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# Cultural Conception of Space and Development in the Colombian Amazon

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## Abstract

With the objective of recognizing the cultural conception of space and development in the Colombian Amazon, an exploratory approach of documentary nature is developed to analyze the history of Amazonian settlement, the cosmogony-cosmology, the enrichment and/or impoverishment that generated the interaction between the indigenous and conquerors in “the creation of the new world,” ecological relations, multilingualism, as well as the development of territory since a “geographic-environmental-humanistic” view, and the laws that currently protect indigenous peoples. It is concluded that the history of social relations has framed a syncretism between the visions of the populations about the world, the territory, development and economic interest, which positively and/or negatively feedback the protagonism of the ethnicities, the worldviews, the language, as well as the ways of relating to nature and therefore the indigenous perpetuity in the territory.

**Keywords:** history, indigenous, laws, multilingualism, nature, worldviews

## 1. Introduction

The study of population and settlement in the Colombian Amazon has exposed a debate on the conservation of the tropical humid forest and its inhabitants. On one hand, it exposes the native models of forest use as a reference for sustainable exploitation and on the other, the government proposes economic models of land use that claim to be sustainable in unsustainable contexts such as mining and oil extraction.

Due to the above, it is necessary to recognize the historical relationship between the indigenous and the territory from the social, ecological, political and economic transversality that allows to generate an approximation to the dynamics that have conditioned the cultural conception of space and development in the Colombian Amazon. For this purpose, the present article aimed to contemplate the cultural origin of the territory and the dynamics that have been generated until the present, through a documentary synthesis that analyzed: physical and human geography of the Amazon, basic principles of the indigenous universe, the importance of myth and science, the essentials of the old and the new, the non-places and the world of waters, the development of the territory from the humanistic environmental geographic view, indigenous

ecological relations, indigenous peoples and multilingualism, and legal norms in relation to the indigenous peoples of Colombia.

## **2. Physical and human geography of the Amazon**

Studies that have used carbon 14 to analyze fossil records have generated a reassessment of autochthonous theses and theories of immigration across the seas to America, elucidating a continental proto-settlement, which began 40,000 years ago, from north to south (Alaska to Tierra del Fuego). In this way, the human traits extracted throughout the hemisphere correspond to dolichocephalic (Indonesia), mesocephalic (Melanesia) and brachycephalic (Mongolians), peoples from the eastern and south-eastern part of the Asian continent, sometimes well differentiated and others crossed as consequence of the interaction within the migratory flow [1–5].

It should be borne in mind that the reasons why the Central American settlements (Mayas, Toltecas and Aztecas) were the most brilliant civilizations of the new continent, is due to the fact that an absolutely continuous trajectory in the continental proto-population was not generated. The initial dynamics of migration flowed towards the east and the west, resulting in changes among migratory groups, which characterized future settlements that followed the order of the “religion of the sun” [6, 7].

Thus, the first settlers who came to Patagonia and the end of the southern cone, would return to the north, under the idea of finding better natural resources, through tributary streams and settlements on the river banks during the journey, until arriving at the net of the Orinoquia and Amazon (Tupi word that means boat destroyer) better known as Amazon. This is evidenced by the somatic foundation of the peoples of ancient Bolivia, Peru, and the entire Amazon region. Also, the phenotypic, linguistic and ethnographic variations that occurred among all settlements, were due to the environmental differences of the different stages and blood fusions of the proto-population [8].

Due to the above, relationships between geology-time, and geography-history are established. We speak of cultures with two religions that converge in their relationship with the moon, a “religion of the sun” and a “religion of water.” This is evident in the dynamics of the different communities that settled in the three great Amazonian landscapes: rock outcrops, sedimentary valleys and plains (Freshwater swamp). This is likely to have been characterized by drastic climatic changes and the orientation of seasonal natural cycles, rainfalls, fishing season, and fruiting of trees; so, human geography arises from the relationship between geography and the history of natural cycles [9, 10].

Precisely, this human geography leads to discuss about the “humanization of the forest” and the social history of the seeds, due to an anthropic intervention dating back more than 10,000 years by scientific consensus [11], and also because different ethnic groups have been masked with representative symbols like “Bochica” (also known as Nemqueteba, Nemquereteba, Sadigua, Chimizapagua), which explained the origin of many of the vegetal formations that are in the zone, giving account of psychological processes of craft teaching and politics of indoctrination [12].

