

# Art Education Research No. 15/2019

Interview with Grimaldo Rengifo Vásquez, by Alejandro Cevallos and Sofía Olascoaga

## Crianza Or The Art of Nurturing – Andean Cosmovisions In Community Education

February-August 2018

In Grimaldo Rengifo's article *Crianza en los Andes. A propósito de Freire (Nurturance in the Andes)* which was first published in 2001 and has been translated into German for this issue, he takes a critical look at his experience as a member of a literacy instruction team working with indigenous peasant communities in Peru's northern Andes in 1970. Rengifo explains that the educators' goal was to mobilize the communities in response to the exploitation to which they were subjected. To this end they employed the 'See, Judge, Act' method that is used to address structural injustices, in which images depicting everyday situations play a central role in conversation circles. For example, one image showed an *adobe*<sup>2</sup> house and invited participants to talk about the work involved in transforming the 'raw material' used in the construction of the house. They were also invited to compare the features of the *adobe* house with those of the *hacienda*, a large landed estate.. The aim of this exercise was to dissect and analyze the picture in order to develop an *idea fuerza*<sup>3</sup> (a driving idea), that could serve as a starting point for raising awareness about social injustices and for acknowledging the transformative power of peasants' hands. As the conversation unfolded, the educators found themselves discouraging indigenous peasants from pursuing their anecdotal narratives laden with 'magical' and holistic ideas. Instead they proposed that they should learn to distinguish human action from nature.

By favoring enlightened rationality, the method ignored the community's own epistemology, which is based on a conversation with nature as a living, sensitive and equal entity. In this way, building a house is not understood as a form of production or of human transformation of raw materials, but rather as an act of community creation and re-creation. There is a specific 'time to build a house' and this time is determined by signs of 'nature', which can be climatic and astronomic. The time to build a house is thus set within the frame of a strict rituality: permission is requested and offerings are made to the deities and to the earth which is to be used to build the walls of the house. In this way, a system of mutual aid and reciprocity is set in motion, making every activity a collective action of caring for the reproduction of community life.

In subsequent years, after having accompanied Amazonian Andean communities in Peru for a long time, Rengifo would describe this complex relation between a human community, deities and nature by referring to the notion of *crianza* or nurturance, a willingness 'to maintain a relation', a conversation and mutual affection which allows community life to be re-created. Nurturance is a relation of respect and affection for a world in which everything is alive. It is a ritual conversation between the human community, nature<sup>4</sup> and deities or spirits, ensuring co-existence, re-creation and the re-generation of biodiversity. The idea of *crianza* therefore contradicts the 'culture-nature' opposition underlying capitalist societies, where the progress and development of humanity is a product of the conquest and transformation of nature into an object-resource. A line of criticism originating in Anglo-Saxon anthropology holds that notions linked to ancestral traditions, such as nurturance, can generate an essentialist image of indigenous peoples tied to

1 It was subsequently published by PRATEC in the book *La enseñanza es estar contento (Teaching Means Being Happy)* in 2003.

2 Adobe is a mixture of clay soil and water for the making of air-dried bricks which are used to build the walls of houses. *Adobe* houses are a type of vernacular architecture in the Andes.

3 *Idea Fuerza* entry in the *Diccionario de Comunicación Política*: [http://www.alice-comunicacionpolitica.com/wikialice/index.php/Idea\\_Fuerza#cite\\_note-Burgue.2C\\_P.3B\\_D.C3.ADaz.2C\\_.C3.81..3B\\_Pato.2C\\_P.\\_.282010.29-1](http://www.alice-comunicacionpolitica.com/wikialice/index.php/Idea_Fuerza#cite_note-Burgue.2C_P.3B_D.C3.ADaz.2C_.C3.81..3B_Pato.2C_P._.282010.29-1) (retrieved on: 15.01.2019)

4 We provisionally use the word *nature* although we are referring to *pacha*, a Quechua word which means world. In Andean philosophy this term is also used to describe the unity of time and space.

