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FROM ETHNOGRAPHY TO COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH-CREATION

Decolonizing Methodologies with Indigenous Qom Artists in the Argentine Chaco[1]

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Abstract
We examine methodological transformations that led from the ethnography of Indigenous music and dance to collaborative research-creation processes over twenty-five years of work with Qom artists and teachers from the Argentine Chaco. In the first part, we trace our main approaches, from doctoral research conducted in a context of neoliberal crisis and ongoing coloniality, to participatory workshops, and, later the co-production of intercultural artworks such as books, performances, music albums and videos. We highlight how these last research-creation processes generated new forms of knowledge through multisensory and affective approaches that combined documentary and creative practices, archival materials and collaborative aesthetic experimentation. In the second part, we analyse one of these collaborative artworks: the song and videoclip *Qa'añe. Young Woman* with the Qom singer Ema Cuañerí and the dance group Pocnolec. Exploring disagreements surrounding the legitimacy of repertoires, contrasting understandings of ancestrality, and the role of historical-ethnographic archives in relation to contemporary Indigenous performances, we focus on the aesthetic, epistemic, and micropolitical dimensions of these tensions. We argue that the Indigenous ethics of "reciprocity", adopted and reworked here as a methodological principle, could help to navigate and manage tensions aroused. Our overarching hypothesis suggests that articulating ethnography and art through collaborative intercultural approaches can contribute to the decolonisation of ethnomusicological methodologies by challenging dichotomies inherited from modernity/coloniality —such as mind/body, science/art, theory/practice, and reason/emotion— as well as extractivist relationships between anthropologists and Indigenous peoples and the exoticisation of cultural difference.
Keywords: music; dance; archives; ancestrality; reciprocity.

DA ETNOGRAFIA À PESQUISA-CRIAÇÃO COLABORATIVA

Descolonizando metodologias com artistas indígenas Qom do Chaco argentino

Resumo
Examinamos as transformações metodológicas que nos conduziram da etnografia da música e da dança indígenas à pesquisa-criação colaborativa ao longo de vinte e cinco anos de trabalho com artistas e professores Qom do Chaco argentino. Na primeira parte, descrevemos nossas principais abordagens, desde uma pesquisa de doutorado realizada em um contexto de crise neoliberal e colonialidade persistente, passando por oficinas participativas e, posteriormente, pela coprodução de obras artísticas

[1] This publication synthesizes and reworks discussions presented by the authors at the ICTMD-LATCAR symposia held in Uruguay (2018), Mexico (2020), and Chile (2022).

interculturais, como livros, performances, álbuns musicais e vídeos. Destacamos como esses processos de pesquisa-criação geraram novas formas de conhecimento por meio de abordagens multissensoriais e afetivas que combinaram práticas documentais e criativas, materiais de arquivo e experimentações estéticas colaborativas. Na segunda parte, analisamos uma dessas obras colaborativas: a canção *Qa'añe. Jovem Mulher* e o videoclipe *Qa'añe. Jovem Mulher Jovem*, desenvolvidos com a cantora Qom Ema Cuañerí e o grupo de dança e teatro Pocnolec. Ao examinar divergências em torno da legitimidade dos repertórios, entendimentos contrastantes sobre ancestralidade e o papel dos arquivos histórico-etnográficos em relação às performances indígenas contemporâneas, enfocamos as dimensões estéticas, epistemológicas e micropolíticas dessas tensões. Argumentamos que a ética indígena da "reciprocidade", aqui adotada e reelaborada como princípio metodológico, pode contribuir para gerir as tensões que emergem nesses processos colaborativos. Nossa hipótese central é que articular etnografia e arte por meio de práticas interculturais colaborativas pode contribuir para a descolonização das metodologias etnomusicológicas, ao questionar as dicotomias herdadas da modernidade/colonialidade — como mente/corpo, ciência/arte, teoria/prática e razão/emoção —, bem como as relações extrativistas entre antropólogos e povos indígenas e a exotização da diferença cultural.
Palavras-chave: música; dança; arquivos; ancestralidade; reciprocidade.

DE LA ETNOGRAFÍA A LA INVESTIGACIÓN-CREACIÓN COLABORATIVA

Descolonizando metodologías con artistas indígenas Qom del Chaco argentino

Resúmen

Examinamos las transformaciones metodológicas que nos llevaron desde la etnografía de la música y la danza indígena hacia procesos colaborativos de investigación-creación, a lo largo de veinticinco años de trabajo con artistas y docentes Qom del Chaco argentino. En la primera parte, reseñamos nuestros principales abordajes, desde la investigación doctoral realizada en un contexto de crisis neoliberal y colonialidad persistente, a los talleres participativos y, posteriormente, la coproducción de obras interculturales como libros, performances, discos y videos. Destacamos cómo estos últimos procesos de investigación-creación generaron nuevas formas de conocimiento mediante abordajes multisensoriales y afectivos que combinaron prácticas documentales y creativas, materiales de archivo y experimentaciones estéticas colaborativas. En la segunda parte, analizamos una de esas obras colaborativas: la canción y el videoclip *Qa'añe. Mujer Joven*, con la cantante qom Ema Cuañerí y el conjunto de danza y teatro qom Pocnolec. A partir del análisis de los desacuerdos en torno a la legitimidad de repertorios, las comprensiones contrapuestas acerca de la 'ancestralidad' y el rol de los archivos histórico-etnográficos frente a las performances indígenas contemporáneas, nos centramos en las dimensiones estéticas, epistémicas y micropolíticas de esas tensiones. Sostenemos que la ética indígena de la 'reciprocidad', adoptada y reelaborada aquí como principio metodológico, puede contribuir a gestionar las tensiones generadas en estos procesos. Nuestra hipótesis general plantea que articular la etnografía y el arte mediante prácticas interculturales colaborativas puede contribuir a la descolonización de las metodologías etnomusicológicas, al cuestionar las dicotomías heredadas de la modernidad/colonialidad —como mente/cuerpo, ciencia/arte, teoría/práctica y razón/emoción— así como las relaciones extractivistas entre antropólogos/as y pueblos indígenas y la exotización de la diferencia cultural.
Palabras clave: música; danza; archivos; ancestralidad; reciprocidad.

