the fact that knowledges and reflections coming from *Abya Yala* are hardly available in languages different from Spanish. To open up these dialogues, we write this article in English and include concepts in the *Nam-trik* language spoken by the Misak people. Thereby, we strive for an understanding of social emancipation that goes beyond Western modernity. The latter is controlled by metonymic reason, implying dichotomies and hierarchies that make it impossible to think outside of imposed totalities, such as the North as opposed and superior to the South, or the man as opposed and superior to the woman (Santos, 2006). By contrast, we aspire to a dialogical and relational conception of Epistemologies of the South, creating “ecologies of knowledges” (Santos, 2016).

With this in mind, the objective of this article is to reflect on emancipatory methodologies that can recover the *vide-cible* (‘see-able’). This concept recognizes the realities experienced by historically marginalized peoples such as the Misak, who keep in their collective memory their way of being, their feelings, what they have *seen* and what is *sayable* through voices that reclaim what has been neglected or hidden through colonization, violence, neoliberalism and extractivism. This entails wiping off the dust and making visible what has been preserved by the communities to assure their (re)existence (Correa Vidal & González Martínez, 2020). We begin by reflecting on our approach to Participatory Action Research before we describe and discuss the indigenous *Latá-Latá* methodology as well as ways of doing social cartography developed by the Misak to represent and analyse the relational life-worlds in which they live.

## 2. Methodology

This article is the result of a transdisciplinary collaboration between an organic intellectual who has been working with the Misak community for many years, and an external researcher who complemented this perspective through participant observation and literature review. According to Gramsci (1967), the term ‘organic intellectual’ does not only refer to someone who makes common cause with the working class, but also to bourgeois organic intellectuals. However, his idea of the ‘traditional intellectual’ was specifically linked to the modern or capitalist order. Modernity, especially in the nineteenth century, had produced an autonomy of the cultural sphere, through which the lettered symbolically substantiated the old regime. The different positionalities, experiences and identities of the two authors stimulated a constant intercultural dialogue throughout the research process, and did not impede them from finding synergies between the academic perspectives of ethno-history and social geography.

Both authors did ethnographic fieldwork in the Misak territory, an indigenous reserve in the Municipality of Silvia in the Colombian Cauca Department, where the sacred place of Shura Manéla is located, a giant rock with a sort of stone-covered cave entrance. Both authors listened to Misak people sitting around the *Nakchak*, which is the hearth that represents the grandfather and his ancestral knowledge. Both authors learned from members of the Misak University, where the symbol of the spiral is omnipresent, as shown in figure 1: the biocultural and spiritual spiral, the social spiral, the planning spiral, the spiral of justice with indigenous law as corpus, and the spiral of original wisdom in conscious knowledge production. This is where the elders (sages) can read the history, as well as their vision of society as a whole and the way how things are interconnected. The origin of time and space is marked in the spiral. Everything begins in its centre and returns to it. The Misak say that the future is behind our backs, and what we have in front of us is the legacy of our ancestors. Thus, in a time spiral, they never lose sight of the origin.

Figure 1: Spirals and the Nakchak at the Misak University



Photo by the authors, 2018

To explore emancipatory methodologies rooted in this cosmogony, it is crucial to adopt an approach of *sentipensamiento* within the life-world of the Misak people, even though their territory is not always easy to access due to the dynamics of the Colombian conflict. This idea of “Thinking-Feeling with the Earth” (Escobar, 2016) invites us to learn from a community struggling for a life in dignity in their territory. What matters regarding this approach is an empathetic attitude towards the people, without imposing the norms of a supposed scientific objectivity. Exploring methods of knowledge production in the Shura Manéla territory does not leave any chance for academic superiority. Rather, it requires commitment that reinforces the authentic participation of the community (Fals Borda, 2017). Overcoming the subject-object binomial generates a creative potential that implies the rejection of dogmatism and authoritarian power structures proposed by modern science methodologies.