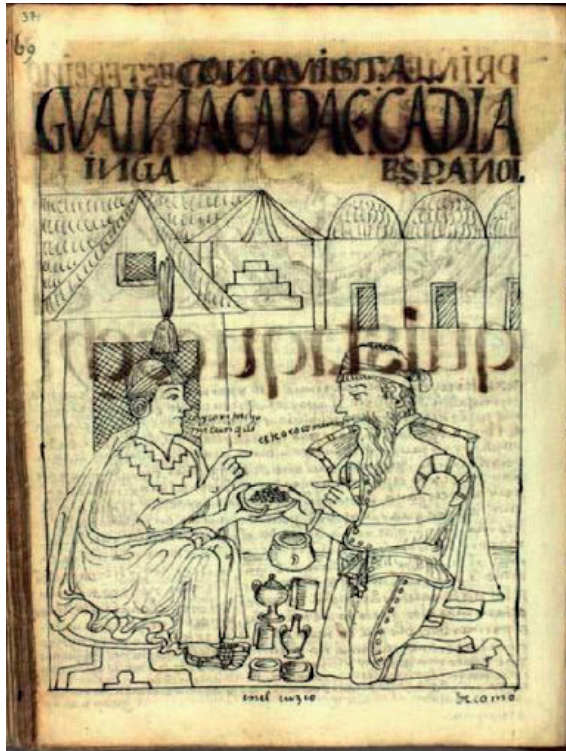


Illustration 1: An Inca-Kazique asks a conquistador: „Is that gold, what you are eating?“ Whereupon he answers, "Yes, what I am eating is gold".

their relations with the land, superstition, and nature.<sup>5</sup> Rengifo has however described the idea of nurturance as a binding way of life which takes kindly to diversity and is not opposed to Western knowledge. Contrary to any form of indigenous essentialism or romanticism, it should be pointed out that *crianza* is a notion that arises in agrocentric societies. An agrocentric society is one which accords a central importance to the act of eating – that is to say, the sustenance of life – as the result of individual and community labour. Knowing how to cultivate what one eats or, as the Andean farmers express it, “*saber criar tu chacra*”<sup>6</sup> (knowing how to nurture your little piece of land), is an ethic and a mystique, which is also expressed in popular festivals, and incompatible with capitalist ways. It should be recalled in this context that, to a large extent, the conqueror differs from the conquered in that the former has ceased to cultivate his own foods and by so doing has broken off a dialogue with the world.

What does all this have to do with us as art educators? This question informs the interview which we have

conducted with Rengifo at two different points in time in the course of 2018. In his responses to our questions, we find suggestive ideas, more than answers. His responses need to be read between the lines and should be considered within the broader framework of discussions concerning the decolonization of the art education curriculum – not as a theoretical exercise but as a struggle waged by the indigenous peoples of the Global South for access to common resources and for the recognition of community-centred ways of teaching and learning. Rengifo’s responses have, for example, led us to think about the concepts and methodologies emerging from indigenous languages and the practices geared towards the reproduction of community life which have been systematically excluded from our institutionalized teaching and learning processes.

Through our conversation with Rengifo we have also recognized some of the contradictions we find ourselves in. One may ask for instance, after having spent a long time practicing a particular pedagogical tool, and being convinced of its deeper relevance: what are its underlying historical and epistemological implications which we reproduce but do not necessarily agree with? Admitting one’s own ignorance of other knowledges and cosmologies is perhaps a necessary step to be taken in order to listen more carefully. This may seem obvious, but it actually requires a process of unlearning and freeing oneself from prejudices in order to listen to others and to ourselves in the midst of others. “Listening means being inside the Other”, says Rengifo, echoing this idea.

Rengifo has also made us think about what it may mean to regenerate life in relations cultivated with and from diversity in our everyday lives. He also made us think about how necessary it is for us to work against the symptoms of hyperactivity and self-exploitation practiced by creative workers conditioned by a neoliberal economy of deterritorialized culture (of laboratories, think-tanks, insignificant residencies and the market of academic titles). On the other hand, Rengifo invites us to think about what we can re-learn from the collective work of ultra-local pertinence, from forms of degrowth that aim at the reproduction of life, or from the rhythms and cycles of work and festivities marked by a rituality that is in dialogue with specific ecosystems? In response to these questions we need to recognize the implications of our own critical interventions in different contexts, and of our commitment to diversity and the regenerative function of life. Remembering and re-creating local ways of doing things, of returning to local interlocutors who can only be found in the background and in the secondary archives of official history, is a task of popular cultural affirmation, without which it would be impossible for us to weave intercultural stories and dialogues together.

We now have a better understanding of how terms such as ‘primitive’, ‘artisan’, ‘childish’ or ‘irrational’ have been of key importance in powerful operations geared to delegitimize other knowledges. But can we identify new ways in which these mechanisms remain effective? Paying attention to these new reconfigurations is part of the

<sup>5</sup> See for example Sahlins (2007): *Islas de historia*. Editorial Gedisa, Barcelona.