Introduction

In this article, we analyse the methodological transformations our research group has undergone over a period of 25 years, moving from ethnographies of Indigenous music and dance to collaborative research-creation involving aesthetic experimentations with *Qom* artists from the Argentine Chaco. We focus on the collaborative process of researching and creating a videoclip on the "ancient" Qom female initiation ritual, based on the main song of the digital album *Qa´añe, Young Woman. Qom songs from the Qañiyi* (2023). This process was led by the Qom artist Ema Cuañerí, a renowned elder singer, actress and teacher — with the participation of *Pocnolec* - the only Qom dance and theatre group in Chaco Province -, and ourselves as researchers and creative producers.

We would like to underline that when research is carried out within our own countries where anthropologists and Indigenous collaborators share the same postcolonial territory —, there are greater opportunities to sustain long-term relationships. In such processes both our interests and those of our collaborators shift with changing socio-economic contexts and cultural policies, while our affective and political bonds often deepen. For example, Ema told us it took her over 20 years to 'find' the ancient female initiation song, and nearly another 20 years to 'gather the courage' to record and film it with us, whom she now refers to as her 'anthropologist friends'. During these two decades, as Ema became one of Argentina's leading Indigenous singers, we consolidated our own strategies for collaborative research-creation. By reflecting on this long-term case, we aim to contribute to the discussions regarding the epistemic and micropolitical potential interdisciplinary approaches that bring together ethnography, art and collaborative research practices. Although audiovisual experimentation has been part of ethnographic practice since its early stages —particularly in works from the 1930s by Franz Boas, Marcel Griaule, Margaret Mead, and Gregory Bateson (see Cascardi, 2012)— collaborative experimentation with musical languages (Feld, 1982; Seeger, 1986; Araujo, 2006; Tugny et al. 2009; Harrison, Mackinlay, and Pettan, 2010; Menezes Bastos, 2011; Montardo, 2011; Barros and Silva, 2017; Durán Velasco et al., 2022), and especially with dance and performative ones, has emerged more recently (Turner, 1982; Tovar, 2009; Citro, Podhajcer, Roa and Rodriguez, 2024). These works show how sound, body, and visual languages can complement traditional anthropological methods by fostering a more multisensory approach to

cultural practices. Such processes reveal their epistemic potential to knowledge production, enabling what phenomenology has termed "pre-objective or pre-reflective knowledge" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945; Csordas, 1999). This approach provides access to sensitive and affective dimensions of experience that are often difficult to capture through conventional text-based and verbal forms of expressions. In performance practices, it fosters a form of reflexivity grounded in bodily enactments, as suggested by the British anthropologist Victor Turner (1982) and the American performance studies scholar Richard Schechner (2000), allowing latent memories or even repressed experiences to emerge beyond verbal articulation. Similarly, working with audiovisual archives, can expand memories -through direct connections with images and sounds from one's own collective past or from other related groups previously unknown to the subject-, a dynamic that several authors have termed "archive performativity" (Taylor, 2003; Balbé and Torres Agüerro, 2021).

Our overarching hypothesis is that when these kinds of research-creations are developed in collaborative intercultural contexts, they possess significant epistemic and micropolitical potential to destabilise hegemonic representations and practices of modernity-coloniality. These include dualistic frameworks (mind/body, science/art, theory/practice, reason/emotion), extractivist relationships between anthropologists and Indigenous peoples, and the exoticisation of cultural differences. We also examine the tensions and conflicts that permeate intercultural collaboration, particularly those arising between historical-ethnographic archives and contemporary repertoires of Indigenous performance, as well as between different aesthetic-epistemic modes of representation and contrasting notions of ancestrality. Our methodological hypothesis is that addressing these tensions requires bringing anthropological reflexivity and our Western democratic and egalitarian assumptions into dialogue with Indigenous ethics of reciprocity, thereby fostering intercultural modes of collaboration.

In the first part of the article, we trace our three methodological approaches that have long shaped this long-term engagement with the Qom people and situate them within changing geopolitical contexts in Argentina. This genealogical perspective is crucial for understanding how our relationships gradually evolved into collaborative research-creation, including the production of the videoclip *Qa'añe.Young Woman*, which we analyse in the second part.

Methodological movements in a Changing Sociopolitical Context Researching through Ethnography in a context of Neoliberal Socioeconomic Crisis and Postcolonial Invisibility

Our relationship with the Qom (also known as Toba) people began in 1998, when Citro initiated the study of their rituals in rural communities of Formosa province, northeast Argentina. This ethnic group, numbering around 100,000 persons, inhabits the subtropical lowlands of the Argentine Chaco Region. As both an anthropologist and a dancer, Citro was particularly interested in Qom dances and music, in relation to representations of the body and personhood and everyday bodily techniques, which became the focus of her doctoral dissertation. In the past, Qom people were semi-nomadic hunter-gatherers with a shamanic worldview, and a long history of resistance to Spanish colonisation. By the late nineteenth century, however, Argentina's ruling elite promoted an imaginary national identity of a 'White' nation – 'descendants of the ships', referring to European immigrants, mainly from Spain and Italy. This narrative was coupled with the military persecution, economic exploitation, and even genocide of Indigenous peoples, followed by their political and cultural invisibilisation (Citro and Torres Agüerro, 2015). From the mid-twentieth century onwards traditional subsistence practices based on hunting, gathering, and fishing were progressively curtailed and replaced by rural labour and state welfare policies. In the 1970s, a massive conversion to Evangelical Pentecostalism led to the condemnation and abandonment of Qom collective rituals within the new Indigenous churches (Miller, 1979; Wright, 2008; Citro, 2009). These ongoing forms of coloniality contributed to the marginalisation of their performative genres —often referred to as "ancient music and dances"— which came to be remembered by only a few elders. At the same time, they fostered the emergence of "new music and dances," evangelical genres influenced by folk, and more recently pop music.

