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ARTICLE

Indigenous archaeology in Latin America. Towards an engaged, activist and intercultural archaeology

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Abstract

Taking into consideration the socio-political history and politics of identity in Latin America, Indigenous peoples' current demands and the contemporary context of pressure on Indigenous territories from powerful groups who deny and challenge Indigenous identities and organisations in their pursuit to appropriate the natural and cultural resources of these territories, this paper argues for the necessity of an engaged, activist Indigenous archaeology in Latin America that is committed to the goals, claims and struggles of native peoples. The argument is that archaeology should move beyond critically reflecting on the discipline's colonial history to develop a politically oriented and theoretically informed praxis that is in tune with Indigenous peoples' project of dual decolonisation – the decolonisation of themselves and the decolonisation of the State. This praxis must be based on two principles: respecting Indigenous peoples as subjects of collective rights and political subjects, and embracing interculturality. The paper offers four examples of the challenges faced in making archaeology available to the subaltern.

Keywords: Latin America; Indigenous peoples; Indigenous archaeology; activism; praxis; interculturality

Introduction

Since the second half of the 19th century and throughout the 20th century, the nation-building process in Latin America involved myriad policies towards eliminating native populations and cultures. During this period, Latin American white ruling elites aspired to overcome the political and cultural backwardness of colonial times by creating modern and 'civilized' nations on the basis of Enlightenment principles and cleared of any form of 'barbarism'. In this context, Indigenous peoples, together with Black and mixed races, were considered obstacles to progress and modernity, and consequently, different strategies were put into motion to ensure the disappearance of the 'undesirable' citizens, cultural practices and knowledges (Appelbaum, Macpherson and Rosemblatt 2003; Kraay 2007; Radcliffe and Westwood 1996, chapter 2; Svampa 2019, part I, chapter 1). The physical elimination of Indians through military campaigns; the enforcing of educational policies oriented to eradicate native (and mixed) traditions and cosmologies and to impose a homogenous western and modern identity and culture on every citizen and in every corner of the nation; the juridical and political disenfranchisement of Indigenous, Blacks and the illiterate (who were excluded from full citizenship and who were not allowed to have property and to vote); and the promotion of European immigration were some of the strategies the newly formed nation-states developed.

The long-standing pattern of discrimination, exclusion, forced displacement and repression against Indigenous peoples had a profound impact on their identities and cultures. Whilst some individuals chose to conceal their native roots, others outright rejected them in favour of national,

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regional or class identities. Nevertheless, many Indigenous families, particularly in rural areas, continued to uphold their traditional practices, knowledges and spiritualities, preserving them within their homes and away from public view. As a result, there is a widespread misconception throughout Latin America that Indigenous peoples are extinct, or that their descendants have been too transformed to be considered Indigenous. Some even believe that those who claim native heritage are actually migrants from neighbouring countries. People who recognize the existence of local Indigenous communities usually think that these are small and marginalized groups, living in remote mountainous or jungle regions.

Latin American archaeology has contributed to the invisibility, denial and subordination of Indigenous peoples (Flores and Acuto 2015; Gnecco and Ayala 2011; Haber 2008; 2013). Latin American archaeologists, who are mostly white and bourgeois individuals, have perpetuated the appropriation of native heritage by leveraging national/provincial heritage laws, which declare that archaeological patrimony belongs to the State, and by asserting their right to study the Indigenous past. Archaeologists have recognized the scientific value of archaeological sites and artifacts, justifying their study, extraction, conservation and storage, but failing to acknowledge other relationships and understandings of them. This has resulted in the production of two representations of Indigenous peoples that have been detrimental to them and have persisted through museum exhibitions, college classes, newspaper articles, school textbooks and publications oriented to the public (Flores and Acuto 2015; Gnecco and Ayala 2011).

For many years, Latin American archaeology perpetuated the notion that Indigenous peoples (if not all of them) had vanished, leaving their identities and cultures stranded in the distant past. Scholars contended that there was no connection between local communities and archaeological sites and objects because, in their view, there were no longer any 'pure Indians'. Likewise, archaeological accounts contributed to the concept of empty regions or deserts that were ripe for colonization and exploitation, presenting their apparently sparse inhabitants as living fossils from a bygone era. Narratives that describe Indigenous peoples in the past tense persist. The confinement of Indigenous in the past and denying their presence in the present foster the disenfranchisement of contemporary Indigenous peoples, who are perceived as illegitimate claimants of rights, territories and heritage.

With a few exceptions, such as the Mayas, Aztecs and Incas, Latin American archaeology used to depict native populations as uncivilized and primitive societies, or at best, as less complex than others. Traditional archaeologists characterized native peoples as peoples without history, their past presented through object collections and lengthy descriptions of artefacts, stripping Indigenous history from its cultural, social and spiritual contents. Additionally, scientific discourse often treated them as part of natural history, with native people receiving an ontological status similar to plants, animals and minerals. This is evident in the inclusion of Indigenous material culture in museums of natural history, a perspective that perseveres in some institutions where Indigenous artifacts – and, not long ago, human remains – have been placed next to rocks, embalmed mammals or insects pinned on polystyrene foam boards.