<sup>6</sup> *Chacra*, or *chakra* (in Quechua): “(It) is the piece of land used for the cultivation of foodstuffs for domestic consumption, a practice that is very common among indigenous families, since it is a system of community development”. See: <https://ahora.com.ec/noticia/1101859590/los-indigenas-tienen-su-chakra-> (retrieved on: 15.01.2019)

challenge to define our committed educational practice in this field of conflict for common resources, community life and memory.

I

**How did your encounter with Paulo Freire transform your perception of your role as an educator?**

I met Freire in 1971, in a summer course organized by Ivan Illich in Cuernavaca. On the occasion of the conference *Beyond Freire – Furthering the Spirituality Dialogue*, held in Massachusetts in October 2000, I wrote the essay *Nurturance in the Andes*, published by *Bowers and Apffel-Marglin* under the title *Rethinking Freire – Globalization and the Environmental Crisis* (2004). What I expressed in this essay was something I had been thinking about for years. Indeed, my criticism of the notion of ‘naive consciousness’ and the method of ‘awaking the critical consciousness’ was not by any means a sudden transformation. It happened in the mid 1980s and especially in the early 1990s, when the *Andean Project for Rural Peasant Technologies (Proyecto Andino de Tecnologías Campesinas, PRATEC)* – an organization which we founded together with other colleagues in Lima, Peru, in 1987 – had already been running for about four years and the internal war in Peru was raging.<sup>7</sup> For several reasons I was expelled from the national institution I was working for, following my experience with Freire’s rural literacy method. I never fully returned to the educational system. I became what was called a *popular educator* at the time: a person involved in promoting the grievances of the rural population, particularly in connection with the peasant sectors. I never gave up this calling to work in the countryside. We engaged with Freire’s ideas in the discussions we had around the concept of ‘development’ in our seminars and courses with Andean professionals. These conversations took place in light of the urgency to find ways out of the political violence which scourged the country. This process extended over several years. It was not easy to shake off the role of a political vanguard, or Freire’s tutelage, regardless of whether or not one belonged to a left-wing party for example. Freire provided well-written guidelines for our work with the popular sectors, that aimed at changing the prevalent perceptions of reality. These exuberant popular education methods provided anyone who was interested with the necessary methodological equipment to become a popular educator, an educator who is invested in the fight against unfair social structures and, particularly, against the social relations of production that were the foundation for the exploitation of workers.

I think that our investigations and experiences with respect to indigenous cosmovisions, and particularly the Andean cosmovision anchored in the *chacra*, and our

critical reflections on Western modernity were crucial elements in this transformation. It was the transformation from a militant educator into an accompanier of the decolonizing dynamic which had been started by the native Andeans as far back as the first day after the European invasion. Our spiritual life, that of the PRATEC team, also revealed itself in this way. It was of vital importance that at one moment in our lives, we were accompanied by a master of the *Muchik*<sup>8</sup> tradition and we took part in the ritual ceremonies of the Andean communities. This spiritual life sprouted and developed in the accompaniment of the indigenous peoples’ everyday experiences. I stopped my involvement with the educational system for years. I only returned to this sphere when we, the members of PRATEC, published a text entitled *Desarrollo o descolonización en los Andes* (Development or Decolonization in the Andes, 1993)<sup>9</sup>, and at a later point, when we coordinated a national program for the recovery of native seeds. My contribution to that text was the essay entitled *Education in the Modern West and in the Andean Culture*. The schools at the time were trying to cover up indigenous cultural affirmation. It was necessary to deal with the discourse they projected, which diverged drastically from what was happening in the Andean countryside. From that time onwards I positioned myself as a supporter of what is now called ‘community education’. I wrote about all this in another article called *La enseñanza es estar contento* (Teaching Means Being Happy, 2003).<sup>10</sup>

**Following your break with Freire’s critical literacy method, what has your search for alternative references been like on the path you have travelled?**

As I have just said, there was no sudden break. It was many years later when, as PRATEC, we had to find a way out of the crisis. We could see that several alternative projects were all like notes in the same piece of music: human beings controlling nature. But personal experiences played a part in all of this as well. After an experience I had with peasant communities in the Southern Andes, my scant knowledge of Andean life became obvious to me. I quite simply did not understand it, so I began to study it in the midst of a personal crisis. I did not take the path of the social sciences in this search. Fate placed some agronomist friends in my path, especially Eduardo Grillo, with whom we later came to organize PRATEC. That was when I began studying Andean traditional agriculture on my own, since there was not a single