Our initial ethnographic work in the late 1990s focused on documenting these ancient genres through interviews and, above all, participant observation and observant participation in Indigenous communities in eastern Formosa, mainly among the *Takshik* groups[2]. One

[2] The term *Qom* today encompasses endogamous groups that were nomadic across different territories of the Argentine Chaco and still preserve certain dialectal variations of their language. Our work began with *Takshik* and continued with the *Nachilamolek*, in eastern and western parts of Formosa province, respectively. Later, we carried out research in Chaco Province, with the *KollaGal'ek* group. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that these former group designations are gradually falling into disuse, as the generic contemporary designation *Qom* now prevails.

contribution of this research was the documentation and revaluation of performative genres on the verge of disappearing, such as the rattle-stick song-dances performed during female initiation rituals (Citro, 2009) and the *nmi* circular song-dances that fostered courtship and alliances among young people during the annual carob harvest ritual (Citro and Cerletti, 2009)[3]. We also identified tensions between 'ancient Qom' and 'new Evangelical' repertoires, as well as continuities that led to re-elaborations. Citro (2009, 2019) analysed these ritual re-elaborations as hybrid, provisional dialectical syntheses addressing some of the cultural contradictions of coloniality, while others—especially economic—remained unresolved. This period coincided with the implementation of neoliberal economic policies in Argentina's, culminating in the national crisis of 2001. These conditions deepened the historical exclusion and poverty of Indigenous peoples and highlighted the ambivalent role of Qom churches. On the one hand, they could legitimise poverty as part of a Christian ethos of 'humility', enabling clientelist practices between White politicians and Qom leaders. On the other hand, they also provided crucial spaces for social reproduction, mutual support and community care. Beyond these sociopolitical dynamics, we observed that the Qom's opposition between the powerful bodies enacted through ritual dances and disciplined bodies shaped through practices such as Bible readings and religious discourses partially resonated with our own tensions as dancers and scholars. Despite our different ethnic and class backgrounds, we argued that both experiences were shaped by the enduring effects of coloniality. Combining (auto-)ethnographic reflexivity and postcolonial perspective, we examined how these contradictions in fieldwork and our own interpersonal genealogy led to a critical re-examination of dialectical theories and methods for understanding our contradictory embodiments (Citro, 2019). To address this challenge, we proposed bringing into dialogue two perspectives: a 'multisensorial and affective approach' (based on ethnographic participation, cultural phenomenology, movement and performance analysis) to describe and comprehend current cultural embodiments, including senses, emotions, and agency; and a 'critical-reflexive distancing approach' (drawing primarily on post-structuralist and post-colonial theories) to reveal how embodiments are shaped by historical genealogies of power within specific geopolitical, economic, and socio-cultural contexts. By articulating these perspectives, we analysed the performative effects of music,

[3] In this work, we also analysed how these genres shared similar musical features with genres of other indigenous peoples of South American lowlands, as Menezes Bastos (2007) highlighted.

dance and other cultural embodiments in constructing, legitimising, and contesting identitarian positions, roles, and intersubjective experiences. (Citro, 2009, 2019). Finally, although this initial research followed a more conventional ethnographic methodology, it raised questions about individual authorship and pointed to the need for more collaborative forms of knowledge production. For instance, in the introduction to the dissertation, Citro named the 180 Indigenous people with whom she had exchanged experiences and dialogues as 'co-authors' of the work (Citro, 2009, p. 16-20). In the years that followed, these collaborative relationships became increasingly visible and central to our research practice.

Participatory Workshops in a Context of Multiculturalist Ideologies and World Heritage Policies

Following the 2001 political crisis, a new government took office in Argentina as part of the broader 'leftward shift' in Latin America, inaugurating a period of socioeconomic recovery, regional integration and strong support for scientific and artistic policies. At the same time, in a global context of multicultural ideology and promotion of cultural heritage, national policies began to challenge the traditional Argentine identity imaginary of 'White-European origin', granting greater visibility to Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and Mestizo peoples. As a result, local governments began to support specific actions aimed at promoting indigenous music and dances (Citro, Torres Agüerro, 2015a). Within this new scenario we were able finally able to establish, in 2004, our Research Group of Anthropology of Body and Performance at the University of Buenos Aires, one of the first in the country to focus on embodiment, dance and performance among Indigenous, Afro-Latin American and peasant communities. These cultural and academic transformations opened new paths for our research. Several Qom teachers and emerging artists began to revalue their ancient music and dances —previously prohibited by Evangelical churches— and invited us to collaborate in documenting and researching them. In response, we developed interdisciplinary workshops drawing on authors such as the French filmmaker and visual anthropologist Jean Rouch´s (2003) 'participatory research methods in visual anthropology' and the 'participatory action research' of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1982) and the Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda (1992). In 2007, Torres Agüerro, together with a colleague, coordinated the first participatory video workshop with indigenous people of the Chaco region, together with Romualdo Diarte, Juan Carlos Caballero, and other

young Qom teachers and musicians. The workshop resulted in two short documentary films on ancient Qom music and dances (Torres Agüerro, 2013). During this experience, we met Ema Cuañerí for the first time, when she spontaneously organised a dance workshop as part of the activities. At that time both Ema and Romualdo were beginning to gain visibility with invitations from the Formosa provincial government to participate in cultural events while also recording their first albums of Qom music – Ema, in her case, with three indigenous singers from different ethnic groups. A few years later, we analysed these early artistic productions in relation cultural policies shifts, focusing on processes of revaluation, hybridisation, and exoticisation (Citro and 2, 2012, 2015a and b)