In this light, the position of the organic intellectual allows for an ongoing co-production of knowledges through action grounded on reflection with the Misak community. This process follows the general principles of Participatory Action Research developed by Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda (Kemmis et al., 2014; Robles Lomeli & Rappaport, 2018). Thereby, the research process becomes organic, as it is organised in cycles – or spirals – of reflection-action-reflection and return to action. Fals Borda states that: “the only validity criterion of scientific knowledge is praxis, understood as a dialectical unit formed by theory and practice, in which practice is cyclically determining” (1984, p. 28, our translation). He further argues:

These steps can be taken simultaneously or following the reflection-action rhythm by approaching and distancing oneself from the base. The idea was to foster an exchange between concepts and facts, appropriate observations, concrete action or pertinent practice, to determine the validity of what was observed, returning to reflection according to the results of practice, and producing pre-concepts or ad hoc standpoints on a new level, so the rhythmic cycle of action research could be reinitiated indefinitely. (1984, pp. 29-30, our translation)

This allows for an in-depth analysis of all activities carried out during fieldwork, beginning from how to insert into the community useful scientific knowledge in a way that overcomes the barriers of alienation to which these social groups have been subjected, considering their lack of access to political pedagogy. Alienation is a process through which people become estranged from themselves, so their consciousness is transformed in such a way that it loses the characteristics that until then were given. Our participatory approach aims at overcoming such alienation to reclaim ancestral knowledges. The results are not primarily focused on academic outcome such as articles, books, research groups for promotions or committee work. By contrast, what emerges from participatory methodologies is the awareness of the participants and knowledges relevant to build their future. In the case of the Misak community, we have been working on the plan for persistent existence (*plan de pervivencia*), a basic pillar of the life project in the community and a road map of ethno-development aimed at transforming social reality. This plan invites the Misak people to build social and economic policies aimed at improving their community life and their ancestral *tatamera* and *mamamera* authority, who live in close relation with nature. It proposes a

policy of strengthening ancestral authority and thereby, establishing territorial autonomy, building new relations between indigenous and non-indigenous authorities, and overcoming centuries of distrust.

In this way, participatory methodologies produce the encounter of different worldviews, that of engaged academic researchers and their telluric or regional counterpart (Fals Borda, 2017). This alternative rationality contributes to redefining the emancipatory methodologies with which the communities had been working before, but which have not yielded the expected results in their struggle for political participation. Against this backdrop, we facilitate a more truly democratic research process based on the cosmo-existence of the Misak. This premise is different from positivist methodologies that disrupt the relation between equals, turning minoritized subjects into research objects. By contrast, our approach seeks to establish subject-subject relations based on equality, while enabling transdisciplinary dialogues.

### **3. Results: Emancipatory methodologies in the territory of Shura Manéla**

#### **3.1 The *Latá-Latá* methodology: a collective endeavor based on the law of origin**

According to the plan for persistent existence (*plan de pervivencia*) of the Shura Manéla community, the *Latá-Latá* methodology is a philosophy of life whose practitioners are thinking-feeling beings (*sentipensantes*) ready to fight for changes by understanding their realities better. *Latá-Latá* refers to receiving and sharing always in equality. It is based on the law of origin of the Misak people and aims at strengthening their key principles: parity (biological difference and cosmic-human equality of man-woman); reciprocity (giving to the other in exactly equal measure to maintain the collective spirit in the territory); and complementarity (the man-woman duality implies mutual help to achieve a good life). ‘The same for everyone’ has always been a key dictum in the Misak culture. Therefore, we can observe *Latá-Latá* at work, in *mingas*, in all social relations. Not giving preference to anyone implies granting them what corresponds to them, accompanying and sharing in the work while strengthening community processes. This important concept paves the way to the understanding of justice and the specific forms of law and authority in the Misak community (Nu yapalø authority, 2020). Consequently, it is also the basis for epistemic justice and collective knowledge production.