This is how myth turned into the explanation of origin. Death of the tree of life, abundance and biodiversity originated the Amazon River (Payabarazu) and the worlds. The ancestral serpent (“Diijoma,” “Yakuruna,” “Añiraima”) was the remnant of the migratory wave of the water ethnicities [10]. But it was only from the maloca that the perception of the “shamanic world” and the networks of thought were marked [13]. The intervention of the human being was masked and the gender roles that emphasized the masculine and feminine essence were distinguished, the latter being the “fundamental of life” [14].

From this moment, a way of life was conceived. It tends to take care of the environment and aims for the reason of the human being in the nature, where the indigenous person not only looked for consumption, well-being and acquisition of material goods, but acceded to other levels of consciousness that facilitated the state of transcendence and the perspective of collective property, making the relation between health-nature-culture complete and indissoluble [15].

### 3. Basic principles of the indigenous universe

According to several authors [13, 14, 16–19], the indigenous universe is a living network of thought that sees everything as something more than the sum of its parts. In this sense, Gavilán-Pinto [16] talks about the fundamental principles of that universe being these: parity, complementary opposition, cosmological, community life, respect, and ritualism.

Parity constitutes the fundamental basis of unity in natural and human diversity from seeming opposites that complement each other. It is noteworthy that parity is not duality, the duality for Descartes is based on the interaction and differences between material (body) and immaterial (mind) in a particular place that he called “epiphysis.” But the non-identification of that place of interaction between the material and the immaterial makes us speak of a quantum theory that would be closer to the philosophy of the indigenous peoples [16]; what Quintana [14] defines as the non-place<sup>1</sup> that is generated in the macro shamanistic space.

The principle of complementary opposition is based on observations of complementarity in nature (Life-Death, Day-Night, Male-Female, among others), which shows a logic that must contemplate several points of view and therefore, questioning the normality in a system, which would enrich the realities (simple or complex) from complementary perspectives [16].

The cosmological principle unites worlds, space, time, culture and history. It is an interaction of the infinite with the finite. In this way, many cultures contemplate mythical origin, enriched by cultural dynamisms, as the sense of occupying that space and relating to its environment. In this sense, Quintana [20] quotes Nimuendaju [21]

*“(...) for the Tikuna the sky presents three subdivisions: the first one is inhabited by men similar to us; in the second live the souls of the deceased and a mythological being (Tae), whom at birth a child gives a soul; in the last live the vultures’ kings (Vultur papa). Further away are the Sun (üakü), the Moon (Tawema kü) and the Stars (Êta). The earth or the intermediate world is inhabited by men and some demons; The underworld comprises the underwater region and various lands where demons and humans live with strange defects (blind, dwarf, deaf, people with-no anus)” (p. 103).*

The principle of community life is based on a reflection of personal and collective experiences (ancestral knowledge, cultural values, cosmology and practices), which makes *indigenous peoples live from real rather than abstract experiences* ([16]. p, 24), generating a new knowledge. Quintana [22] indicates that for indigenous cultures it is the body that is under construction and not the soul. So, that the management given to the body along with morality will be reflected in the diseases and the type of collective treatment of them. Thus, it can be considered that the way of living or not living in community directly influences health.

The principle of respect and rituality is the mytheme of the cultural identity of the ethnic groups. This consists in the greeting and permission of action to

<sup>1</sup> Space that arises between the territorialization of the body and spaces of cultural importance.



the owners or spirits of places, plants and/or animals, which has implications of remembering stories of the resource origin and the moral behavior that people must have in the community. In this sense, the mythical history of the place, plant and/or animal is vital at the time of its use, because it gives an indication of why to use it or not. It is thus that the “legitimate” use of the place, plant and/or animal at the level of ethnics or even of clans can be valid or not to the ethnic groups that use similar places and/or the same plant and/or animal for different uses [23].

In this sense, the problem of generating spaces in the western school arises, where these traditional indigenous logics could be integrated. In order to articulate them it is necessary to contemplate ethnic education as a form of environmental management that contemplates cultural syncretism and multilingualism [17].