In 2011, we were invited by a Qom artisan from an NGO in western Formosa, belonging to the *Nachinamolek* groups, to develop a new research-creation with adult women aimed at "recovering and performing their ancient practices", through a "dance and memory" workshop. Over the time, the workshops' objectives changed as new participants joined –first young students and later bilingual teachers (Citro, Torres Agüerro, and Greco, 2019). The process concluded with the publication of the educational book *Memories, Music, Dances, and Plays of the Qom of Formosa* (Citro, Cuañerí, Diarte et.al 2016) co-authored by four anthropologists from our group and nine Qom teachers, including Ema and Romualdo. Like the videos from the first workshop, the book was designed to support Indigenous teachers' work and, for the first time, brought together documentation from the two main Qom groups — *Nachilamolek* and *Takshik*.

We would also like to emphasize the methodology employed in these early participatory workshops. First, we assembled a collective archive integrating ethnographic and historical materials on rituals and bodily practices from our fieldwork, previous anthropological research in Argentina, and accounts produced by missionaries and explorers in the Chaco region, most of them European. These materials were shared to encourage collective reflection while simultaneously co-generating new records and interpretations with the Qom collaborators. To this end, we employed a range of strategies adapted to each group, including screenings, listening sessions, elicitations exercises and collective discussions based on the archival materials. We also promoted aesthetic experimentation through drawing, re-enactment of songs, dances and everyday life bodily practices as well as audiovisual recordings and editing techniques. Drawing on these experiences, we began to conceptualise this approach as

'performance-research', a transdisciplinary methodology that explores the sensory, affective, and reflective dimensions of intersubjective experiences, not only through words but also through a diversity of gestures and bodily movements, sounds, images and other materialities. Hence our choice of the broad term 'performance' to describe it. (Citro, 2018). A key feature of this methodology is that neither the artistic languages we employ nor the research strategies we design are imposed in advance. Rather, they emerge tactically through ongoing dialogue and are continually adapted to the particularities of each group, territory, and sociocultural context, including the intersections of ethnicity, gender, and social class. In this sense, we adopt an ethnographic perspective that remains attentive to local cultural categories and aesthetics, as well as to the evolving intersubjective and micropolitical dynamics that shape each participatory process. This openness was already evident in our first workshop, which began as a video-based project with young male teachers, but soon incorporated an improvised dance session proposed by an older female teacher and singer. Similarly, the second workshop, initially conceived as a dance and memory project for older women, later expanded to include writing and drawing practices developed with middle-aged teachers. This responsive and open-ended approach, grounded in listening and transformation, distinguishes our work from certain outreach initiatives promoted by NGOs, artistic groups, and other institutions in the Chaco region, which often rely on a predetermined aesthetic language (such as video-dance, hip-hop, or Afro-dance) and apply uniform methodologies across diverse groups and contexts.

Finally, we would also like to highlight the significant impact that these participatory experiences had on our own academic practices. Since 2012, we have also modified the ways in which we conduct academic events and university teachings, incorporating workshops that promote embodied forms of teaching-learning theory and methodology (Citro and Rodriguez, 2020). Furthermore, since 2014, we have increasingly sought to communicate and disseminate our ethnographic research through artistic formats, in an effort to reach broader audiences. This marked a third methodological transformation in our trajectory.

Intercultural Artworks in a Context of De- and Contra- Colonial Questionings (2014 -)

In 2014, we began inviting Qom musicians who had participated in our workshops to join research-creation processes that we coordinated. Soon afterwards, these artists invited us to participate in their own artworks, such as *Qa´añe*, which we will discuss later. Through these

collaborations, we produced intercultural artworks that creatively reinterpreted our research materials, blending documentary and artistic elements, non-fiction and fiction, and generating both indexical references and metaphorical reworkings. As a result, our initial archive expanded into an interdisciplinary and intercultural collection of historical, ethnographical and artistic records that has been continuously reactivated, reinterpreted, and enriched. In this sense, our methodology of aesthetic experimentation resonates with Lévi-Strauss' (1964) notion of *bricoleur*, a figure he developed to describe the mythical and ritual modes of thought characteristic of Amerindian peoples. Like the *bricoleur*, we creatively recombine available materials—historical, ethnographic, and artistic—to generate new meanings, relationships, and forms of knowledge. These new experimentations emerged within a shifting intellectual context marked by growing critiques of academic knowledge production from decolonial and counter-colonial perspectives, drawing on the work of Latin American thinkers such as Quijano (2000), Mignolo (2005), and Rivera Cusicanqui (2015). At the same time, Qom communities in Formosa entered a period of territorial struggle and political mobilisation that led to open confrontation with provincial authorities. As a consequence, the governmental support for Indigenous artists was suspended as a form of "political punishment" (Citro and Torres Agüerro, 2015a). In response, we became more actively involved in supporting their initiatives, assisting with grant applications and seeking funding through both academic institutions and national arts programs. One of the first outcome of this new stage was the video-dance *Transmutations of being-in-the world* (2014-2018), coordinated by Silvia Citro with the collaboration of the dancer Carina do Brito and the photographer Salvador Batalla, and featuring songs of Ema Cuañerí on the soundtrack. In this artwork, we engaged in bodily improvisations with the trees in a woodland environment exploring how these encounters affected and transformed our perceptions and movements. The piece drew inspiration from the memories of our fieldwork with the Qom, particularly their relationships with the powerful non-human beings of the bush or *monte*, 'the powerful owner' or 'mothers/fathers' of species such as plants, animals and spaces. In this exploration we sought to avoid mimetic or realistic approaches, as well as any exotic appropriation of the cultural differences. Instead, we focused on the phenomenological experience of *being in-that-other world*, opening ourselves to alternative ontologies, as part of

a broader process of decolonising our own intersubjectivities (Citro, 2018)[4]. In 2018, Citro travelled to Chaco province and met Pocnolec, the province's only group performing Qom music and dances, outside the sphere of Evangelical churches[5].