The *Latá-Latá* methodology is bound to the spiral of persistent existence (*espiral de pervivencia*) whereby everything is related, the material, the spiritual and the cosmic. The dynamic circular line of the spiral ascends and descends, conducting energy between mother earth (*Pachamama*) and the cosmos, which is the living totality. This entails a reconnection between science and spirituality, both of which are possible in a communal society that is collective in a deep cosmic sense and fully identified with nature. The Misak people distance themselves from the individual in order to enter the cosmic totality. Their concept of totality, however, is different from the Western point of view which contracts the present by reducing the diversity of reality towards very limited, concrete typologies and logics (Santos, 2006). This cultural difference



causes conflicts with the majoritarian society dominated by epistemic racism, which stigmatises, devalues and mythologises spirituality. Nevertheless, spirituality is powerful from the onset because it is internalised in all existing structures when dogma transcends the individual.

The duality for complementarity begins with the understanding that there is no order between man-woman-man. In the case of Christian genesis, creation starts with the man, and from that ensues the woman. Therefore, peonage, land ownership and conquest depend on a type of society that imposes a particular hierarchy on its different components. The *Latá-Latá* methodology, in turn, does not permit this hierarchical structuration because there is reconnection, that is, the science-spirituality union is inseparable for the Misak. This bonding is born in their law of origin. It cannot be understood through the category of evolution, but emanantism – a theory according to which what is represented as the content of consciousness is the only reality as opposed to what is external to it. Following this doctrine, the entire world, including the soul of each human being, comes by emanation or flow from the divine totality or primordial One, mediately or immediately. It is not synonymous with creationism, since it does not refer to the temporal or ex nihilo beginning of the world, but rather a philosophical notion. For instance, the scientists of the Andean world developed astronomy to observe celestial phenomena for agricultural production and ecocultural calendars. Hence, the philosophy of *Buen Vivir* (good living) is based on the scientific basis of astronomical studies that embody the totality, while Western methodologies that favour the analysis of individuals in communities do not reflect the lived reality in these life-worlds.

Consequently, the *Latá-Latá* methodology is based on the *Alik-minga* (work-family-community). *Alik-minga* refers to the *minga* that constitutes a fundamental part of the community's thinking and way of living. The elders say that the *minga* is like a celebration, a great moment for all the Misak to be together. It aims at consolidating their process of (re)existence and cultural permanency in time and space. They reject a linear conception of time that reflects a supposed progress, modernization, development and globalization, in which those considered as the most advanced always forge ahead while the rest is discriminated against as backward or residual. The residual is a form of producing absences and stigmatising entire peoples as primitive and wild (Santos, 2006). Through this, differences are naturalised, and colonised groups are forced into a teleological time-space, intending to deprive them of their history and geography, to freeze their cosmogonies as pre-modern others, and to impose a violent “chromatics of power” (Albán Achinte, 2009, p. 84, our translation) upon them.

In the face of this reality, emancipatory methodologies of knowledge production emerge in communities such as the Misak in the Shura Manéla territory. They help them to position themselves in the exercise of their own authority, strengthening the principles of spirituality, nature, transcendence, indigenous identity, ancestral knowledge, oral tradition, healing practices, vernacular economy, food autonomy, family, work and indigenous rights as constituent elements that underlie their notion of *Buen Vivir* (good living). Through the *Latá-Latá* methodology, the

Misak develop their own categories, concepts and critically examine whether to adopt paradigms other than those dictated by their law of origin. They (re)evaluate the dynamics of knowledge production and organise seminars, workshops, congresses and other collective activities in their *Nu-Pirao* (the Shura Manéla territory) to analyse ways to improve their material and spiritual conditions. Thereby, they bring into dialogue the empirical knowledge of each of the participants. Empirical knowledge is obtained through direct experience and perception of the real world, without going through abstractions or imaginations. It is the knowledge that tells us what the world is like, which things exist and what their characteristics are. This type of knowledge is the basis of materialistic approaches to reality, that is, of those that seek to understand what there is from what already exists.