<sup>7</sup> See more information on PRATEC on its website: <http://pratecnet.org/wpress/> (retrieved on: 15.01.2019)

<sup>8</sup> “The mochica, yunga or yunka (*muchik*) was one of the languages spoken on the coast and part of the northern highlands of Peru, having been one of the general languages of the country at the arrival of the Spaniards (16th century).” Wikipedia (2018). See the *idioma mochica* entry on Wikipedia: [https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Idioma\\_mochica](https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Idioma_mochica) (retrieved on: 15.01.2019)

<sup>9</sup> Available at <http://www.pratecnet.org/pdfs/Desarrollo-descolonizacion.pdf> (retrieved on: 15.01.2019)

<sup>10</sup> Available at <http://www.pratecnet.org/pdfs/Enseanza-estarccontento.pdf> (retrieved on: 15.01.2019)

school that taught this subject. This is despite the fact that our country is the country of origin of many of the world's most important cultivated plants. I felt the need to understand my country better and began to study pre-Hispanic agricultural implements in order to comprehend the level of development of the productive forces and the social relations in Andean peasant communities. My first article on Andean agricultural tools dates back to that time. Therefore, my references were not from the social sciences or philosophy, but were studies on Andean agriculture. I even drew up a bibliography on this subject which ended up being published. At that time I began to understand the differences between so-called Andean technology and modern technology which so deeply marks the existing instruments. This also meant that we had to think about welfare outside of an instrumental logic.

The ideas that emerged from this engagement were useful when, as PRATEC, we coordinated national programs informed by the notion of nurturance of the *chacra* and later with the nurturance of the school. The study that I published in the book *Desarrollo o descolonización* (Development or Decolonization) particularly dealt with the concept of nurturance. In that text I demarcated the differences between nurturance and the educational system and while drawing this line of separation, Ivan Illich's ideas about the school as a holy cow were important.<sup>11</sup> As I said, I met Ivan at the beginning of 1971 at the *Centro Intercultural de Documentación* (CIDOC)<sup>12</sup> but I did not get back to reading his studies until I needed someone who could get me out of the muddle we found ourselves in with regards to the institutions created by modernity. His work allowed me to subsequently have the time and patience to understand the regeneration of knowledges that were nested in the Andean and Amazonian cultures – what we began calling *crianza* or nurturance. In my work around the concept of nurturance, my readings on decolonization were of interest, those of the so-called deconstructionists like Michel Foucault, and unquestionably the contributions made by several of our colleagues who were then beginning to form various nuclei of indigenous cultural affirmation.

<sup>11</sup> This refers to Ivan Illich, *La escuela, esa vieja y gorda vaca sagrada* (The School, This Fat Old Holy Cow), published as an article in the journal *Siempre!* in August of 1968. It was his first attempt to identify the school system as an instrument of internal colonization. He would later develop this idea more completely in *La sociedad desescolarizada* (Deschooling Society, 1970). Ivan Illich, *Obras reunidas*. Volume I. Mexico City. FCE, 2006.

<sup>12</sup> The CIDOC was founded by Illich in 1965 as a higher education campus for development workers and missionaries. It was located in Cuernavaca (Mexico), at the Rancho Tetela. See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Centro\\_Intercultural\\_de\\_Documentaci%C3%B3n](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Centro_Intercultural_de_Documentaci%C3%B3n) (retrieved on: 15.01.2019)

### From your point of view, what would an approach to education look like that is not based on the culture-nature opposition?

Community education, that is to say, the knowledge which is re-created in communities daily, is the best proof that learning takes place outside of the framework of institutions and takes the form of a dialogue between humans, as well as between humans and the supernatural world. However, the question is whether it is possible to change the prevailing stance of treating nature as a resource that can be controlled within the framework of the existing educational curriculum. From the perspective of Andean cosmovisions the answer to that question is “yes”. All Andean communities have schools and, as far as I know, none of them have requested the state to take them away. There is no opposition between an unnurtured and a nurtured sphere for a nurturing culture. Everything is susceptible to nurturance, including illness. In this way, the *hacienda*, the estate, has been nurtured up to the point of disappearing and the priests and saints of the Catholic church have been nurtured up to the point that they now are now part of Andean deities. The same has been done with wheat and the wooden plough. The aim is that the nurturance of diversity should continue, entailing the non-imposition of a single crop, a single religion, a single way of teaching, or a single type of livestock. If someone subverts diversity in order to replace it with homogeneity, this entity is perceived as a kind of sickness, but it is still seen as a living being deserving to live. It should however not be allowed to eat excessively. The excess which arises when fundamentalist monocultures are imposed on diversity, leading to any form of life appearing as a plague, is the actual crime that deserves to be punished.

