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A look at intercultural archaeology from the Colombian Caribbean

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Acuto's manuscript is a gateway to understanding what could be called 'Indigenous Latin American Archaeology' (or 'Indigenous Archaeology in Latin America'). This manuscript summarizes several arguments that have shaped the theoretical panorama of Latin American Indigenous archaeology in recent decades. The first argument is of a historical order. Clearly,

the construction of national identities in Latin America that began in the 19th century after the wars of independence set forward a programmatic agenda concerning the question of the region's Indigenous populations. The core of this agenda was to eradicate Indigenous populations so that the territories could be populated with modern citizens. So once the new Latin American republics were recognized, the project of clearing what would represent the Indigenous background was undertaken.

In this regard, regional nuances must be distinguished. The whitening agenda that happened in the southern cone was not the same as that which occurred in northern South America. In Colombia, for example, the end of the 19th century did not involve the extermination campaigns that occurred in the Argentine Pampas. Colombian liberals at the beginning of the 20th century promoted a policy of reshaping Indigenous identity and culture through education (Londoño 2003). This led Colombia to cede control of education in the rural sector to the Catholic Church. In any case, there was no process of physical extermination as with the one that accompanied the desert campaigns in Argentina and, later, the migration of people from Italy and Spain, mainly.

These nuances are important because they lead us to another theme that emerges in Acuto's manuscript: Indigenous social movements in Latin America in recent decades. In the case of Colombia, the Indigenous social movements of the south-west of the country have been more forceful and incisive in forming an intercultural political agenda, which makes sense given that these organizations have had links and ties with republican governments since the 19th century. In the Department of Cauca in Colombia, for example, the Nasa exchanged political autonomy for the support for the Cauca armies in the civil wars of the second half of the 19th century (Londoño 2003). This is important because the archaeological agenda among the Nasa, who have been in dialogue on terms of relative equality with the state since the second half of the 19th century, is not the same as that of the Muisca Cabildos, of the Sabana de Bogotá, for example, which reflect processes of ethnogenesis that began at least at the end of the 20th century (López 2022). It is not unimportant that the Misak, neighbours of the Nasa, have been doing Indigenous archaeology projects since the 1980s (Vasco 2016), which would make them pioneers in Latin America, which is understandable because they are ethnic group with a historical awareness of the fight for their identity and their territory; this awareness has been brewing since the very beginnings of the republic.

The Indigenous social movements of south-west Colombia cannot be associated with the ethnic movements of the last quarter of the 20th century, which can be understood in terms of the proliferation of multicultural policies (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009). So, Acuto's manuscript invites us to reflect on two crucial axes: The first has to do with the construction of the nation in Latin America and the erasure of Indigenous identities and culture. The second axis would be the history and agenda of Indigenous social movements, which varies depending on the cultural context and the country. We could even find nuances regarding this issue in countries such as Argentina because of the Indigenous archaeological agenda of the Atacama Coyas, who have been working with Alejandro Haber for at least three decades (Haber et al. 2016). The examples that Acuto presents are relatively contemporary.

There is also a third axis or argument that Acuto brings up which is very important. This axis concerns the difference between multiculturalism conceived of as a process of promoting cultural diversity without the transformation of structures that promote social inequality, and interculturality, which indicates a challenge to the hegemonic notions promoted by modernity, such as the belief in a separation in the ontological order between nature and culture. Within this context, something that should be determined is what is understood by Latin American Indigenous

Archaeology and what has to do with the imperatives of interculturality, specifically, with the acceptance of the existence of a multiplicity of ontologies that weave or configure the design of the pluriverse, as stated by the Colombian anthropologist Arturo Escobar (Escobar 2018).