In practice, the *palabreo* (palaver) technique is the centre that facilitates authentic participation and consensus of the whole community. It is a key element in decision-making, for example, in the administration of justice and conflict resolution by means of mediation and negotiation between different clans and with people or organisations from outside the community. Even children attend these assemblies. Unlike in Western cultures, where small groups of people considered as experts take decisions and generate knowledge, in the Misak culture all people use the techniques of consensus and dissent. In some African societies, the Baobab tree would be the place of the *palabreo* (palaver), where decisions are made, mortals and deities interact and all members can talk without exception. Consequently, there is no inequality with respect to being carriers of knowledge in the *Nu-Pirao* (territory), because all community members have as their source the law of origin. As a philosophy of communication with the cosmos, collective thinking is maintained and sustained; the individual has no foothold in an indigenous community. One makes sure that there are no owners of their sciences or specialists, because the individual appropriation of science would break the horizontal chain that maintains the political-organizational structure of the community, as the spiral constitutes an unstoppable return: law of origin-cosmos.

As illustrated in figure 2, the Misak plot everything during these meetings, creating an aesthetics-art relation that flows into communication, since they did not use recognised alphabets until those were imposed by the Spanish colonisers. They keep their historical documents as products of their graphical representations and preserve their languages such as *Nam-trik*. The *Latá-Latá* methodology revitalises these linguistic and anthropomorphic aspects of their culture. Thereby, they revisit oral narratives in order to recover historical, dissident and hidden memories (the *vide-cible*, i.e. the see-able). They re-examine their own archives, audio-visual material such as videos and historical photographs periodically. This review of primary and secondary sources allows for meticulous analyses of historical antecedents and contemporary struggles. Their collective vision is to create social, cultural, economic-productive and political guidelines. This strengthens not only language and thinking, but the whole cosmo-existence, that is, the cultural, spiritual, environmental and productive endowment of the Misak community.

Figure 2: Members of the Misak community plotting their lifeworld



Photo by the authors, 2020

### 3.2 *Pachakiwa*: social cartography in line with indigenous notions of territory

Within the framework of the *Latá-Latá* methodology, territory plays a particularly important role. For the Misak, territory is part of their being, in which the earth, water, forests, moorlands, rocks, fire, animals, medicinal plants, sacred spirits, are all interconnected. This is expressed in the concept of *Misak-Misak*, which refers to the territory-human relation. All components of the living space are closely connected, constituting the *Pachamama* (mother earth-human). *Pachamama* is the feminine goddess of the earth and fertility, a benign agricultural divinity conceived of as the mother who nourishes, protects and sustains human beings. In the Inca tradition, she is the deity of communal agriculture, foundation of all civilization and the Andean State. On a smaller scale, the Misak relate closely to the *Nu-Pirao*, which is their originary Shura Manéla territory where they live and hold land rights characterised by customary tenure. This is embedded in the *Nu pire*, referring to the *Abya Yala* continent currently known as America.

To achieve a comprehensive view of all these territorial components, their actors and symbolic meanings, the Misak create maps and relate them to each other in a social cartography dynamic called *Pachakiwa*. The maps are made for and by the community of Shura Manéla to build their future. The Misak organise themselves and share their knowledge in an integral way, that is, with egalitarian participation. This strategy enables a shared reflection and analysis of the living space of the Misak, comprising all the social, environmental, cultural, spiritual and productive interrelations. Their notion of territory embraces everything: sacred spaces such as



the moorlands and lagoons, spirit houses, spaces for cohabitation and production, infrastructure and dream spaces. This shows that the Misak are not homocentric, as they believe in spirits amidst nature, in the underworld and in the cosmos. The physical body and the soul constitute the spirit, and the maps capture this integrated domain of realities.