Accordingly, an example of an educational approach that does not place culture and nature in opposition to one another, may be found in what we have called ‘the community educational culture’. I consider this culture as the point of departure from which other relations may be established within the framework of official educational cultures, which is not an easy field. The official educational system – similar to religious, economic and other institutions – is designed to degrade other ways of regenerating life, to associate them with cognitive invalidity and to make us dependent on the dominant system. Native Andeans are aware of this dynamic but this knowledge did not envelop them in a victim/victimizer dichotomy – they simply nurtured other ways of regenerating life. This is why they have asked us to turn the school into another *chacra*, a space of nurturance, even if the school itself is not of a nurturing character – and we sometimes devote too much energy to this. Several of my colleagues have told me that I should give up these useless attempts, but I continue to be or to resemble what is called an ‘organic intellectual’.

The nurturance we are advocating is a kind of nurturance that digests its colonizing character within itself, and we do this from the *chacra*. The *chacra* – the place

of nurturance of cultivated plants – is the scene of a cordial meeting between humans and the more-than-human world. Various dimensions of wisdom are entwined in it: the dialogue with nature, the prescriptions and prohibitions of the human sphere with the supernatural world, local and circumstantial forms of organicity, rituals, festivity, food, etcetera.

The common people claim that the *chacra* is the place where teachers may recover their respectful relations with the community. It is necessary to stimulate the affection for nature in teachers, to turn them, as the people say, into heartfelt *chacareros* or cultivators of the land. This does, however, call for vigorous indigenous peasant communities. These communities have also been and continue to be battered by colonization. In this respect, the effort is twofold: to recover the respect for nature and the deities, and the respect between humans within the community; and to carry out a similar activity in schools. The fat old holy cow, similar to the case of the Church, cannot be excluded from *chacra* nurturance.

**Does the difference between the critical literacy method and Andean cosmovisions, which you have described, preempt the possibility of establishing a relation between the public school and indigenous struggles for their own specific education?**

As I have just mentioned, the disappearance of the institutions which it is nurturing, or the impossibility of having a dialogue with them is not part of a nurturing culture. The dynamic a dialogue can develop depends on a set of circumstances, including the strength of the communities themselves. Nowadays these communities are, at least in Peru, less concerned about schools than about the defense of their territories, and rightly so. The governments have granted concessions for all the territories where there is gas, oil, wood or water to the highest bidder. And many of these resources are found in indigenous territories. For this reason education is not among their top priorities anymore. Secondly, it depends on the strength of their teachers' organizations. The training received by indigenous teachers is not always up to the challenges that their communities are facing. They often implement the official curriculum without any criticism. There is an enormous task to be carried out in this respect.

The Andean and Amazonian communities have proposed an educational project for the teaching of two knowledge systems: their own knowledge and the 'modern' one. With respect to their own knowledge, emphasis has been placed on the relevance of language, leaving aside other aspects making up their culture. As a result, their 'own culture' appears as a sort of 'monocultural bilingualism'. The vernacular is used to transmit the colonizing project but the bilingual education does not reach an intercultural level. The modern system provides the curriculum, which is geared towards training the modern individual in ways to subjugate nature. There is little crit-

icism from indigenous teachers in academic circles with regards to the modern Western project, also because little is known about it. Consequently, there is very little analysis and few propositions are made concerning the dialogue between knowledges, when it is not limited to the placement of one knowledge next to another, but rather aimed at an exploration of their potential relations, if there are any. Mental decolonization is a prerequisite for indigenous struggles since the so-called 'hidden enemy' is unconsciously engrained in many of them.

## II

**Crianza and creativity share the same etymological root, the Latin word *creare*. In your article you analyze the limits and problems deriving from the creation and use of images in literacy campaigns based on your experience in Peru. You also emphasize the relational character of how community life is created and the function of dialogue and how things and beings are always linked. This led us to wonder about examples where alternative processes of image creations may perhaps exist, as in the case of the Waman Wasi<sup>13</sup> agrofestival calendar. This could be seen as an example where a diversity of world views comes into play and is set in relation with one another, outside of the literacy method. And we were also wondering how these kinds of images could be perceived as the outcome of a community's dialogue with the materiality and aesthetic of its particular 'locality', and not as a tool of abstraction or separation. From your experience, what other processes for creating images – visual or oral ones, as in the case of the Waman Wasi agrofestival calendar or radio broadcasts – are possible and convey respect for the practice of community dialogue?**