#### **4. The importance of myth and science: the Yakuruna and the human being**

The search for evidence of the similarity between rock art and myth [24] has helped to raise and reconsider hypotheses that contribute to the establishment of cultural sequences, indispensable for the understanding of history. This makes this kind of discoveries go beyond the aesthetic, as it frames the relationship between nature and the human being as a fundamental part of cultural history [10].

Likewise, these characteristics reveal a historical temporality that accounts for indigenous developments, which lead to the reevaluation of the “need” to resort to translocation disguised as cultural loans, which make indigenous peoples look like dependent and incapacitated. This feature has covered the longest cultural genocide in history since it not only limited the extraction of “green gold” from its territories [22], but also brought contempt for the greatest of its treasures: “the Indigenous spirit,” turning art (oral, handicrafts, petroglyphs, music and paintings) into weapons that endured beyond silence: in an “invisible shadow” [20].

In this way, the relationship between the snake and the human being has been a common characteristic of diverse ethnic groups of the Amazon; the “mytheme”, which summons their unity through the mythical idea of a common origin (“Dijjoma,” “Yakuruna,” “Añiraima”), masking in this relation the essence of the primordial sense of humanity and the demiurgic force which assigned a place not only in a geographical space but in “the universal concert” [14].

The myth characterizes the space, conditioning the first contact with nature [22], it forms part of the social structure as it generates channels of communication not only with grandparents, plants and sacred animals “owners,” but with the past, present and future. Therefore, the management of the world involves relations with the beings of this world and those of the spiritual world [13], which enriches and characterizes the vision of the environment inside and outside the indigenous communities.

#### **5. The essentials of the old and the new: their influence in the creation of the new world**

Due to the European and African expansion in the American geo-historical space, the results of the ideas, feelings, beliefs, opinions and attitudes of the meeting of the three worlds were generated, forging a collective mentality reflecting the new society where they developed [25].

The mixture of Spanish chivalric, religious and mercantilist ideals, as well as the assimilation of indigenous productive systems by the invaders (Europeans and Africans), generated different “New-ethnicities” [26] characterized by the

relationship between them. This gave the natives a unifying role that led to the “indianization” of Spanish and African, as part of a system of response to subsistence through forced insertion in previously organized societies [27].

Based on the above, indigenous ethnic backgrounds are gaining importance in the conquest due to the diversity of aboriginal ethnic groups subjected to the processes of cultural transformation, variability of the mode of production-subsistence and diversity of ecosystems, which added to the irregular processes of conquest as to the times and models of penetration along with miscegenation gave rise to the “myth of the new world.” The inter-ethnic turned into an inter-fecundating and complementary force, as opposed to the inter-classist dynamics that result in conflict and genocide [26].

The chivalrous ideals, the beliefs and rites characteristic of the Middle Ages, were mixed with aristocratic aspirations, mercantilist ideals and images of a world full of new worldviews, converting the lost cities, the treasures and the indigenous worlds, into the mythic forces and the impellers of the conquest. In this order of ideas, the old and the new were intertwined reproducing their essentialities, in which indigenous mythology enriched the European fixing actions and through the decisions of the leaders who modified the changes and goals of society [28–32], This stimulates the colonization of new territories and gave rise to an “antagonistic acculturation” by the transcultural dynamics [33].

This cultural hybridization made the Europeans project their treasures in the “new world.” Thus, the myths of: Dorado; Metha; Xeira; Tree of Life (Wochine in the Amazon); World of waters (Yakuruna) created the stimulus that led to the conquest, which, even if they were not able to explain the indigenous myth from European mythological ideas and traditions, they projected the reality of natural resources, the beauty of landscapes and scarcely the depth of indigenous traditions.

## **6. Non-places and the world of waters**

To talk of a non-place is to retake those spaces that only allow “to be” when the identity is contributed [34], therefore the description of the world in abstract terms serves to form an affective bond between places [35] and people “geographic actor” [36], in which the perception of territory (direct contact with space) along with its cognition (spaces where the “geographical actor” has never been present) contribute to symbolic elements [37] that will affect the conception and valuation of space [17].