Led by Rosa Suárez and Carlos Lorenzo, a couple of bilingual teachers and performers from Fortín Lavalle, Pocnolec became acquainted with our collaborative book on Qom music and dance in Formosa province and our video-dance *Transmutations*. Inspired by some of the bodily movements explored in the film, we began improvising together and eventually incorporated the audiovisual material in a new version of the work[6]. From this encounter arose the proposal to continue collaborating. Building on these experiences, we developed *Transmutations, An Assemblage in Becoming* (2018 - 2019), a performative installation presented in Buenos Aires. The work combined our multimedia ethnographic archive with images from the earlier video-dance, projecting audiovisual materials interwoven with dance and theatre scenes inspired by ethnographic encounters. Through project funding, we invited Ema Cuañerí and the Indigenous rap duo Eskina Qom to perform live as part of the installation. We initially planned to create a new version of the project in Chaco with Pocnolec and Ema; however, these plans changed when Qom artists invited us to participate in their own artworks. In 2019, the rap duo Eskina Qom invited us to participate in the production of their song and video *Sangre y lucha* (*Blood and Struggle*). Around the same time, Ema invited us to collaborate on her first album of 'ancestral music', entitled *Qa'añe. Young Woman: Qom Songs from the Qañiyi*. We agreed to invite Pocnolec to perform the dances featured in the album's music videos. Ema's invitation redirected our efforts toward supporting her project, reflecting the flexible and responsive character of our approach: rather than adhering to fixed plans, we allowed the research-creation process to be guided by the artistic priorities of our Qom collaborators. It also marked a key shift in our collaborative methodologies, which we examine in the next section.

[4] This process bears some similarities to what Piedade (2024) has recently described as "transcultural musical compositions," based on the reworking of materials emerging from his ethnomusicological fieldwork with the Wauja Indigenous people (Upper Xingu, Brazil), and grounded in ethical and aesthetic commitments such as "rejecting superficial musicality and easy, generic references" and "the exoticization of cultures" (p. 259).
[5] This encounter took place through anthropologist and filmmaker Carolina Soler, who at that time was conducting her doctoral dissertation on different video experiences in that province, including a video-dance workshop she had carried out with Pocnolec (2017). For this reason, she consulted us about our earlier experiences in Formosa.
[6] Video available at: https://vimeo.com/268161499?share=copy

The Collaborative Research–Creation Process of *Qa´añe* – Young Woman.

The recording of Ema's album and the production of its music videos were delayed by two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In November 2021, we resumed our collaboration with Pocnolec, who invited both Ema and us to participate in their annual *Qom-Kanak* Festival. This event originated from an encounter between Qom and Kanak people of New Caledonia, Melanesia, organised through an Evangelical network in 2006[7]. Although the Kanak have not returned since 2012 due to travel costs, their presence continues to shape Pocnolec's identity. The group organises the *Qom-Kanak Intercultural Meeting* each year as a free festival featuring Indigenous performers from Formosa and Chaco, as well as film screenings and craft fairs.[8]

We travelled to Fortín Lavalle, where Ema proposed that Pocnolec accompany her festival performance with two dances, which we all rehearsed together beforehand. This marked our first collaborative aesthetic experimentation. After the festival, we met to discuss Ema's recording project. One of the main issues Ema emphasized during these early conversations was her concern with preserving the ancient songs she had inherited from her family and transmitting them not only to the Qom people, who, she noted, often no longer "remember" these songs, but also to a broader audience, including non-Indigenous people. Her project brought together two musical legacies. On the one hand, it included a series of songs composed by her late father, Clemente Cuañerí, a member of the Qañiyi group, whose repertoire was closely linked to the Qom worldview and shamanic practices. The album also incorporated two archival recordings made in the 1990s by members of our research group. On the other hand, it featured songs that Ema had learned from important women in her family, including the female initiation ritual song, which her aunt Luisa Luna transmitted to her after more than twenty years of searching. To date, Ema's recording of this Qom song remains the only documented version of its kind in Argentina[9]. This made its recording particularly significant not only for Ema, but

[7] During this encounter, twenty Kanak participants travelled as part of a pan-Indigenous 'theological project', initiated during the African decolonisation process of the 1960s and influenced by the leader Jean Kotto.

[8] It is worth noting that this is the oldest self-organised Indigenous Music and Dance festival in the region. Today, the festival is organised exclusively by Pocnolec and is largely self-funded, with occasional support from local politicians and Evangelical churches. The festival has also received recognition from the Chaco Provincial Legislature. Available at: https://legislaturachaco.gob.ar/sitio/noticia.php?not_id=11115.