Over the last three decades, we have witnessed a resurgence of Indigenous identities, organisations and movements throughout Latin America (Albo 2008; LeBot 2013; López and García Guerreiro 2016; Seider 2002; Svampa 2019, part II, chapter 1; Trinchero, Campos Muñóz and Valverde 2014; Yashar 2005, chapter 2). The reasons behind this phenomenon are multi-faceted. Firstly, the return of democracy in the region after years of military dictatorships has played a meaningful role. Secondly, in the post-Cold War context, the constitutional, neo-liberal agenda has promoted significant transformations in western societies, amongst which are the endorsement of an active civil society, multi-culturalism and diversity as human rights and policies of reparation of historical injustices. Thirdly, new constitutional rights and international agreements have allowed Indigenous persons, families, communities and organisations to embrace and express their identities, overcoming fear of rejection and repression. Today, Indigenous peoples actively struggle against denial, invisibility, displacement and discrimination,

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and fight for autonomy and self-determination, rights over their lands and resources, Good Living, consultation and participation, bilingual and intercultural education, intercultural health programs and control over their heritage. These struggles have spread across Latin America, transforming the social dynamic of the region.

Latin American archaeologists, or to be more precise a group of them, have recognized the legitimacy of Indigenous claims and are taking steps to transform the discipline. They have started by critically evaluating the role of archaeology in colonising and subordinating Indigenous peoples. Drawing inspiration from Latin American coloniality of power and decolonial theory/program (Dussel 1993; Escobar 2007; Mignolo 2000; 2007; 2008; Quijano 1993; Walsh 2003; 2005), these archaeologists have reflected on the negative discourses and representations that the discipline has produced about Indigenous peoples. They have developed strong arguments in favour of the decolonisation of academic institutions, museums and knowledge, emphasising the need for a more reflective, participative and democratic approach to archaeology (e.g. Angelo 2005; Arthur de la Maza and Ayala 2020; Ayala 2007; Flores and Acuto 2015; Gnecco 1999; Gnecco and Ayala 2011; Haber 2008; 2013; Herrera 2011; Jofré 2010; Kalazich 2020; Manasse and Arenas 2015, amongst others).

Indeed, it is important to decolonise archaeology, but transforming the discipline cannot be the sole objective of the process. In this paper I sustain that along with being critical and reflective regarding the narratives about and representations of Indigenous peoples, their heritage and their past, Indigenous archaeology in Latin America (the archaeology with, for and by Indigenous peoples) needs to be an activist endeavour, developing a politically oriented and theoretically informed praxis. Praxis, in the Marxist tradition, implies knowing and critiquing the world, but also taking actions to change it (McGuire 2008, pp. 37–50). Praxis means planned actions that start with a theoretical analysis of a particular social situation, involve critical thinking and require political commitment. They do not bloom from personal good will, political correctness or common sense. These actions are based on knowledge and reflection.

The need to rethink the relationship between archaeology and Indigenous peoples to develop a collaborative, community-based and participative archaeology has been widely discussed and practiced in North American and Australian/New Zealand academia (e.g. Atalay 2006; Atalay et al. 2014; Bruchac, Hart and Wobst 2010; Colwell 2016; Laluk et al. 2022; McGuire 2008; Montgomery and Freyer 2023; Nicholas et al. 2011; Smith and Wobst 2005, amongst others). Although I recognize the importance of these debates and examples of archaeological praxis, the ideas and discussions offered in this paper find their inspiration in the teachings I have received over the years from Indigenous leaders, philosophical authorities and knowledge keepers, and the traditions of thought that have emerged and developed in Latin America social sciences, such as Latin American coloniality of power and decolonial theory/program, and Latin American long tradition of engaged, committed anthropology (see Gnecco and Ayala 2011; Hale 2008; Jimeno 2005; Katzer et al. 2022; Leyva et al. 2015, volume II; Rappaport 2007; Ribeiro 2023; Varese, Delgado and Meyer 2008), exemplified in the Declaration of Barbados, set forth by a group of renowned anthropologists from this part of the world, who, back in the early 1970s, urged Latin American anthropologists to transform their relationships with Indigenous peoples and rethink the role of the discipline. They claimed, 50 years ago, that:

'The anthropology that is required today in Latin America is not one that takes Indigenous populations as mere objects of study, but rather one that sees them as colonized peoples and is committed to their struggle for liberation … In this context it is the function of anthropology: on the one hand, to provide colonized peoples with all anthropological knowledge, both about themselves and the society that oppresses them in order to collaborate with their fight for liberation' (Bartolomé et al. 2019, p. 506, author translation).

Why is archaeological activism necessary in Latin America today? Despite recent efforts towards the recognition of diversity and the promotion of affirmative actions and rights, Indigenous peoples continue to be denied and victimized by repressive actions. The multi-culturalist, neo-liberal

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agenda has come together with the expansion of capital and the enforcing of a series of economic policies oriented to the deregulation and liberalisation of Latin American economies, as well as the opening of national markets to foreign investments. The trans-nationalisation of production, privatisation of national enterprises, extractive companies' interest in natural resources, agribusinesses and the promotion of tourism have put more pressure on Indigenous lands. The economic interests of national and international groups, with the complicity of politicians, the judiciary, security forces, media corporations and even scholars, have often taken priority over Indigenous rights (e.g. Acuto 2018; Albo 2008; Cottyn et al. 2016; Lenton et al. 2019; Manasse and Arenas 2015; Manzanelli 2020; Stavenhagen 2002; Trincheros, Campos Muñóz and Valverde 2014; see also articles in López and García Guerreiro 2016; and see *Urban Anthropology* 48(3–4), 2019, special issue: State violence and Indigenous peoples in Latin America).