I have not worked on the subject of image creation from the standpoint of the communal, or 'agrofestive', as they call it in the Andes calendar. I have however devoted myself to the development of an instrument that can be useful for placing the teacher's text in its proper context. One of the things that struck my attention was that the educational system in the Andes and the Amazon appears like a text without context. According to the systems theory there is no text without context. And it is true that any part of a machine, and you could apply this metaphor to any aspect of life, is a text that operates in a particular context. Life in the classroom, however, functions independently from the everyday life of students. Mathematics, for example, teaches solutions to problems that do not exist in the student's day-to-day life. The idea of realigning the classroom with life, for

---

<sup>13</sup> *Waman Wasi Community Education Centre, Lamas, Peru.*

example when teachers prepare the calendar, is a way of stimulating the system's friendliness to the wisdom that nests in the life of indigenous children. I do not think that the calendar is the only possibility but we have promoted it because of our connection with the agrocentric way of looking at life in the Andes, and as a way of working against the dismissal, invisibility and degradation of indigenous wisdom at the hand of the education system.

The calendar is full of images. Some of the particularly spectacular ones have been drawn by indigenous parents and school children. And I think they are impossible to interpret if you do not have some knowledge of the life and the language surrounding them. Each drawing is a whole story, the idea giving rise to it is another story, how people tell it is yet a different story, and the one that is finally being told, differs from that as well. That is the path an oral story travels. It changes according to the storyteller, the circumstance and the place where it is told. Sometimes the drawing is the only trigger for the story and is merely a point of reference that does not exhaust the whole story. Orality has its own gestural paths that move beyond the possibility of presenting or 'representing' stories in an image. Sometimes the image has an expressive power that surpasses oral possibilities. The calendar is therefore an important reference for some of the things we have spoken about here.

As opposed to videos, which are increasingly capturing the interests of our students, and their way of narrating experiential stories, the calendar has the advantage of requiring little more than pencil and paper for its production. Producing a video requires the use of recording and production techniques that, as things stand today and despite the existence of community video projects, are in the hands of experts, indigenous or not. We still have a program, albeit a diminished one, of video production and are aware of its advantages and limitations in the context of community dialogues and of its huge potentials for cultural affirmation. Despite all of that, radio continues to be the least complicated medium and the one with a particularly strong impact on the practice of community dialogue. Radio also always requires operators, regardless of their origin. It needs someone who can act as a mediator between the common person who walks down the street and the person who wishes to speak on the radio. There are successful cases where community radio stations are in the hands of communities that have learned to use this instrument democratically. Other experiences have been less successful. In our experience at *Waman Wasi*, the daily one-hour program on a local radio station, continues to be the medium that can realistically be implemented within the capacities of an institution, with all its difficulties. The attempts to have the communities themselves take responsibility for these matters have been just that, attempts, but they have not succeeded in becoming a regular activity, perhaps because of lack of experience.

Nothing can replace face-to-face interaction. That we know. We also know that nothing is superfluous. Everything adds up, whether calendars, videos, radios,

murals, posters or books. Like seeds, they all follow their destiny; sometimes we can boast that we know their probable outcome or impact, but in most cases they are full of surprises. So if people want to brag, at least in the indigenous sphere, and say "this is the ideal formula" with regards to technological innovations and the use of mobile phones, they may be in for a surprise when they see the impact of puppets or street theatre on the everyday life of people. For as long as we are and continue to be diverse, there will be no ideal communication formula for the promotion of community dialogue. This is particularly the case in an environment in which the 'media' has been captured or created by the powerful.

**Along the line of the foregoing thoughts and specifically with respect to the role orality plays in the struggle for self-affirmation, as well as the function of conversation in the building of a sense of community and a mutual understanding of people as relational beings, we ask ourselves: what importance does the exercise of writing have for your own work? In what way does collective dialogue relate to your writing process? What is the significance of the nurturance of collective experiences, conversations and affective relations in which you have taken part when accompanying specific communities? How is this quality of relations and bonds maintained over the course of your learning process and translated in your writing? When or how do these other voices from the communities appear in your writing and when engaging with other professional and intellectual spheres, outside the scope of accompaniment work?**

Writing appeared relatively late in my work. Let me begin by saying two things: first, that I learned a few things about writing when I studied for a short degree at a city university in the course of which I wanted to reflect on rural learning – and I knew that my writing posed a problem for those who edited my work. The course actually taught me – or sought to teach me – how to read and write, because they go together. It was a painful but important exercise. As a teacher I used to copy written texts, or when I worked as a civil servant I used to send out memorandums, but I had not realized that I did not know how to write. The second point is that for the most part I do not write things for my own pleasure, but rather because something annoys me – as in the case of the domestication of the body in so-called physical education, which is something I personally went through – or because I cannot find anyone who has already dealt with certain issues in the area I am working in, as for example the difference between the bodily distinctions postulated by modern biology, and the bodily experiences of my mother or indigenous women.