In this way, a revaluation of the mechanistic notions of the idea of space under the physical notions (large, high, width, long, small) has been generated, added to the relativism of dimensions depending on the observer’s point of view [38]. This enables the human being to move both in time and space, facilitating the understanding of the world, describing the here and now, placing an “all” in it through the maps [39].

According to the worldview of the “river ethnics” (the major water source depends on ethnicity), which was originated by the mythical tree that in its fall gave shape to the great basin and the worlds (earth, sky, water), characterizing in this case the Amazon as a large and diverse place in such aspects as: natural, geological, climatological, flora, fauna, water, and also in regard to the societies and cultures that occupy it. “The allocation of a territory to each group is born of the cultural need to define discontinuous entities that allows an order that avoids chaos (...) that serves to live well” ([13], p. 131); So, the allocation, as the guideline for organization and recognition of tribal territories, is related to predetermined sites of the landscape: “the mythical place of birth” [17].

In this sense, indigenous peoples territorialize their body and incorporate from their rituals, powers of essences (owners) as an integral part of the “being” (world),

converting the geographical space in which the group was born, not only into the source of ethnic identity, but into the basis of the “shamanistic macrosphere.” From this, territorial associations generate networks between malocas [40] and tunnels between territories and other worlds that only the shamans know and have access to. Van der Hammen [13] reported the existence of subterranean tunnels reported to her by “Chapune,” and attributed to them the displacement of fish from the Caquetá River to the middle lakes of Mirití. This evidence the existence of “shamanistic territory” which can be understood through the maloca [17].

The maloca represents the universe in a concrete system, making it accessible and enabling actions in it. Its location is related to the myths of origin, consolidating territorial associations as a “world order” (“Dijjoma,” “Yakuruna,” “Añiraima”), which in turn establishes models of social relations and spatial management for each ethnic group (mythical, ritual and human), memory (moral and political), history of the territory, source (power, defense, identity, ethnic cohesion), and life. [14].

It should be borne in mind that the Amazon has been occupied by human groups for ~10,000 years [11]. Thus, relations were established with the environment “nature,” which through European contact were decimated and displaced by the extractivist mentality. In this way, the Amazon as a “pantry” was incorporated in globalization, and thus in territorial disputes of countries for which it has been a remote frontier [17].

As a result, the European legacy left a vision of territory from “scientific thinking,” a mapped and delimited geographic space, which defines the sovereignty of a political power, in charge of managing, controlling and defending resources (capital territory) and Human groups that exist there, a territory that exists independently of humans, although these give it meaning [14].

From the above-mentioned characteristics, the interbreeding between indigenous peoples, Europeans and Africans, generated a cultural, social and political complexity, forming an Amazonian rural population, living from the jungle and the waters, a “forest society” of indigenous roots [41]. They gained access to public education and public services through interaction with the market and cities. Because of this, the “extractivist” mentality of European heritage took a multicultural and environmentalist turn, which encouraged the formulation of cultural and natural conservation and protection policies [42], “which in the case of Colombia is reflected in the institution of indigenous reservations in the 1980s and the 1991 Political Constitution” ([14], p. 99).

*“(…) the presence of the State has generated a homogenization of the differences (territorial logics) camouflaged in a policy of ‘national unity’, whose strengthening of ethnic and cultural specificities does not take into account that the fact that ethnic groups share a ‘Shamanic macrospace’ implies a ‘world order’, where the management of territorial space is a supra-ethnic legacy of care of this great being (Planet Earth)” ([14], p. 100).*

The differences in world conceptions between indigenous and western territorial logics have led to a different recognition of the problems of cultural and natural protection and conservation by these two actors. In response to the above, [43, 44] are generated, but because they are laws that try to integrate an indigenous logic<sup>2</sup> and a western logic<sup>3</sup> in a territory characterized by armed conflict (illicit crops),

<sup>2</sup> It privileges a vital center over the boundary, “condenses” time, it has a vision of “home territory” (humanized space) and opposes human and nonhuman people [14].