In recent times, powerful groups have implemented a new approach to gain control over native lands and the valuable natural and cultural resources they possess. Since they cannot disregard the legal rights of Indigenous peoples and communities and are well informed of the existence of international courts, judges and groups advocating for these rights, they have altered their tactics, challenging the identities of those who assert their national and international Indigenous rights. They insinuate, or directly affirm, that although these rights exist, those claiming them are not truly natives, or perhaps they are Indigenous, but not from the precise region in question. These powerful groups and their allies intend to delegitimise Indigenous collectives and to reject their status as subjects of rights by representing them as 'fake Indians' or Indigenous people who have come to the disputed lands in recent years from neighbouring countries. These 'usurpers' seek to appropriate the private property of honest citizens under false pretences because, they sustain, the 'true' Indigenous populations of the region are extinct.[1]

This article is the result of more than 15 years of work as a non-Indigenous scholar with various Indigenous peoples and organisations in Argentina (Acuto and Flores 2019; Flores and Acuto 2015; 2023; Huircapán, Jaramillo and Acuto 2017). The first section delves into what I consider the essential aspects of the relationship between archaeologists and Indigenous peoples. I then discuss how Latin American Indigenous archaeology's activism should be oriented. Finally, the last section of the article provides concrete examples of how this program has been implemented.

Working with Indigenous peoples in Latin America

Many years ago, Indigenous authorities and referents taught me that working with Indigenous organisations involves recognising Indigenous peoples as subjects of collective rights and political subjects, as well as embracing interculturality.

Archaeologists in Latin America never explore isolated and abandoned ruins, antiques and old human skeletons. Rather, the great majority of us study the past, heritage and ancestors of a social collective with rights and political interests. Our investigations take place in their territories, which are often intersected with conflicts. Indigenous peoples and their communities have rights over these lands and their ancestral patrimony, which is an integral part of these territories and contributes to their balance and wellbeing (Cruz Mamani et al. 2020; Ñanculef Huaiquinao 2016, 73; Obreque and Muñoz 2020; Paillalef Carinao, 2011; Vilca 2020; see also chapters in Acuto and Flores 2019). These rights are guaranteed by specific national laws and key international agreements such as the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention No. 169 of the International Labour Organization, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of the Organization of American States. To comply with Indigenous rights, it is essential that we familiarize ourselves with the relevant legislation and follow its guidelines when conducting our projects. This involves establishing a thorough consultation process to obtain their free, prior and informed consent before

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commencing and throughout the various stages of our projects. It is crucial that we respect Indigenous institutionality, their decision-making procedures and timelines.

Archaeologists should follow the path of interculturality in their relationship with Indigenous peoples. Many archaeologists, especially advocates of North American and Australian/New Zealand Indigenous archaeologies, prefer describing these interactions in terms of collaboration, and they never employ the concept of interculturality (e.g. Atalay 2006; Atalay et al. 2014; Bruchac 2010; Cipolla, Quinn and Levy 2019; Colwell 2016; Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008; Laluk et al. 2022; Nicholas et al. 2011; Smith and Wobst 2005; Watkins and Nicholas 2014, amongst others). It seems that collaboration serves to mend past inequalities and to transform power balance with native collectives. Nonetheless, collaboration can be a vague term, often used to convey goodwill and political correctness, whilst hiding embedded inequalities and conflicts. Collaborative methodologies differ from activist praxis.

Now, what is interculturality? It is worth noting that interculturality and multi-culturalism are not interchangeable terms. Multi-culturalism is usually a state-led top-down initiative that aims to celebrate diversity, foster acceptance and appreciation of differences and implement policies to compensate and empower minorities (de la Cadena 2020; Dietz 2017; Navarrete 2018; Žižek 1997). However, we must also acknowledge that the administration of diversity by the State through multi-culturalism has also entailed a governmental rationality (Aparicio and Blaser 2015, p. 112; Navarrete 2018).

Interculturality has the advantage of being a concept thought, discussed and employed by Indigenous organisations from Latin America, and not just another academic imposition of concepts and agendas. Interculturality is an ethical and political positioning and a project oriented towards the decolonisation of political and cultural structures and hegemonic paradigms (Walsh 2003). It begins with the construction of horizontal relations between the State (and other non-Indigenous organisations) and Indigenous peoples, whilst respecting self-determination and consultation. Interculturality promotes Indigenous sovereignty and participation in all matters that affect them, including the elaboration and execution of public policies, and requires that Indigenous peoples have control over state institutions that deal with Indigenous affairs.