[9] As we discuss later, this song belongs to the liminal phase of the ritual and is the only one documented to date, whereas the song-dances performed publicly during the ritual's aggregation phase had previously been documented by Ruiz (1985), Ruiz and Citro (2002), and Citro (2009).

also for us as her collaborators and researchers. It is important to note that, among the Qom, as among many other Indigenous peoples of the South American lowlands, songs are often understood to be bestowed upon humans by powerful non-human beings through dreams and encounters in the forest. At the same time, Qom people also describe some songs as being transmitted within families, passing from one generation to another (Ruiz 1978-79, Ruiz and Citro, 2002). For this reason, Ema often told us that she felt a profound responsibility to preserve the songs she had inherited from her ancestors. This family lineage also endowed her with the authority to record and disseminate these songs and consequently, with the ethical consent of Qom communities to do so. For this reason, each song on the album is preceded by an introductory explanation describing the context in which it was transmitted and making explicit Ema's relationship to the family member from whom she received it. It is important to add that, among the Qom, the power of songs to bring about transformations, for example, in shamanic healing, is linked to the person who received them rather than to the songs themselves (Ruiz 1985, Roig 1998); thus, songs belong to each individual shaman, and only when performed by their owner do they possess ritual efficacy. That is why Ema is able to record her father's shamanic song and her aunt's initiation song because, as she explained to us, when sung by someone else, they 'lack power'. The process of musical documentation among the Qom appears to differ from that of other Indigenous peoples of the South American lowlands, where greater tensions can be observed regarding the circulation of recordings beyond community settings, often resulting in stricter controls and restrictions (Menezes Bastos, 2011), as well as limitations on who may perform particular repertoires due to ritual secrecy (Seeger, 2015). Among the Qom of Argentina, however, we have not encountered these kinds of tensions or restrictions. in our collaborative work with the Qom of Argentin. Instead, these Indigenous artists have consistently emphasized the importance of preserving and sharing "ancient" expressions that most Qom people—now largely evangelical—no longer know, and that are even less familiar to non-Indigenous audiences. In this respect, the context differs markedly from that described for "Amerindian music in Brazil," which, according to Menezes Bastos: "has suffered widespread predation, being used—and 'ab-used'—without any payment of royalties […] and even without any reference to its specific origins. […] Nationalist music in Brazil turned this procedure into a veritable plague" (2011, p. 3).

Another important issue that emerged during these early conversations was that many of these songs were performed together with dances and other bodily gestures as part of a sequence of ritual acts. We therefore agreed that it was essential to represent them through their multiple modes of expression. This led Ema to invite Pocnolec to contribute to the music videos through dance and theatrical performance. Since Pocnolec shared similar interests in preserving Qom culture and disseminating it among diverse audiences, its members enthusiastically accepted Ema's proposal. As we mentioned earlier, this new research-creation process marked a significant shift in our modes of collaboration. In this case, Ema, as an Indigenous artist and researcher, took the lead in her own research-creation process and assumed authorship of her artistic works, while our role shifted toward one of support and accompaniment as both anthropologists and artists. In relation to the artistic production process, we collaborated by identifying funding opportunities, preparing grant applications, contributing to the audiovisual and performance-based dimensions of the works, and helping to disseminate them through social media, festivals and congress. In relation to the research process, we facilitated connections among these Indigenous artists, drawing on the broader interpersonal networks we had developed over years of fieldwork, while also contributing materials from our ethnographic and historical archives. In sum, after these initial exchanges, we collectively agreed on our different roles in this new collaborative project and we plan to hold a preparatory workshop during our next visit.

The Workshop: Archives, Repertoires and Ancestralities in dispute

In May 2022, Ema and us, returned to Fortin Lavalle to record her album and, to facilitate a workshop with the members of Pocnolec at the home of the group's founders, Rosa and Carlos, alongside Kelly Lorenzo, Graciela García, and Héctor Carmelo[10]. Following the methodology developed through our previous collaborative projects, Ema began by sharing her songs, while we presented a selection of photographs and audiovisual materials from our archive. Together, we then discussed possible directions for the development of the music videos.

[10]Although the group is made up of more members, their participation varies depending on work dynamics. Kelly and Graciela are young women (25 and 30 years) and Héctor is a 40-year-old man who works as a rural labourer.

Given the deeper impact of colonisation and evangelisation in Chaco province, processes that began in the late nineteenth century, most Qom elders no longer practised or recalled ancestral dances and songs, and no local archives were available to support their reconstruction. For this reason, we shared records from Qom communities of Formosa province—which was incorporated into the Argentine state and colonised later, mainly during the 1930s—as well as early twentieth-century records of other Indigenous groups from the region. To our surprise, after viewing these archives, Carlos and Rosa expressed a certain discomfort with using records they felt: "belonged to other groups (...) they are not ours". Ema and we responded and explained that, although some differences exist between the Qom tribal groups from Formosa and Chaco, shared stylistic elements remain in their ancestral practices. Indeed, it was precisely this broader Qom aesthetic heritage that Ema sought to evoke through her album and music videos.



Image 1: Workshop with members of Pocnolec at the home of Rosa and Carlos Suárez. From left to right: Ema Cuañerí, Carlos Suárez, and Héctor Carmelo, Fortín Lavalle, Chaco Province. May 2022, Photo: Soledad Torres Agüero.

This episode revealed a deeper tension regarding the legitimacy of the dance repertoire to be performed in the videos. As anthropologists and collaborators, together with Ema, we stressed the importance of revisiting elements from our shared historical-ethnographic archive. However, Pocnolec leaders questioned the validity of these materials, arguing that they