To draw and interpret the maps, the community is distributed according to age groups. These narrating groups allow for efficient communication and create a constructive pedagogical setting for a collective reading of their territory. Founders and elders are invited to express themselves through dreams concerning the natural space. The different perspectives complement each other and serve as a fundamental basis to develop the spiral of persistent existence (*espiral de pervivencia*) as a guide for life in the Shura Manéla territory and its *Nu-páyale*, the authority of the reserve headed by a governor. The cycle concludes with a plenary session to openly exchange on the community life represented in the maps. As shown in figure 3, different mapping techniques are combined and drawings are digitized. This interaction generates integral insights that are very close to the realities of the Misak. One can recognise the relational components of the territory, such as environmental offering, cultural composition, social fabric, vernacular economic activities, spiritual practices, and the political-administrative structure of the *Cabildo*.

Figure 3: Social cartography in the Misak community



Photo by the authors, 2020

This illustrates that the *Latá-Latá* methodology is a cosmo-existential spiral of life woven into the *Nu pirø* (continent). It is difficult and very time-consuming for external researchers to apprehend the Misak conception of territory as the vital element of origin and existence. Only after many years, when they become organic intellectuals, they will be able to capture with their senses that territory is much more than a geographical entity. For the Misak, territory implies the reciprocal relation between the ‘children of the water’ and *Pishimisak*, a spirit that inhabits

the sacred territory. *Pishimisak* shows the way to take care of the house. The footsteps of this spirit lead through paths of crystalline waters and mountains where the secret of life is hidden. Hence, territorial relations are about caring, harmonising, balancing and presenting offerings to the lagoons, mountains and forests, where the spirits of the moorlands and the rain live, places where dreams of other times sprout and life refuses to perish. Sages remember this through the law of origin.

Consequently, the territory is a living space in balance with those who inhabit it. For the Misak and other cosmogonically Andean cultures, the moorlands and the forests are considered spaces of purity, generators of life and supreme sacredness. They are covered by a halo of mystery, since these heights are the natural habitat of very pure supernatural forces. Those who want to enter these sacred spaces must perform a ritual of cleansing, spiritual and corporal harmonisation. Accordingly, the Misak category of *Ketramera* comprises the space for life and spirituality, which cannot be depicted through Western methods of cartography or geographic information systems. Therefore, developing emancipatory methodologies to represent their territory in the way in which they experience it is vital for the Misak. They recognise that subjects are embedded in a specific territorial context when carrying out their practices, giving foundation to the law of origin by which they are guided. This conception of social and spiritual experience is often ignored by sciences inferred from Western rationality.

#### 4. Discussion

The examples of *Latá-Latá* and *Pachakiwa* show that the Misak people consider research and learning not as a linear process, but rather as one that occurs through conversation circles in which all community members, the elements of nature and the ancestors are in constant interaction. This implies creating their own research spaces and carrying out their own reading of the territory to enhance knowledges and practices. Thereby, they generate possibilities for dialogue, cohabitation and interaction with other cultures and multiple ways of perceiving the world. All experience is valuable when thinking about ways of egalitarian interaction, collective construction and consensual validation. In this way, indigenous communities such as the Misak are deconstructing the basis of metonymic reason. In their cosmo-existential system of spirals located in their territory, all materiality is linked to the spiritual and the cosmic order. All living beings, be they intelligent, non-intelligent or material, are connected to and complement each other; they are reciprocal. This relationality is maintained to keep the balance between collective actors and the law of origin: the ordering and creating principle that is mobilised through ancestry to regulate all materiality and spirituality in the territories. According to the Misak worldview, this maintains order in the universe.

The law of origin gives birth to a worldview that is the entirety of logical, epistemological, methodological, axiological and metaphysical presuppositions of specific claims to knowledge. These elements are presuppositions of beliefs, theories, practices and actions. In the *Misak-Misak* worldview, people conceive of themselves as children of the word, dreams and water. Their

approach to identity, dignity and permanence of life is in accordance with the existence and experience of ancestry based on the vital liquid (father-mother): “water, seed of all living species, visible and invisible; the earth is the feminine germ that, when united with water, becomes fertile and perpetuates life” (Muelas, 2007, our translation). The symbolic order represented in this cosmogony allows for the lived articulation of materiality with the cosmos.