Interculturality encompasses more than just implementing reparative policies and promoting equitable relations. It is a long-term project that aims to transform the structures that create social asymmetries to bring about a different world (Briones 2009; 2020; Dietz 2017). As claimed by the Zapatista movement in Mexico's Chiapas region: a world where many worlds fit. It is about producing real, lasting changes rather than simply applying Band-Aid solutions to problems (Dietz 2017, p. 194; Walsh 2003). As a political project, it champions plurinationality over multi-culturalism, and advances cosmopolitics, acknowledging earth-beings as real entities and not just as beliefs and hence as participants in the political realm and rights-bearing entities (Blaser and de la Cadena 2018; de la Cadena 2020; Robbert and Mickey 2013). Interculturality is about the insurrection of knowledges (Aparicio and Blaser 2015), fostering appreciation for Indigenous wisdom and its integration into solving the challenges of the Anthropocene era. It envisions ontological pluralism: the coexistence of different knowledges and ontologies – and therefore of realities, worlds and natures – putting an end to the suppression of them by modernity's epistemology and ontology (Aparicio and Blaser 2015; Robbert and Mickey 2013). In a nutshell, interculturality aims to construct an alternative future for humanity, a pluriverse different from modernity/capitalism (Aparico and Blaser 2015; de la Cadena 2020; Navarrete 2018). It is a political, cultural and epistemic program with an emancipatory horizon. It seeks the transformation of modernity/coloniality's program and regime of knowledge/power to build a social power, a society, knowledges and subjectivities otherwise (Escobar 2007; Mignolo 2007; 2008; Walsh 2003; 2005).

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Latin American Indigenous archaeology's activism: a proposal

The spread of neo-liberal agendas, extractivism, agribusinesses and right-wing governments that relentlessly deny the planetary crisis have pushed us away from interculturality's long-term project of radical transformation. Currently, Indigenous peoples' immediate goal is to achieve a dual decolonisation (Francia and Tola 2011; Keme 2021; Ñanculef Huaiquinao 2016; see also chapters in Acuto and Flores 2019 and chapters by native authors in Leyva et al. 2015, volume I). On the one hand, they aim to decolonise themselves. This involves reclaiming their cultural practices and spiritualities, shedding the identities, cultural forms and knowledge imposed upon them by western society, and reconnecting with their collective and territorial ways, perspectives and paradigms. Indeed, many Indigenous organisations are presently working on reviving their languages; redefining their relationships with their ancestral sites beyond the scope of archaeology, tourism and heritage; recovering their spiritual practices; and fortifying their oral memories, all aspects that, for a long time, were prohibited and repressed, leading to their concealment. On the other hand, Indigenous peoples are striving to decolonise the State and the relationship the State establishes with them. Archaeology can contribute to this.

Indigenous archaeology in Latin America needs to be available for Indigenous peoples. Making archaeology available means offering archaeological tools – knowledge, methods, techniques – and our time and expertise to support Indigenous projects and struggles. This inverts the typical interaction between a researcher and an Indigenous collective, where the former approaches the latter to obtain authorisation for their project or information to advance in their investigation. It implies conducting an archaeology by demand, redirecting our research programs and interests and investing time and effort in cooperating with Indigenous causes. The idea is not to bring projects and plans that we think could benefit them, but to listen and learn from native voices about their actual goals and priorities. The praxis I am proposing differs from many public archaeology programs that approach Indigenous collectives to tell them how their past was or to convince them that the archaeological record is a non-renewable resource that can be studied only by professional archaeologists. This approach results in Indigenous communities being excluded from their own cultural heritage. Making archaeology available entails spending time in Indigenous territories and establishing intercultural dialogues to learn about their positions, projects and fights, as well as listening to their aspirations, needs and requests. Only after this stage of intercultural dialogues in the territory (I emphasize here the importance of being in the territory to achieving a profound understanding and engagement with Indigenous peoples), can we design a plan of action together in which we offer our expertise as well as our critical and reflective perspective. Despite the opinions of some European scholars (González-Ruibal, González and Criado-Boado 2018), critical thinking must play a central role in this relationship and praxis. After all, praxis is a theoretically informed plan of action.

Latin American Indigenous archaeology must be approached as an activist endeavour with the aim of producing scientific knowledge and compelling arguments to support Indigenous identities and native peoples' claims over their ancestral lands, challenging those who label them as 'fake Indians' and usurpers. In Latin America's current scenario, Indigenous archaeology should primarily focus on showcasing the pre-existence and uninterrupted presence of Indigenous peoples in their territories. At the same time, it should counteract narratives that propagate their disappearance, transformation or foreign identity; narratives frequently utilized by those seeking to seize their lands and resources. It should demonstrate that Indigenous peoples are neither squatters nor criminals, as they are often depicted in media and political speeches, but that their claims concerning their identities, territories, and heritage are in compliance with the law. Furthermore, Latin American Indigenous archaeology should support Indigenous rights over their ancestral heritage, including the repatriation of the mortal remains of their ancestors. Indigenous collectives have the right to engage with their patrimony in ways that align with their

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unique perspectives, which differ significantly from conventional western scientific approaches and museum practices.

Next, I offer a series of examples of the intercultural work I have developed in coordination with different Indigenous organisations from Argentina seeking to contribute to this dual decolonisation process.

Self-identification and the decolonisation of Diaguita-Kallchakí identity

During the mid-2000s, Carlos Robles, an entrepreneur from Salta province, purchased a large estate (13,473 ha) in Las Pailas area of the Calchaquí Valley. He envisioned the perfect place for a tourism development that would include cabins, restaurants, trails and even a ski track with synthetic snow. However, there was a 'little' problem with his recently acquired property: it was already home to the Indigenous Diaguita-Kallchakí and peasant families, who had lived there for generations.