Now let me get back to your question. When I bring a book to the communities I am working with, it is being val-

ued. It has a pleasant symbolic value when they can see their own words or pictures in them. But I do not think it is of any use to them other than to be able to say: “I appear in this book”. Their life does not depend on it. However, once a child brought a booklet to school which described his grandfather’s knowledge about handicrafts. The child said that from that day on, his teacher began to think more highly of him and his classmates began to admire him. The experience was like a miracle for him because no one had paid any particular attention to him before that. He went from being invisible to becoming visible in that community. This is just one example, but there are others. A teacher once bought a book at a bargain price from a street bookseller. He was not surprised by the content but rather by the fact that it said “Free copy” on the cover. There are lots of other anecdotes like that.

We published dozens of books at PRATEC with the writings of colleagues from different parts of the country who belonged to and continue to belong to the Andean-Amazonian cultural affirmation groups. These writings are of use to all of us who belong to the extensive network of people involved in this struggle. Non-established writers began to have an audience this way. Anthropologists ceased to be the only ones preoccupied with indigenous matters. The ideas expressed in these books were supported by the opinions of common people and were vital for the development and strengthening of our own ways of seeing the world. Notions such as colonization, cosmovision, cultural affirmation, nurturance and others are now used even in discussions about football. Peru’s *Ministry of Education* has republished hundreds of copies of some of our titles, which is something we could not have done ourselves. All of this helped to make visible what had previously been invisible. Today one can use the internet to track the large number of researchers and authors who cite our texts, whether it is to critically question them, as in most cases, or to cite them as a proof for their own findings.

As a member of the editorial team I took part in the preparation of many of these texts. My partner Gladys Faiffer<sup>14</sup> also played a key editorial role, writing some of the essays herself. Working on the editorial team has not been easy for me. On the one hand because I am not an

expert in the Spanish language, and, on the other hand – and this is the main reason –, because many of the texts written by my Quechua and Aymara colleagues and by others using regional variants of Spanish, were transcriptions of what indigenous people had said in their respective languages, and the original audio recordings had already been deleted from the tape recorders. They were Spanish translations of the local languages in which the testimonies had been collected. One very delicate task was to make sure that a language like Spanish, in which indigenous cosmovisions are not usually expressed, did not betray the sense implied in the other worldview. It was a very arduous job. “*Traduttore, traditore*”, is what the ancients said. And despite having done everything possible not to betray the sense of certain words in the vernacular, I must confess that I think I did not manage to leap the language hurdle. But we are carrying on in spite of it all. In the future someone will surely do a better job.

I was not alone in these efforts and the help of Gladys and colleagues like Jorge Ishizawa was priceless. The corrections they made in my texts, just like the ones previously made by Eduardo Grillo, were extremely valuable in helping me to avoid saying more foolish things than I usually do. The direct interaction with peasants was also extremely enlightening. Sometimes through interpreters and sometimes directly, these conversations were fundamental in our process of learning how to listen. They have taught us that listening means being inside the other. But it is difficult to be inside the other if you are not the least bit prepared to comprehend the world view that you will be engaging with. This is an intellectual exercise, but above all it is also an experiential act.

When it comes to writing about the indigenous world, nothing compares with making actual experiences, with having been there, especially when it comes to rituals and, in my case, to the long sessions with medicinal plants of the Amazon. This experience translates into my writings in the form of a mixture of statements based on my experience, my readings, and the testimonies collected by colleagues or from the people themselves. The one thing I recall about many of my interlocutors is their patience and their nurturing attitude towards me. Of course, there are many things that they did not tell me immediately. If you act as a ‘researcher’ they simply put on their best face and tell you what you want to hear: that they are poor, backward and in need of help. Their pride and the affirmative relationship towards their own world, which is what they actually feel inside, does not surface. I have been criticized because many of my writings affirm things that I have ‘discovered’ on my own, even though they are actually everyday experiences and not a discursive reality tailored to suit the customer’s taste.