<sup>3</sup> It privileges the limit to demarcate its scope, it has a linear vision of time and a vision of “territory-capital” that opposes the natural to the cultural [14].



and policies of exploitation by the government (agroindustry crops, hydrocarbons, minerals and hydroelectric dams) [14], the need to establish negotiation tables under participatory methodologies arises [45].

## **7. The development of the territory from the geographic-environmental-humanistic view**

Geologically it could be said that the forests due to the estuaries and an atmosphere with greater amount of oxygen and carbon dioxide, came to feed the oceanic life and contributed to the formation of the continental life. Colombia being an equatorial country, its jungles are the relation with the water of: oceanic masses (Pacific, Caribbean, Atlantic), banks of clouds (glaciers, Andes), Amazonian evaporation, which together generate a zone of convergence where the rivers are born [46], “the world of water” that feeds not only the jungle slopes but all the Amazon.

The loss of the jungles [47] or the “Eco-todo” have generated a search for solutions that have not taken into account socio-historical bases or processes of devastation [48]. So, these must be seen from the glaciations, whose studies and evidence show that the jungle has not always been there and has been in other places. In other words, the jungle was transformed into savannahs, which became refuges where life had the possibility of being born, spiced, differentiated, and diversified [17].

From the previous idea, the forest can be considered as a “matrix of life,” where there are trees that can live between 600 and 1000 years [49]. Each stratum generated niches where their relationships and connections have led the forest to be considered the largest organism on the planet, so human beings established a mutualism with it, generating a niche to themselves and to the planet. They converted some of its plants into channels in other worlds “Entheogens” [50], which, because of their complexity and relationship, allowed a non-scientific knowledge of the forest, which gave it a much greater sense of transcendence and mutual belonging, generating an environmental and social history of the seeds, which makes necessary the “naturist” revaluation of nature.

It should be noted that the process of European conquest, changed the way of recognizing and relating to the jungle, and altered the “vision of environment,” which generated an “Andean-Amazonian” landscape, under a vision of territory as “pantry,” which became over time in: Bioprospection, Bio piracy (looting of resources with State complicity and intense development of scientific exploration), transforming the jungle in a Bio business (projection of multinational business interests: policies of privatization, denationalization and loss of autonomy), which leads it to be a territory to deplete and destroy [22].

Also, in its beginnings, this European model of forest management, made invisible the relationship between plants and the soil by not taking into account that from this the different layers that make up the soil are formed. Due to this, the dynamics of felling, fire, pasture and livestock, caused that arable land was devastated by water and the wind causing erosion, which generated borders between the territories [51], reason why it can be considered that “the evolution of the forest,” in agricultural systems, livestock and plantations of European and non-indigenous legacy (soils of biochar) marks the beginning of the end of it.

In this vein, the European model of forest management left behind an inheritance of an “extractive” development mentality that produces poverty and misery, which does not reinvest in the territory, perhaps because investors are not interested in ending the armed conflict, but just in the fact that these conflicts provide them with advantages that facilitate their intervention, in which “rationality” makes them superior for the fulfillment of their interests but not responsible. So, the vision of “strategic ecosystems” disconnected the sensibility and joint search for answers and



meaning, turning dead trees into spirit coffins, and the vast majority of us into the result of a devastated country whose wealth is ignored by its own people.

## **8. Indigenous ecological relations**

The explanation of the reason for the control of the world is found in the myths of the ethnicities, and it is the maloca where this “non-place” marked the perception of the “shamanic world” and the networks of thought that generated a way of life which tended to take care of the environment, making the relationship between health, nature, and culture complete and indissoluble [14, 17].

In this sense, indigenous peoples tended to take care of the environment with a vision of sustainability, which is confirmed in some studies that indicate that for ethnic groups such as the Kasajos and Mohawks, the fact of making a decision of importance should contemplate the invocation of seven generations of ancestors to discuss the effect of this decision on the next seven generations [52], which demonstrates a cyclical movement between culture and nature through a bidirectional indigenous time relationship where the future may be behind and the past ahead [16].

This shamanic relationship, integrates for the natives the world of the natural and supernatural in a concept of environmental sustainability that was fed by the Human being-nature relationship given by the first contact established with it, which conditions the actions on it [22]. In this sense, the different “visions of nature” by indigenous peoples have emerged due to changes historically introduced long before the “discovery” (cover-up) of America. So “nature belongs to the field of culture, and cultural patterns must be taken into account to understand actions on it” ([13], p. 3).