Emancipatory methodologies based on such cosmogonies enable the authentic participation of the respective communities. Applying the *Latá-Latá* methodology empowers the collective subject in the Shura Manéla territory to break the asymmetric relation of submission and dependence implied in the Western subject-object binomial. Authentic participation is rooted in the cultural traditions of the common people and their real history (not the elitist version) permeated by genuinely democratic feelings and attitudes of a communal, neighbourhood, rural, urban or peasant nature. This helps preserve values that have survived through practices of resistance and re-existence, despite the destructive impact of conquests, violence, epistemic racism and all kinds of foreign invasions. Hence, the *Latá-Latá* approach enables the Misak to assume the role of researchers within a framework of horizontal relationships. From practical experience, however, we know that bridging the gap between indigenous research methods and academia implies a mutual process of pedagogic training and capacity building with key actors to make sure that the process benefits the whole collective and the results meet the quality expectations of all actors involved. This is in line with Paulo Freire’s (2005) seminal work “Pedagogy of the Oppressed”, and is more complex if the communities are larger and more heterogeneous.

Nevertheless, the major challenge remains how to combine the experiential with the academic, which continues to be dominated by Western intellectual thought. Considering the relation between thinking and being as a specific location in the territory implies a radical ontological change. In the context of working with indigenous and other minoritised groups, emancipatory methodologies need to understand theory in a way that brings together these different types of knowledges, navigating between everyday community life and academic ivory tower abstractions. While institutionalised university spaces demand highest scientific standards in theory production, mostly under time pressure, the community asks for practical knowledge relevant in the “lived space” (Lefebvre, 1991), where the collective researcher-subject shares information which allows for social transformation in a long-term perspective. This requires a balancing act, breaking with pure activism in order to adopt ethical-political principles that contribute to a transdisciplinary dialogue between different scientific positions and possible alternative or emerging paradigms coming from communities in struggle (Fals Borda, 2017).

The fact that the *Latá-Latá* methodology does not make a sharp distinction between the researcher and the researched requires that the people involved in the process identify common needs and ends, and constantly share the research findings. In other words, emancipatory methodologies are adjusted to the real needs of the communities, and not just to those of the academic system. It is necessary to agree with the communities on the empirical measurement

techniques such as statistics and the organisation of the material, given that including these analytical tools can enhance the understanding of the reality at local and regional levels. In spite of their approach coming from positivist sociology, such complementary tools can be used to train the communities with whom the research experience is developed, contributing to strengthen their political claims.

Apart from such specific occasions, however, we acknowledge that most of modern science rather prevents indigenous people from understanding their reality than raising political consciousness and guiding them towards an emancipatory praxis rooted in their ancestral knowledge. As we need to recognise in a self-critical manner, this is one of the theoretical-conceptual asymmetries that could that can only partially be overcome by Participatory Action Research. If external researchers facilitate the process, the moment will come for them to distance themselves from the community and start reflection, before returning to action. In this case, the systematic return of knowledge to the community is mostly controlled by the external researcher. On the other hand, social groups such as the Misak can act as gatekeepers, authorising and legitimising the researchers' presence in their territory. If it is convenient to them, they demand commitment as an ethical marker oriented towards the decolonisation of thinking. They are aware of the fact that unlike Participatory Action Research, their own approaches such as *Latá-Latá* and *Pachakiwa* are rooted in their law of origin and, therefore, are more targeted towards their needs for decolonial healing than any methodology originating from other worldviews. They produce liberating knowledge focused on their life project in the *Nu-Pirao* (territory), where the *Nakchak* (hearth) unites and weaves life as an organised community.

Nonetheless, Participatory Action Research continues to be an important research methodology that paves the way to work with and for minoritised groups by facilitating their mobilisation against exploitation, repression and despotism. It has the potential to raise awareness of changeable social conditions among peasant groups, workers, teachers, artists, ethnic minorities, student groups – in short, all kinds of popular movements that have been fighting and continue to fight against repression by the constitutional state or armed organisations, for the control of territories both in urban and rural areas. In this regard, Participatory Action Research is a useful approach to explore and develop methodologies of knowledge production that are rooted in indigenous cosmogonies, like the *Latá-Latá* approach..