Robles began to intimidate local inhabitants, affirming he had the power and connections to expel them. Hopeless and frightened because Robles visited the area carrying a pistol on his waist, some people left their family homes, whereas others chose to stay and resist. Using his political influence, Robles managed to obtain a court order for the eviction of the native families. In the early hours of 17 December 2010, local police showed up in Las Pailas, proceeding to use force to expel native families, using a bulldozer to demolish their houses and to destroy their agriculture fields, which began to bear fruit after the first cycle of sowing (see photos and testimonies at http://upndsalta.blogspot.com.ar/, 2010 entries). The actions of Robles, the provincial judge Mónica Faber who issued the eviction order and the police constituted a blatant infringement of national law 26,160, which was issued back in 2006. This law suspends the execution of sentences that order the eviction of Indigenous communities from their traditional lands until the State concludes a comprehensive technical–juridical–cadastral survey of these lands.

To confront Robles and prevent further attempts of being forced out of their ancestral lands, some native inhabitants of the Calchaquí Valley realized that they needed to fulfil the official state requirements to form Indigenous communities. By doing so, they would be legally protected by Law 26,160. To achieve this, they took the first step by inviting local families to join the communities and to proceed with their formal registration. Nonetheless, some individuals were hesitant to identify themselves as Indigenous due to fears of discrimination or repression.[2] It is important to acknowledge that for many years, anything that was considered Indigenous had negative connotations and was seen as undesirable and backward.

As an archaeologist who had been working in the region for several years, I was invited to participate in the first general assembly of the Diaguita-Kallchakí people in February 2011. I happily accepted the invitation and asked how I could be of assistance to their efforts. I received a clear answer:

'We would like you to tell us about your archaeological research in the Calchaquí Valley. However, it would be best if you did not give us the typical archaeological presentation describing the development of pre-Columbian societies in the region, from hunter-gatherers to small agricultural villages to complex societies. What we want to show our brothers and sisters who are still afraid of identifying themselves as Indigenous is the connection between past and present, how in your research you find evidence of cultural practices in the past that we still conduct in the present. We want you to show how archaeology can demonstrate that we are connected with the Indigenous past and survive thanks to preserving our cultural practices.'

I did this during the assembly, but also for some years when I visited the territories of several Diaguita-Kallchakí communities, who invited me to talk to them and to organise workshops about Indigenous archaeology and contemporary history (Fig. 1).

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Figure 1. The author in the first general assembly of the Diaguita-Kallchakí people, February 2011.

My primary objective was to support the process of self-identification as Indigenous and contribute to the decolonisation of their identities. To achieve this, I divided my presentations into two parts. First, I explained why many descendants of Indigenous peoples debated whether they were Indigenous. I discussed the history of native peoples in Argentina and Latin America and how colonial institutions first, and the modern State (including scientific institutions) later, employed a variety of strategies to disarticulate their organisations and to wipe out and replace their identities, cultural practices, knowledge and cosmologies with modern, western ways. The idea was to employ historical knowledge as an emancipatory tool through which we can acquire a better understanding of the present, unveiling a series of contemporary practices, representations and discourses – which have been naturalized and go unnoticed – that still contribute to the subordination and stigmatisation of Indigenous peoples today. Second, I stress that native cultural practices resisted despite this long process of de-Indigenisation, whitening and modernisation in Argentina. Up to that moment, my project was oriented to studying native social life and daily practices in the Calchaquí Valley during the Late Intermediate Period (AD 1000–1450), the strategies the Inkas used to dominate the region since around AD 1450 and how Inka colonialism impacted native life. I was aware that contemporary local people had practices that originated from the Indigenous past, including building methods, agriculture techniques, spiritual bond with the land and the use of certain symbols and metaphors. However, I did not systematically study these practices at that time. I was faced with the challenge of making sense of this fragmented knowledge. I reoriented my project in search of the cultural connections between past and present. My goal was to collect solid evidence and build compelling arguments that supported these connections. Fortunately, it was not as arduous as I initially thought it would be. Once I started to reflect on these links, they became apparent to me. I simply had to fully commit myself to the project.

The search for these connections does not mean ignoring the significant impact that the colonial process first, and modernity and nation-states later, have had on Latin American Indigenous peoples and cultures. I do not argue that there is an unchanging and authentic cultural or identity core that has persisted throughout the years. Indigenous peoples have been displaced

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and dispersed, their institutions disassembled, their cultural practices degraded and forbidden and their identities denied, which of course produced transformations. Contemporary Indigenous organisations, as well as native identities and cultural forms, are not the same as they were 200 or 500 years ago. Nevertheless, many cultural and spiritual practices, languages, technical know-how, oral stories and wisdom have persisted and been passed down from generation to generation (Aparicio and Blaser 2015, 104). After all, Indigenous re-emergence in Latin America is based on recognizing a cultural difference that has endured despite the attacks of western colonial institutions, the State, capitalism and modernity.

The reterritorialisation of Los Chuschagastas' land

On 12 October 2009, a truck arrived in the territory of the Los Chuschagasta Community (Diaguita People) in the Choromoro Valley of Tucuman province, Argentina, carrying three passengers. They were landowner Darío Amín and former police officers Luis Gómez and José Valdivieso. The three individuals observed and filmed the activities of the Indigenous residents of the area, including several children, who were spending a mellow afternoon celebrating a national holiday that paradoxically observes respect for cultural diversity. Goméz approached the gathering and established a brief discussion with a group of community members, amongst them Javier Chocobar, one of the authorities of Los Chuschagastas. This short-tempered former police officer called the encounter a provocation and used it as an excuse to holster a pistol that he kept hidden behind his back, under his shirt, and fired on the ground, using his pistol to hit the head of a person who was taking photos of him (see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v = xZq_mzJSO5M, footage filmed by the perpetrators). Amín and Valdivieso came to his rescue, shooting here and there at the defenceless Indigenous persons without considering the children present. One of Amín's shots ended Javier's life. Moreover, two community members were seriously injured and hospitalised for several months. For 9 years, Darío Amín and his henchmen used their political influences to avoid jail and delay the trial against them. During this time, and as they did before the murder, Amín and his family continued harassing the community. In an astonishing act of impunity, he even organised a barbecue gathering in the same place where he killed Javier.