These historical cultural changes prior to the “discovery” of America, determined a relationship between peoples and their environment through an environmental history, as well as a social history of the seeds [22]. This makes that the region where these peoples are located have an optimal spatial arrangement that maximizes ecological integrity through good use of land [53].

It is noteworthy that after more than 500 years of a colonization (re-foundation of constituted cities) [54], a neo-colonialism (mythical imaginaries with chivalric ideals accompanied by Catholic and/or Protestant missions) [55] and a republic that was crueler than the colony itself (by allowing the killings of the Arara house, rubber bands, drug trafficking and an armed conflict that not only affected the indigenous communities but also the Afro-descendants). It was only until 1991 that a constitution in Colombia gave real recognition to indigenous peoples. So, it is illogical to think that the solution to the problems of the ecological relations of the indigenous with their environment is soon to be solved, and especially if we take into account that many laws that tend towards the cultural perpetuity have other laws that are against it, defending extractive policies and control and management of resources [14].

This has led many of the multiracial people, Afro-descendant and indigenous people to deny their indigenous or African heritage and underestimate it, making the “whitening” stand out in works carried out in communities such as Quintana [9, 14, 17, 23, 45, 56]. Due to the “whitening” that the miscegenation has led to the community, it is considered that the indigenous being is a transition that will lead children to be the same as the western children, which conditioned a vision of development that does not differentiate from economic growth.

This attempt to equate equality (deserved well-being) with difference (diversity) [57] is fueled by the fact of not feeling satisfied with their aspirations and a religious encounter that contemplates the pluricultural as incompatible, and sees the different spiritualities as not converging spaces towards intercultural values.

On the other hand, if we see the convergence of intercultural values, an exclusion from pluralism camouflaged in tolerance would not be fostered. This would not mean a new “miscegenation” that tries to get the best of each culture, but the recognition of the differences that lead to respect that enriches the actors involved, allowing them to be one within the multiple.

In this sense, starting from the fact that “human being cannot be understood only with reason” ([58], p. 21), solutions for the adaptation of western human society to the processes that exist in nature could be generated [59]. But it will only be in the integration of territories (Indigenous-Western) in which eco-efficiency, biomimicry [60] and the articulation of the economic-social-natural relationship, will generate sustainable proposals outside the framework of unsustainable contexts: a “real” sustainability on a planetary scale [17].

An articulation of the economic-social-natural relationship, makes it necessary to start from the fact that the idea of nature for the indigenous people has had a process of intercultural dynamics that, for the case of Latin America, has been characterized by acculturation, deculturation and cultural integration [61], where the educational context (maloca, family, elders, educational institutions) has been mediated by religion (imposed or traditional) and/or external and/or internal economic interests. In this way, the teaching, knowledge and skills that interact from the West to another society or to itself (hybridizations, negotiations, exchanges, translations) are transcendental in the identification of the cultural heritage; and, therefore, in the understanding and actions on the world [56, 62].

The above makes necessary the understanding of aspects on world view, epistemology, ontology and axiology, which compromise the origins and dynamics of the culture in different contexts [63], generating an assimilation of science that is born of the daily knowledge, systematicity of use and cultural signification, which would increase the resistance to cultural change [64, 65].

## **9. Indigenous peoples and multilingualism**

In today’s world, there are about 6909 different languages, yet 96% of the languages that exist are spoken by only 3% of the world’s population, so the way children acquire language has been a motive of fascination for both linguists and psychologists, who hold a debate between the “natural” and the “social.” Those who defend the naturalist position assert that the brain is designed to learn grammatical structure and therefore language, while others affirm that language acquisition is done through education. In the middle of the debate between these two positions, a third was born that sees the process of language acquisition as the combination of nature and education [66].

To begin this journey between the “naturalistic” and “social” posture of language, the theories about how the primitive human brain reaches its present size is taken up again. On the one hand, a posture speaks of language as the device that activates brain development; and on the other, it speaks of the brain that reaches the size suitable for the use of language.