The impact of nationalism in the destructuring of Indigenous identities and culture, the historical role of the Indigenous social movements in defending their political autonomy and the political struggle between the agendas of multiculturalism and interculturality are three arguments that Acuto mentions and that take us into the depths of the topic of Latin American Indigenous Archaeology. However, I would like to emphasize that there is still a hint of the imperatives of modernity in Acuto's manuscript. For example, by using the notion of Latin America, he, of course, runs up against the problem of nationalism and its erasure of Indigenous identities and culture. The idea of Latin America, as Walter Mignolo (2009) pointed out, is part of the imperatives of modernity where an entire continent is defined on the basis of the idea that its identity has to do with the values of Latin civilization, which are considered to have been inherited from Western Europe. If we want to work according to the terms of intercultural archaeology, then we cannot assume that this archaeology happens or occurs in Latin America by virtue of using that geopolitical system, because it leads us to risk naturalizing the territorial definitions of national projects supported by the idea of the supremacy of the West. This leads to an even more complex issue, which is that any evaluation of the trends in Indigenous archaeology must be done outside the abstract notions provided by science. There would not be something like Indigenous archaeology in Latin America but rather diverse experiences where various groups with diverse ontologies have used one method or another that could be called 'archaeological' for political purposes.

If the route of interculturality is taken when making evaluations of Indigenous archaeologies, then it should be a priority to theorize about these trends in terms of Indigenous notions themselves. Then, Indigenous archaeology would be interpreted according to each particular case. The ontologies that populate the pluriverse do not advocate syntheses or the evaluation of trends, which is often scientists' aim. As the Indigenous Nasa Juan Piñacué (2009) indicates, Indigenous people, at least the Nasa, do not construct the meanings behind the archaeological record according to their vision of the world because this record already has meanings. In the case of the Nasa, for example, archaeology does not help memory reestablish ties; instead, memory uses archaeology to generate new stories.

This brings to awareness to a dimension of Indigenous archaeology: All Indigenous archaeology is unique in its organization, premises and scope. Furthermore, all Indigenous archaeology responds to the need that local communities have to oppose the forces of colonialism. All Indigenous archaeology, consequently, is anti-colonial or decolonial archaeology.

Without a doubt, the coming decades will show us the proliferation of multicultural Indigenous archaeologies where academics from hegemonic centres will appropriate Indigenous knowledge to atone for their colonial guilt: This will involve photos with the community, the hiring of local labour to promote employment, the appearance of the 'other' in the academics' manuscripts and repatriations to museums. This will entail the proliferation of diverse archaeological experiences based on an apparent horizontal collaboration that will leave archaeological hegemony intact. Likewise, an intercultural archaeology will emerge wherein the history of modernity will not be understood in terms of abstractions such as the state and its origins but rather in terms of local history as a history of resistance. For example, in northern Colombia, the Taganga, an Indigenous fishing people, have been constructing a history of the region that is not based on the idea of a timeline that leads from the past to the present but on a story of the resistance that

has allowed the community to remain on the coastline (Daniels 2011). This story does not show endless change over time; on the contrary, it emphasizes what remains and has been maintained – even if the achievement of such has involved negotiations and concessions and has come with strings attached.

Acuto's manuscript should be considered a diagnostic that directly results in the construction of methodologies or non-methodologies (Haber 2016) that launch intercultural decolonial archaeology. This means encouraging projects in which hierarchy does not prevail. When an archaeologist with a large budget comes to an Indigenous community, usually impoverished by the national project, to ask for dialogue or collaboration, there cannot be equal relations. Likewise, it must be recognized that, when the archaeologist is called upon to help educate the locals about their history, there will not be equality but instrumentalization. However, when an Indigenous person complains about the archaeology done in their territory and when an archaeologist criticizes how archaeological questions were asked in that territory, a borderland epistemology may arise (Elenes 2006). This leads us to consider intercultural archaeology almost impossible if it is not done in specific geographies; thus, intercultural archaeology must be not only historical and individual but also localized.

I will close this comment by saying that the time for identifying problems and taking stock has passed, and we must delve into the construction of the stories that the pluriverse demands, which are histories in which the idea of Latin America is already passé or is no longer relevant. This entails moving one step forward and thinking using different cartographic and geopolitical orders and even different ontological considerations, such as other epistemologies. Acuto leaves us with something significant to ask: What happens with history in these pluriverses, and what is the role of archaeology in those realities outside or beyond modernity?

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