Some of our publications were well received and sold out, while others were less well received. Of course, none of our editions had print runs in excess of 1,000 copies. The process of book publishing disciplined us, it made us write, and it was also a way of rendering accounts to the communities – a way of saying “We did this with you. Here is the result”. We never had any funds for our

<sup>14</sup> Gladys Mercedes Faiffer Ramírez is a trained anthropologist and holds a Master’s degree in Amazonian Studies from the *National University of San Marcos* (Lima, Peru). She is a member of PRATEC, where she carries out the functions of Project Coordinator, and she has been a member of Waman Wasi since 2002. She has coordinated and contributed to numerous research studies within the framework of the activities of these two organisations, and she has coedited, designed and coordinated their publications. She is the co-author, together with Luisa Elvira Belaúnde, of the book *Mujer, biodiversidad y seguridad alimentaria en las comunidades kechua-lamas* (Women, Biodiversity and Food Safety in the Quechua-Lamas Communities), Waman Wasi, August 2016. This publication forms part of a research action in the native Quechua-Lamas communities of the Department of San Martín, Peru, based on interviews and workshops with indigenous women and their initiatives concerning the nurturance of biodiversity, in which their everyday activities in the life of the communities stands out. Gladys Faiffer was in charge of this research project in 2011 and 2012 as a member of *Waman Wasi*.

publishing projects. To keep the parties that finance our activities from refusing to provide funds for the publishing of books, we made up all sorts of excuses. Very few books were written by me. Most were books written in tandem or in collaboration with others. Apart from that, it helped us that we did not adopt the perfectionist outlook of a scientific journal or anything like that. Since we were actually learning to write, we were not going to dig our own grave. The idea was to express what we felt with the required courage. If we would have paid attention to academia, we most likely would not have published anything at all. For us, writing was and is an exercise in rupture.

**The interest in creativity and innovation is often related to new forms of capitalism. For example when it comes to the commodification of collective work initiatives, cultural experiences, local food – everything can potentially be turned into an object of entrepreneurship and merchandising. In contrast to this scenario, crianza or nurturing is a provocative idea. Crianza as the ‘re-creation’ and re-generation of the everyday world. From this angle, how can we understand the oppositions that have arisen between concepts such as tradition and rupture, between heritage in the South and innovation in the North, between craftsmanship and art, between creative economies and popular economies or between urban and rural life?**

The notion of nurturance, or *crianza*, has been an *idea fuerza* that has greatly empowered people like us who are walking in its path. In the faces of many indigenous people you can see – if you show a minimum of interest – how these societies have digested colonization with all its legacy of genocide and ethnocide. You cannot help

but wonder how they managed to continue cultivating thousands of varieties of the more than 60 crops domesticated in the Andes, how they turned the saints and the Blessed Virgins into their own, how they make use of the wooden plough, how they cultivate wheat and barley as if these crops were their own inventions, and so on. The answer to this lies in the notion of nurturance, in this capacity to harmonize, to nurse, to nest, to love, to interlace all that is their own but also that which is foreign, that is to say, the capacity to allow themselves to be nurtured as well. The fact is that, in the Andean worldview, there is no room for the dichotomy “I nurture this/I do not nurture that”. Everything is apt to be nurtured, including illness.

‘Indigestions’ exist in many of these processes, of course. They form part of nurturance: the capacity to digest a conflict is not denied but is instead nurtured within the spirit of *sumak kawsay* or good living. The colonizer – call it what you like: capitalism, imperialism, globalization or whatever – is the one who establishes the dichotomous notion of friend/enemy, victim/victimizer. And I am sure these entities will continue to generate oppositions and hierarchizations because that is the way they are.

They turned nature into an object, then into a resource and finally into a mere merchandise and that is what everything – including humans – has turned into. I do not foresee any sudden change in this situation. When you know what they are like, you do not expect anything from them at all. Being aware of that, you can live with less anguish but you always need to keep an eye out for the next swat of the big clawed paw. Do not let it catch you unawares, off balance, in conflict with your brother, because that is what gives it its strength. Even though we already know this, we often forget. That is the way life is, and if it were otherwise we would hardly be speaking about this now.

### Illustration

—  
Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, El primer nueva corónica y buen gobierno, 1615/1616, Facsimile of the manuscript by Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala in the chapter on the conquest of the chronicle El primer nueva corónica y buen gobierno, accessible via the Digital Research Center of the Royal Library of Denmark in Copenhagen (Available at: <http://www.kb.dk/permalink/2006/poma/info/es/frontpage.htm>, retrieved 1/15/2019)