Under the above premises, the theory of the logical structure of linguistics arises [67], where it is argued that the ease with which children of all cultures learn grammar through everyday speech is a condition of cognitive development. In this way, perceptions and the need to communicate them, coupled with the child’s need to question and manipulate the world, make language develop through a constant and unstructured exposition of it [68].

In spite of the above, we talk of a “critical period,” which establishes the neurological guidelines for language and, therefore, those of learning any language.

Despite the discovery of the gene (FoxP2) that disrupts the normal grammatical ease [69–71], it cannot be considered responsible for the complexity of learning grammar. Because of this, language acquisition is much easier for children than for adults. In this way, babbling would be considered as a “pre-linguistic phrase,” which helps to form the necessary social bonds before learning to speak.

In the case of Amazonia, religious and political powers provided changing linguistic policies to facilitate the conversion of indigenous peoples. “There are many languages in this area. A problem planted by the devil to make the conversion of the indigenous people more difficult” (Padre Nieto Polo, eighteenth century). This problematic, framed in processes of acculturation, deculturation and cultural integration [61], has been evidenced through anthropological studies and historical data that have shown that with the European and African entry, people passed from talking about more than 1200 languages to 240, which 101 are currently registered in Colombia, where 84 are alive and 17 are extinct [68].

Due to the importance of language, the colonizers used general indigenous languages (Ñeengatu and Queshua) as *franca lingua* for evangelization [72]. Thus, it caused a process of weakening and loss of many native languages by the cultural rejection imposed by the colonizers. This situation reached its maximum expression in the nineteenth century with monolingual nationalist policies, turning Portuguese and Spanish into the most widely spoken languages in this region and strengthening the extinction of Amazonian multilingualism.

In this sense, the 1991 Political Constitution of Colombia has tried to reverse the processes of acculturation and deculturation, recognizing the multiethnic, pluricultural and multilingual character through educational policies that propose the promotion of intercultural bilingual education, along with policies of protection, preservation and strengthening of native languages [73].

## **10. Legal norms and their relation with the indigenous of Colombia**

The recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples has been the result of a slow process of awareness of the international community. Thus, in 1919, the International Labor Organization (ILO) took the initiative in the matter of the rights of indigenous peoples until it reached Convention No. 169 of 1989, which applies to independent countries considered indigenous by the fact of descending of populations that inhabited the country or a geographical region to which the country belongs at the time of the conquest or colonization. It has so far become the most comprehensive international legal instrument on the protection of indigenous and tribal peoples. There are also international laws that recognize the rights of indigenous peoples, such as resolution WHA30.49 of 1977 [74, 75], resolution WHA51.24 [76] and declaration of [77].

In this same way, Colombia has taken into account the indigenous peoples through the Ministry of Health (Resolution No. 10013 of September 24, 1981, [78] and Resolution 5078 of 1992), but it is considered that it actually had an advance (Article 2, 6, 7, 8, 45 (Numeral 2), 70, 246 49, 356 (clause 3), article 56 and trans. 286 and 287 [79]), which stipulate the fundamental principles that recognize the ethnic and cultural diversity of Colombia and, therefore, to the indigenous populations. It also has stipulated laws that regulate the international norm, among them the [80, 81]. Thus, within this legal and normative support for the protection of the indigenous peoples, provisions were included on: territory management, ethnic sovereignty (development models), recognition of benefits by Genetic resources and direct access to: state resources, public education services (recognition of their multilingual status), health and housing.



In this sense, the Political Constitution of 1991 establishes that the indigenous territories are of collective property with special treatment, reason why it protects the territorial and cultural integrity of these towns. Thus, the collective property of the guards and communal lands of the ethnic groups is established, giving them the character of inalienable<sup>4</sup>, which is contradictory from the Western Colombian logic that only grants the indigenous community the territorial ownership of the superficial part of the soil, contradicting among other things the judgments of the Colombian Constitutional Court: T-254/94 [82], T-496/96 [83] and T-025/2004 [84]; The Law of Congress 1448 of 2011 [85], and the Decree Law of the Ministry of Interior 4633 of 2011 [86].