Los Chuschagasta lived in a state of distress and fear for years. They were scared to walk through their land or tend to their livestock and agriculture fields because they were certain that Amín and his followers would show up unexpectedly and resort to violence against them again. Their ancestral territory had become charged with negative feelings, particularly the place where Javier's murder occurred. It took them several years to recover and reorganise, and with the support of other Indigenous organisations, they began to publicly demand justice in various places and forums (Acuto 2023; Manzanelli 2020; https://www.facebook.com/loschuschagasta.justiciaparajavierchocobar.7). However, this was not enough, and Los Chuschagastas realized that they had to change the negative feelings they had developed towards their land. They needed to reclaim their territory and make it their home once again. To accomplish this, they undertook several projects, including the construction of a communal centre and a ceramic workshop and the production of territorial markers. They invited me to participate in the latter two initiatives.

In an effort to reconnect with their past and culture and decolonise their practices and territory, Los Chuschagastas decided to revive their pottery-making practice. They also planned to produce material markers that would be placed in significant locations, including the place where the tragic event happened. The objective of these markers was to change the emotional and symbolic associations linked to these places, with the hope that people would pay more attention to these material objects and distance themselves from feelings of fear and negativity (Mamani, Chocobar and Chocobar 2019). To go ahead with this process of re-territorialisation, Los Chuschagastas drew inspiration from the pre-Columbian, local practice of demarcating territories with monoliths. However, on this occasion, instead of using rocks to build these markers, they decided

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Figure 2. Territorial markers, Los Chuschagastas indigenous communtity's territory, Choromoro Valley, Tucumán province, Argentina.

to make them with ceramic cubes. The decoration on these cubes would celebrate Javier's life, Diaguita culture and the historical struggles of Indigenous peoples for rights (Fig. 2). To bring this vision to life, Los Chuschagastas enlisted the Instituto Municipal de Cerámica de Avellaneda (IMCA), a college-level ceramic school. The faculty and students of this institution would be in charge of making the cubes, assembling the ceramic workshop and teaching pottery-making to the community.

I was requested to deliver, both in the IMCA and the community, a series of presentations on the role of ceramic pots in pre-Columbian Diaguita society and the elements and meanings of ceramic iconography. The objective was to provide the faculty and students at this school with accurate information about the Diaguita's past to prevent imaginative, modern and often folkloric interpretations of Indigenous ancestral iconography. Additionally, the Chuschagastas wanted to receive information and learn about the archaeological studies conducted on their past ceramics.

I encountered two challenges whilst studying Diaguita ceramics and ceramic iconography. Firstly, the archaeological approaches towards them were mainly descriptive, typological and functional. I aimed to demonstrate that for past Diaguita communities, ceramic vessels were not just utilitarian containers. Instead, they were active participants in past Diaguita social life, with their own tasks and affordances. Moreover, I wanted to show that the iconography on these vessels were not just decorative elements, but rather meaningful statements of Diaguita cosmology. It represented how they perceived and lived in the territory and how they understood the connection amongst entities. To achieve this, I extensively studied pre-Hispanic Diaguita ceramics, including the contexts in which archaeologists usually find them and the elements that adorn them. However, I dedicated more time to re-thinking these findings and attempted to develop and support new interpretations in line with Indigenous theories of territorial relatedness and life. My ultimate goal was to make my work more relevant to contemporary Diaguita people. Secondly, whilst presenting on the archaeology of pre-Columbian Diaguita ceramics, I did not want to create a one-way interaction with Los Chuschagastas that solely presented archaeological knowledge as the only and most legitimate way to understand the past. Instead, my intention was to create spaces of dialogue where Diaguita people could express their understandings of ceramics and iconography on the basis of oral traditions, techniques, spiritual wisdoms and their experience as

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inhabitants of their territory. This way, I hoped to foster an intercultural approach to exploring the past, rather than perpetuating a hierarchical dynamic (see Acuto and Corimayo 2018 for an example of this kind of intercultural work).

Seeking the recognition of the Atacama people

The Atacama people who reside in Salta province are not officially recognized as a pre-existent Indigenous group. The province alleges that the Atacameños came from Chile in recent years, and therefore they are not entitled to receive support, resources and welfare policies from the State. As a result, their claims over their ancestral territories are not taken into consideration. Since 2018, the Red del Pueblo Atacama, an Indigenous territorial organisation formed by 10 Atacameño communities, has been working towards achieving recognition of their pre-existence in the region before the provincial congress. I have been assisting them in their quest by researching historical, anthropological and archaeological information to prove that the Atacama People lived in the jurisdiction of what is today Salta province before the constitution of the modern State.