## 5. Conclusion

Indigenous peoples such as the Misak are struggling to heal from their trauma of colonisation, while they continue to (re)exist in the face of multiple forms of domination. Against this backdrop, organising community processes such as the *Latá-Latá* methodology in the Misak reserve of Shura Manéla in the Colombian Cauca region helps reclaim neglected identities and reconstruct the spiral of life. (Re)creating methodologies related to the cosmo-existence of the Misak people is a form of epistemological and ontological emancipation. Hence, it is more than

just a set of methods – in fact, it is a framework that *makes sense* to indigenous communities. Emancipatory methodologies replace the hierarchical structure proposed by modern science with another one that is more appropriate for the real interests, needs and capacities in these territories. Here arises the criterion of validity of scientific knowledge: praxis, conceived of as a dialectical unity formed by theory and practice, is understood by these groups as political action aimed at assuring their territorial (re)existence and, ultimately, transforming the (post)colonial and racist structure of society.

Emancipatory methodologies stem from the sociocultural and political experiences of minoritised communities (Afro-descendants, indigenous, workers, gender groups, workers, environmentalists, etc.). They decolonise thinking and foreground what they consider theirs: that which originates from empirical knowledge produced with all of the actors. The latter are the ones who ultimately validate knowledges and practices through cycles and spirals. They bring creativity into play, conferring it identity through a dialogue of knowledges, a crucial methodological technique for discussion and participatory reflection. This methodological route develops cycles of reflection, transiting all the time between past-present-past. So the future settles in the past, recovering the popular – and not the hegemonic – version of history, reinforcing the self-esteem of minoritised groups. This relationality is connected to language and requires inclusive communication, whereby incorporating arts, aesthetics and poetics can be helpful. In this way, it is possible to establish harmonious relations within a collectivity such as the Misak, as well as a dialogue among different types of knowledges. Thus far, ancestral knowledge has only scarcely been circulating in university cloisters. If at all there are advances, they can possibly be identified in the sphere of decolonial theory, but hardly in practice.

Against this backdrop, focusing on emancipatory methodologies invites us to develop new research and training tools such as intergenerational dialogue, cultural maps, conflict maps and different types of historical archives. Through such approaches, researchers can contribute to assure the epistemological and ontological (re)existence of marginalised groups. In the *Latá-Latá* methodology described in this article, the indigenous law of origin works as a creative principle in its ontological relation with being and the cosmos. It is an emancipatory methodology that enables the Misak community to (re)create dignifying senses of existence and to feel, think, speak and do for themselves, while building knowledges. It aims at carrying out transdisciplinary dialogues with different institutional, public and academic actors, as its practitioners strive for the collaboration of people with other knowledges and technical skills, benefitting minoritised groups by way of a fruitful interaction based on equality. This can contribute to the integral development of the community with respect to their spiral of persistent existence (*espiral de pervivencia*).

Ultimately, it remains crucial to analyse the historical, social and political conditions in which transdisciplinary knowledge production arises as a proposal for research and training, examining the ruptures that occur in scientific rationality. Far from considering it mechanically as knowledge, we should rather conceive of science as a historical construct with defined limits, which mostly



ignores the pluriverse worlds and the social experiences of cultures stigmatised as inferior others. A coherent response to this problem is to recognise and respect the experience and dignity of subjects in social struggles. As such, it is pertinent to avoid appropriating information from the actors and distorting their life-worlds. Since Western logic was transformed into a universalised feature of human thought without taking into account other(ed) social experiences, a single story has prevailed for a long time. If we want to overcome “the danger of a single story” (Adichie, 2019), we need to pave the way for emancipatory methodologies and a transdisciplinary dialogue based on the precepts of cultural/human equality.