This means that, if mineral wealth is to be found, the Government will have the right to expropriate and relocate the reserve unless it is overlapped in a national park such as Macedonia<sup>5</sup>. In this way, any administrative act affecting Macedonia must be consulted by the ethnic authorities, ensuring the recognition of cultures and their needs for territorial use, as well as the perpetuity of long-term resources as typified by ILO agreement 169 and ratified by Act 21 of 1991 [87].

Likewise, the interaction of the actors involved (*association of indigenous cabildos*, National Parks, indigenous communities, governmental and nongovernmental entities, among others) has generated a symbolic reconfiguration of territory proposed by the Colombian State, as evidenced by [88]. It recognizes the indigenous territory as a victim of a territorial conception that did not take into account the world view and the special and collective bond that unites the indigenous people with what they call “mother earth.” But this initiative will have no effect until the decree of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development 1987 of September 12, 2013 [86] is repealed; decree 1464 of July 2013 [89] of the Ministry of Housing City and Territory; the bill 46 of 2011 [90] of the National Congress of the Colombian Republic and the right that gives the law of the Congress 685/2001 [91] about the mining code, which imposes the obligation to exploit minerals in indigenous mining areas and mixed mining zones.

This shows contradictions between local laws and international agreements, which have created injustices not only for indigenous peoples but also for the Republic of Colombia, which is evidenced by the non-compliance with the ONU Convention on Biological Biodiversity [92] and Decision 391 of 1996. These legitimize the importance of the origin of knowledge and the recognition of the benefits associated with genetic resources and their derived products. In this way, access to genetic resources and the compensation of those who provide them following the model of intellectual property, so that traditional indigenous knowledge has no recognition or compensation for their contribution, and therefore in the conservation of biological diversity. Sample of this is evidenced in the patents for use of Yajé (*Banisteriopsis caapi*), Copoazu (*Theobroma grandiflorum*), Curare (*Chondrodendrom tomentosum*), which were carried out despite the Convention on Biological Biodiversity [92] and decision 391 and 369 of 1992 [23, 93].

## 11. Final considerations

Research analysis showed that “cognitive skills are socially transmitted, socially constrained, nurtured and animated” ([94], p. 40), where sub-cultural variations and context respond to the understanding-relation-causality of the subject with the natural world [95, 96] which gave rise to traditional land use models for indigenous people.

<sup>4</sup> It means that it cannot be sold or transacted by the members of the indigenous community.

<sup>5</sup> Indigenous village located in the Amazonian Trapezium (Colombia).



It is necessary to recognize the history of origin of the cultures in which we work to interpret the territorial logics in which the population is submerged. Although it is true that cultural dynamism establishes that cultures are nourished and fed. These mechanisms of knowledge allow to generate processes to demystify ideals of whitewashing and modernity.

The territorial relationship shows that the territory is a social construction as Fals Borda states, so to speak of environmental sustainability, is to claim the category of territory as an essential support for the reproduction of culture. In order to be able to weigh the problem of the approach from multiple perspectives, the approaches must be materialized in the social, ecological, political and economic transversality that allows to join the paradigms avoiding to permeate the goals and actions executed within the population.

The homogenization of territorial logics through a “cultural and territorial protection of indigenous peoples” through parks and natural reserves superimposed on legally recognized indigenous territories, territorial planning plans mediated by policies of exploitation of agroindustry crops, hydrocarbons, minerals and hydroelectric dams, as well as the same armed conflict generated by illicit crops, could be masking a form of “neo-colonialism” camouflaged in a policy of “national unity.”

This documentary review analyzes how knowledge about the cultural conception of space and development is the best tool to generate protection for native models of forest use. Likewise, it is exposed the danger of the perpetuity of indigenous peoples in the territory due to different emerging actors, which covered by extractive policies, could expropriate indigenous from their territory. In this way, even if the Colombian State recognizes as indigenous those who have traditional ancestral beliefs, a traditional language and occupy a specific territory, the extinction of indigenous languages and the loss of traditional beliefs imply a historical process that leads to the loss of indigenous rights, and therefore, to the loss of their ancestral territories. This is reinforced by interests in mining exploitation and extraction of hydrocarbons in indigenous territories. A clear example of an economic model of exploitation of natural resources that claim to be sustainable in unsustainable contexts.

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