This project has four activities, all of which are carried out in conjunction with members of the Red: 1. We have conducted semi-structured interviews with Atacameño community members, referents and authorities, both from Chile and Argentina. The interviews aimed to gather information about the constant interactions amongst Atacameño families on both sides of the border. The oral narratives collected during the interviews clearly demonstrate that Atacameño people have maintained fluid kinship relations and continuously exchanged goods. Beyond the political divisions between both nation-states and the ever-increasing border controls and restrictions, especially in the last 20 years, contemporary Atacameños have always seen this as a continuous territory. 2. We examine the written records of western explorers, including state officials, who travelled to the Atacameño region during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Our focus is on identifying the individuals from the local community that they encountered during their journeys and shedding light on the identities of these inhabitants. 3. We study old and contemporary maps of the region in search of Kunza (the Atacama's language) toponymy. 4. We are currently working on an archaeological project on the Argentine side of the Atacama territory. Our project involves surveys, site mapping and surface collections, all of which are being carried out with the participation of members of the Atacama people. Instead of using traditional archaeological survey methods to explore the region, we decided to rely on the decisions of the native participants on the basis of their historical and spiritual knowledge of the territory (Figs. 3 and 4). Our exploration follows Indigenous wisdom and focusses on particular locations that are historically significant to the Atacama people, such as areas where trading caravans once passed, traditional habitats of their people or sacred landmarks. The information gathered has served to produce a comprehensive scientific report that presents all the evidence that confirms the pre-existence of the Atacama people in the region. The Red organisation submitted this report to the legislature of Salta province to bolster their plea for recognition.

Decolonising repatriation

In the year 2010, and for over a decade, I was part of the technical, intercultural team of National Encounter of Territorial Organisations of Indigenous Peoples (ENOTPO), a team formed by non-Indigenous professionals with different expertise: lawyers, graphic designers, biologists, historians and archaeologists, amongst others. ENOTPO was the largest Indigenous organisation in Argentina during the 2010s, consisting of 45 territorial collectives representing 27 pre-existing native nations. As a political organisation, ENOTPO aimed to transform and decolonise the relationship between the Argentine State and Indigenous peoples. It negotiated with the State to

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Figure 3. Intercultural research with members of the Red del Pueblo Atacama.



Figure 4. Making offerings to Earth Mother and sacred mountains in the territory of the Atacama People.

include its members in institutions responsible for developing and implementing public policies for Indigenous peoples, such as the National Institute of Indigenous Affairs (INAI).

Back in 2014, ENOTPO authorities invited me to participate in the National Program for the Identification and Restitution of Indigenous Mortal Remains in charge of the INAI. They asked my input in developing a protocol oriented at organising and regulating the repatriation of

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Indigenous mortal remains. According to Argentine Law 25,517, museums, scientific institutions and universities are required to return these remains to the Indigenous peoples or communities that request them, and the INAI is the official institution responsible for enforcing this law. However, there were no guidelines specifying how to conduct these repatriations. We saw this as an opportunity to create a protocol informed by the Indigenous perspective. To achieve this, we delved into the meaning of the dead and their remains for the various Indigenous peoples in Argentina. We conducted two activities: studying anthropological literature and interviewing members of different Indigenous organisations. Through this research, we gained insights into the role dead ancestors play in the territory and the interactions the living establish with the departed. Next, I discuss three central aspects of the protocol we elaborated on the basis of this investigation.

As a starting point, the protocol stresses that repatriation is not just about giving back mortal remains, but rather is a process that involves the liberation and return of native ancestors' spirits and bodies to their original lands to restore lifecycles that were interrupted when they were removed from their lands and graves. Indeed, it is not just the repatriation of inert bones but of animated entities.

Our investigation led us to learn that most Indigenous peoples feel a sense of responsibility towards the departed, with whom they share their territory. This sense of responsibility goes beyond just a blood connection or cultural affiliation. Deceased persons are viewed as entities and forces in the present, contributing and affecting the territorial dynamic and the lives of the living (e.g. Abercrombie 1998, chapter 7; Allen 1988, pp. 54–63; Condori and Alancay 2019; Course 2007; Cruz Mamani et al. 2020; Dillehay 2007, p. 161; Gose 1994, pp. 114–123; Harris 2000, pp. 27–48; Lanata 2007, chapter 4; Larach 2019, p. 243; Ñancucheo 2019; Ñanculef Huaiquinao 2016, pp. 79–82; Ramos 2010, pp. 130–137). They are also considered subjects of rights, with the right to be respected, honoured, consulted and cared for. Like other earth-beings, dead ancestors bring benefits to human communities, but they also can be angry and sad when mistreated or neglected. Indigenous people consider that their forebears, who are currently held captive in museums, should return to the territories where they spent their lives and where they were buried (Rojas Bahamonde 2016; Larach 2019, p. 249; Ñancucheo 2019, p. 44) (Figs. 5 and 6). As many native voices have expressed (Arjona Acoria 2019; Barra 2019; Condori and Alancay 2019; Cruz Mamani et al. 2020; Huircapán 2019; Navanquiri 2019; Ñancucheo 2019; Pilquimán 2019), dead ancestors are territory themselves (a piece of the larger entity that is the territory itself), and their repatriation is essential for restoring balance and promoting wellbeing in the land.