## References

- Adichie, C. N. (2019). *El peligro de la historia única / The Danger of a Single Story*. Random House.
- Albán Achinte, A. (2009). Artistas indígenas y afrocolombianos: entre las memorias y las cosmovisiones. Estéticas de la re-existencia. In, Z. Palermo (Ed.). *Arte y estética en la encrucijada descolonial*, (pp. 83-112). Del Signo.
- Chilisa, B. (2020). *Indigenous Research Methodologies*. Sage.
- Correa Vidal, E. & González Martínez, J. A. (2020). *Pandoras en Colombia, recorriendo huellas*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Escobar, A. (2016). Thinking-feeling with the Earth: Territorial Struggles and the Ontological Dimension of the Epistemologies of the South. *AIBR: Revista de Antropología Iberoamericana*, 11(1), 11-32. <https://doi.org/10.11156/aibr.110102e>
- Fals Borda, O. (1984). *El problema de cómo investigar la realidad para transformarla por la praxis*. Ediciones Tercer Mundo.
- Fals Borda, O. (2017). *Campesinos de los Andes y otros escritos antológicos*. Editorial Universidad Nacional de Colombia.
- Freire, P. (2005). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Continuum.
- Gramsci, A. (1967). *La formación de los intelectuales*. Editorial Grijalbo.
- Kemmis, S., McTaggart, R. & Nixon, R. (2014). *The Action Research Planner: Doing Critical Participatory Action Research*. Springer. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-981-4560-67-2>
- Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The Production of Space*. Blackwell.
- Mignolo, W. D. (2018). Colonial/Imperial Differences: Classifying and Inventing Global Orders of Lands, Seas, and Living Organisms. In, W. D. Mignolo & C. E. Walsh (Eds.). *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*, (pp. 177-193). Duke University Press.
- Muelas, J. (2007). Identidad cultural para la permanencia digna de la vida del pueblo Misak. *Revista Semillas*, 32/33: *Tierra y Territorios II*. <https://www.semillas.org.co/es/revista/identidad-cultural-para-la-permanencia-digna-de-la-vida-del-pueblo-misak-1>
- Nu yapalø authority. (2020). *Espiral de pervivencia del resguardo originario Misak del territorio Shura Manéla, 2020-2030*. Unpublished manuscript.

Robles Lomeli, J. D. & Rappaport, J. (2018). Imagining Latin American Social Science from the Global South: Orlando Fals Borda and Participatory Action Research. *Latin American Research Review*, 53(3), 597-612. <https://doi.org/10.25222/larr.164>

Santos, B. d. S. (2006). *Renovar la teoría crítica y reinventar la emancipación social*. Clacso.

Santos, B. d. S. (2016). *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide*. Routledge.

---

#### AUTORES

**Rigoberto Banguero Velasco.** Doctor en Humanidades de la Universidad del Valle (Colombia). Magíster en Educación Popular y Licenciado en Ciencias Sociales de la Universidad Santiago de Cali (Colombia).

Rector de la Institución Educativa San Antonio, Santander de Quilichao, Departamento del Cauca.

Profesor invitado al Doctorado de Humanidades en la Universidad del Valle. Investigador asociado en el proyecto de investigación-acción participativa “Moral Geographies of Re-Existence” en la Universidad de Bayreuth (Alemania).

**Valerie V. V. Gruber.** Investigadora en el Cluster de Excelencia “Africa Multiple” de la Universidad de Bayreuth (Alemania), doctoranda en Geografía Social y Junior Fellow en la Escuela Internacional de Posgrado en Estudios Africanos de Bayreuth (BIGSAS). Tiene una maestría y un pregrado en Estudios Culturales y Administración Internacional de la Universidad de Passau (Alemania), donde se especializó en Estudios Latinoamericanos. Gracias a varias becas, realizó estancias de estudio en la Universidad de La Laguna (España), la Universidade Federal da Bahia (Brasil) y la Universidad del Valle (Colombia).