originated from other Qom groups and did not reflect their own local heritage. We interpret this disagreement as being linked to the marked aesthetic differences between the archival materials and Pocnolec's contemporary choreographies —differences that we suggest were partly shaped by the group's encounters with Kanak people from New Caledonia between 2006 and 2012. As Rosa and Carlos recalled, during that period a series of workshops were held under the name of 'cultural rescue and exchange', seeking to identify 'similarities' between the traditions of both Indigenous groups. Previously, in conversations with Ema, the three of us had suspected that these encounters may have involved a predominant transmission of Kanak performance styles, rather than a 'mutual exchange'. At that time, most Pocnolec members were mostly young people with little or no previous knowledge of traditional Qom dances. They were introduced to a religiously infused and pedagogically structured proposal, framed by a global and local multicultural climate that favoured such initiatives. To examine this hypothesis, we conducted a comparative analysis of Pocnolec's current dances in relation to filmic and photographic records of contemporary Kanak performances. We found that Pocnolec's choreographies showed greater aesthetic affinity with Kanak styles than with ancestral Qom dances documented in the archival materials. These affinities were particularly evident in the use of wide-legged stances, strong rhythmic footwork, and movements and gestures reminiscent of combat or war dances. We also observed striking similarities in clothing and bodily adornments, likely introduced through the Kanak workshops, where participants were taught to create their own garments. Additionally, we noted parallels in vocal styles, probably influenced by the Kanak ways of performing evangelical hymns. When we shared this comparative analysis with Ema, she agreed that these archives confirmed our initial suspicion: Pocnolec's performances showed greater similarities to those of contemporary Kanak people than to those of the Qom *antiguos* or ancient.

It is worth noting that this kind of comparative analysis required a critical-reflexive distancing, enabling us to interrogate genealogies and the power dynamics embedded within them. In this respect, our methodology—grounded in the dialectical perspective outlined earlier—differs from certain forms of arts-based research that do not always engage in practices of suspicion, historical contextualisation, and critical distancing (Citro, Podhajcer, Rodríguez and Roa, 2024). The analysis revealed complex dynamics of intercultural influences and intergenerational discontinuity, while also highlighting the ambiguous role of archives and

repertoires in processes of cultural revitalisation. As Taylor (2003) suggests, both performance repertoires and archives are means of "producing, storing, and transmitting knowledge," albeit in different ways: repertoires through embodied practices transmitted from generation to generation, and archives through material records that endure over time but create a separation between the moment of production and that of reception. While ethnographic and historical archives may function as resources for memory, reappropriation, and cultural revitalisation in some contexts, as occurred in our earlier workshops in Formosa, they may generate dissonance in others when they fail to resonate with the lived experiences and contemporary performance repertoires of Indigenous communities, as was the case in this workshop in Chaco.

Another key episode showing Kanak´s influence was Pocnolec's participation in a 'night ceremony' held in the bush during the 2010 visit, led by the Kanak shaman and choreographer Ailé Moisés. Carlos described it as: "going to the other side," a moment in which they were able to "connect with the spirit of their ancestors" and "begin to dance". This experience helped them to overcome their initial feelings of "modesty and shame" around Indigenous dances, as they "received the power to dance" and created their first choreography: a "combat dance". As several authors note (Cordeu and Siffredi, 1971; Miller, 1979; Wright, 2008), for the Qom people the *haviak*—the bush at night—is considered the most sacred and powerful space, inhabited by various non-human or more-than-human entities[11]. It is within this liminal environment that shamanic initiations and other forms of encounter with these beings occur. During our workshop Carlos and Rosa recounted this ceremony with Ailé Moisés, excerpts of which we transcribe and translate below.

> Carlos: The (Kanak) choreographer, who took us there, taught us the technique, taught us how to connect through nature. How to connect through the tree, how you have to talk to the arrows. It was all work at night. Then, he gave us a test on how we have to connect to nature. So, we would sit down and start closing our eyes and listen to nature... what nature transmits to you.
> Ema: Why did they do it at night?
> Rosa: According to the choreographer, he says that is where the spirit of our ancestors begins to emerge. It starts to give strength and begins to observe how nature is, how the people are (...) There it begins to roam, and then the human, we who are still alive can receive that connection.
> Ema: But is that version from the Kanak or from the Qom?

[11] There are strong similarities in the important role of non-human beings and their agency among indigenous peoples of the South America. In the case of the Amazonian peoples, it has been analysed by Viveiros de Castro (2004) through the notion of perspectivism. For a comparative analysis of this topic between Chaco and Amazonian indigenous peoples, see Citro and Gomez (2012).

> Rosa: From the Qom too, because they go out at night.
> Carlos: So, the spirit goes out all night, it is wandering. When we sleep, we can make a connection to that spirit. It's like we make a pact with it. And from there, when you go somewhere, that spirit will protect you. The spirit will get to know you because you already made a pact with it(...). So, with the Kanak brother we made an exchange. And that brother says there is a place called Tierra Grande where no one steps except him. So, he calls that spirit to make an exchange with the spirit from here. He held a ceremony to enter the bushes to make a connection with his land and the one here. (…) He made an offering, took things out and started to bury them, and with prayer. And that is how the pact was made (...). From there I know that we still have a connection between nature and us. And through that, it transmits to us the energy, the strength to show your direct connection with nature (...) The connection with the different spirits of nature.
> Ema: Without that connection, what we do would not make sense…
> Rosa: We are trying to express what we feel about our culture to the public. And that they can also receive it. After we transmit the power of our culture to them, it is as if they finally recognize themselves as indigenous and that is a joy. (Workshop interview with Carlos, Rosa, Ema and Ailé Moisés, Fortín Lavalle, Chaco, Argentina, 2022).

As noted above, the nocturnal space of the *haviak,* or bush, occupies a central place in Qom cosmology. Within this setting, the Kanak choreographer-shaman taught Pocnolec members a "technique" for "connecting with nature" and, through a ceremony involving offerings and the burial of various objects, established what participants described as a 'pact' between the spirits of his land, *Tierra Grande*, and those inhabiting the Chaco bush. As Rosa explained, it was through these experiences that: "the spirit of our ancestors began to emerge..." while Carlos emphasised that they received "the energy" and "the strength" to express the connection with the different spirits of nature" — an "energy of culture" that they seek to transmit to audiences through dance. In response to this interpretation, which strongly associates ancestors with nature, Ema questioned whether it was: "Qom or Kanak". To our knowledge, this association appears resonate more closely with Kanak cosmological understandings (cf. Leenhardt, 1961) than with those documented among the Qom, although further comparative research would be needed to explore these convergences and differences in greater depth.