On the basis of this understanding, we established in the protocol that repatriation processes should prioritise the return of these ancestors to their land. As such, the rightful requestors of repatriation are the Indigenous territorial organisations or communities residing in the same areas from where these persons' bodies and spirits were removed and where they originally lived. Our protocol for the National Program for the Identification and Restitution of Indigenous Mortal Remains in Argentina ranks first territorial connections as the main criteria for repatriation over blood and kinship relations or cultural affiliation. This approach is in line with respecting Indigenous perspectives on relatedness and territorial entanglement. According to the protocol, the mortal remains that are part of institutional collections are considered as territorial ancestors. In this way, we sought to counter those who deny contemporary Indigenous organisations' right to repatriation, often archaeologists or state officials responsible for the administration of heritage, by contending that solely descendants or members of the identical culture possess the entitlement to seek the return of native mortal remains. By using this criterion, contemporary native organisations are barred from requesting the restitution of old mortal remains.

During our interviews with referents and delegates from various Indigenous peoples, they expressed concern regarding the State's attempt to impose western schedules and funerary rituals on them. They explained that before proceeding with a repatriation they require sufficient time to locate the exact location where ancestors should be brought. Additionally, they need to be spiritually prepared, and the territory must be appropriately prepared, to welcome the bodies and

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Figure 5. The repatriation of *longko* Inakayal and his family, with Mapuche, Mapuche-Tehuelche and Günün a küna peoples' flags. Tecka, Chubut province, Argentina, 2014.



Figure 6. Ceremonial activities during Inkayal's and Inakayal's family's restitution.

spirits of the dead back to the land. As they explain, certain ecological and cosmic conditions must be met to achieve an auspicious repatriation (e.g. Barra 2019; Huircapán 2019; Obreque Guirriman and Muñoz Pérez 2020; Pilquimán 2019). An ill-organised repatriation could bring harm. Moreover, all of them expressed their strong desire to rebury the deceased. However, this intention conflicts with the plans of some archaeologists and state heritage institutions that intend

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to keep access to what they consider to be bio-anthropological remains, in case they need to conduct future analysis. We took note of this and outlined in the protocol that only Indigenous peoples possess the authority to determine the timelines for repatriations, and that they have the exclusive right to decide how to proceed with their ancestors once they are returned to native lands.

Conclusions

Indigenous peoples in Latin America continue to be denied and discriminated against. Today, traditional and emerging right-wing and extreme right-wing political parties and politicians, who react against multi-culturalism, affirmative actions and rights and policies of reparation oriented to minorities seeking to preserve private property and class and racial privileges, as well as landowners and national and international companies (ranging from extractive to tourism), who, with the support of mass media corporations, politicians, security forces and members of the judiciary, pursue the appropriation of Indigenous territories and their natural resources and patrimony, challenge the identities, pre-existence and rights of Indigenous peoples and their communities. These powerful groups assert that those who claim to be Indigenous are usurpers of identities and private property driven by political and economic interests. Some even go as far as to accuse these individuals of being members of terrorist organisations, as has happened to the Mapuche in both Chile and Argentina. These kinds of arguments are perilous, and in other historical times, they provoked the disappearance of thousands of people in Latin America, including hundreds of Indigenous persons.

Latin American Indigenous archaeology needs to go beyond internal discussions about the decolonisation of the discipline to join Indigenous collectives' struggles and support their search for rights, social justice, emancipation and autonomy. This requires an engaged and militant archaeology that work together and interculturally with Indigenous peoples to fulfil their projects, claims and the process of dual decolonisation.

Latin American Indigenous archaeology can contribute to native peoples' current social, cultural and institutional processes, supporting their process of self-identification and aiding in the revitalization of their cultural and spiritual practices that they were forced to abandon and that today seek to recover. Additionally, it can help with the decolonisation of government institutions by encouraging the development of public policies that are based on Indigenous perspectives and are interculturally oriented. An example of such a policy is the protocol for the repatriation program mentioned earlier. But more importantly, Latin American Indigenous archaeologists can confront hegemonic groups, institutions and organisations that, seeking to appropriate Indigenous peoples' territories and their resources (natural, but also cultural), refute their identities, pre-existence and the continuity of Indigenous collectives in their territories. They question the fact that native peoples and their communities are entitled to collective rights, and that their demands are in compliance with the law. Archaeological knowledge can demonstrate that those who claim Indigenous rights are indeed Indigenous, and that they have been living in their territories long before the modern nation-state was formed. Additionally, this knowledge serves to show the deep cultural, spiritual and territorial ties that Indigenous peoples have with their patrimony, which is a crucial aspect of their identity and existence. Archaeology, together with anthropology and historical anthropology, are powerful tools to produce evidence and build arguments to counteract those who deny Indigenous peoples and who intend to delegitimise their rightful claims.

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Notes

1 In the case of Argentina, see, for instance: https://www.lanacion.com.ar/opinion/la-cuestion-mapuche-nid1177580/, https://www.clarin.com/revista-enie/ideas/originario-valle-calchaqui_0_K69GQoCVO.html, https://www.eltribuno.com/salta/nota/2021-5-22-0-0-0-los-falsos-indigenas-de-los-valles-calchaquies, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v = Gepme00yZ1E, https://www.perfil.com/noticias/opinion/de-donde-salieron-los-mapuches-los-indios-chilenos.phtml, https://www.infobae.com/politica/2017/08/12/claudio-chaves-hablar-de-nacionalidad-mapuche-es-un-disparate/.

2 Needless to say, they were right about this (see http://upndsalta.blogspot.com.ar/, entry January 2014).

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