From this account, we can identify two distinct ways in which Pocnolec and Ema understand 'ancestrality' and legitimise their repertoires. For Ema, *ancestral* refers to the Qom songs and dances transmitted through family relations and kinship networks —expressive forms

often described within indigenous communities as 'ancient' or 'old'. Importantly, the contrast between the *old-ancient Qom* and *new evangelical* reflects discourses rooted in coloniality-modernity, based on the binary opposition between the 'wild' or 'primitive' (*ancient*) and the 'civilised' (*new*) (Citro, 2009, 2019). By using *ancestral* instead of *ancient* or *old*, Ema distances herself from pejorative associations with primitivism and instead foregrounds forms of knowledge acquired by listening to, observing and learning from her ancestors and relatives.

By contrast, Pocnolec conceives their dances as a legacy from more diffuse and collective 'spirits of ancestors' in connection with 'nature', rather than from specific family members or kinship lineages. This form of ancestrality has been performatively updated and reworked through the group's experiences, particularly those originated during the bush ceremony with the Kanak choreographer-shaman. We suggest that this understanding of ancestrality transcends local territories and temporalities, fostering a sense of *communitas* (Turner, 1988) between Pocnolec, the Kanaks and the 'spirits of nature'. In this sense, it may be understood as a multicultural pan-Indigenism identification with utopian dimensions. In conclusion, the tensions and conflicts surrounding the legitimacy of the musical and dance repertoires discussed in our workshop were closely related to these contrasting notions of ancestrality: embodied family memories (Ema), intercultural encounters and rituals (Pocnolec), and historical and ethnographic archives (ourselves as anthropologists). A central challenge of intercultural collaborative research-creation lies precisely in navigating such epistemic and micropolitical disagreements and tensions. As we suggested in our methodological hypothesis, we sought to address these challenges through collaborative micropolitics grounded on Qom ethics of reciprocity, aimed at restoring over time a kind of compensation, and in certain cases balance, for asymmetries and tensions created by present differences. Reciprocity implies that gifts, knowledge, and forms of support received in the present will eventually be returned, creating relationships of complementarity and mutual obligation. In this sense, positionalities are not dissolved, as liberal fictions of a democratic equality worldview might suggest but rather acknowledged and reshaped over time. Guided by this principle, the group agreed that Pocnolec would take part in filming scenes for Ema's album, performing the repertoire and aesthetics she proposed based on our shared archives. In turn, we offered to film Pocnolec's war dances and record one of the songs they had learned from their exchange with the Kanak. In this way, we agreed to collaborate with these indigenous artists, helping them to produce different videos

and musical recordings according to their different approaches to music and dance: in the case of Ema, closer to her memories and our archives, in the case of Pocnolec, closer to their mixed Kanak and Qom influences. After one of these recordings with Pocnolec, while we commented about the different music and dance styles, Rosa recalled that a teacher had once described their work as: "contemporary." Torres Agüerro then jokingly suggested that our joint creations might be called: "Qom-temporary". In the Qom language, the "q" represents a guttural sound, distinct from the Spanish "c" in *contemporáneo*. Through this playful neologism we sought to reframe these hybrid performances as contemporary reworkings by Qom artists, rooted in their familial and spiritual ties to ancestry, while simultaneously shaped by encounters with Kanak shamans and choreographers, Evangelical missionaries, and ourselves as anthropologists and artists. In the following section, we focus on the filming and editing for Ema's videoclips, analysing the convergences, disagreements and the role of reciprocity in reshaping these tensions.

Micropolitics of Reciprocity in the Filming and Editing of the the Music Videos

As an outcome of the workshop, we agreed to produce two music videos to accompany the songs from Ema's album. The first was *Jeia ja Jo* (the song of joy), one of the melodies traditionally performed in the *nmi*—circular song-dances of young people fostering both courtship and alliances between groups. In these celebrations, men initiated the song-dance, after which women selected a partner and joined the circle. Accordingly, the filming —carried out on the riverbank — involved the entire Pocnolec group. Since neither the song nor the choreography formed part of their existing repertoire, Ema taught both to the performers[12].

The second video was conceived for *Qa'añe - Young Woman*, the song that gives the album its title. Through this video, Ema pursued different purposes. On one hand, she sought to recreate the: "female initiation ritual (…) recovering memories as closely as they have been", to transmit them to younger Qom women who no longer practise this rite. While certain beliefs and myths about menstruation persist in domestic life, the ritual—with its specific songs and dances—has largely disappeared, replaced by Evangelical celebrations of girls fifteenth birthdays (Citro, 2009; Citro, Cuañeri, Diarte et al, 2016). On the other hand, Ema continued the dissemination of the ancient Qom music and cultures to diverse audiences, as reflected in

[12] Available at: https://open.spotify.com/intl-es/track/0lY2wTf09EsYDjrTjfVG3R?si=199e60e716974032. The official music video is currently in production.

her request that we help promote the album and the music video at various festivals and academic conferences.

One of Ema's memories associated *Qa'añe* song with an adobe house where the young initiate was secluded. Graciela, one of Pocnolec's members, suggested using her father's unused adobe house in the bush as a filming location. There, together with Ema, Rosa, Graciela, and Kelly we finalised the script and gathered ritual objects: Ema contributed handmade *chaguar* textiles, woven from the fibres of a native bromeliad, and the *tegete* (a gourd rattle used by Qom shamans), while Rosa brought objects from her own fifteenth-birthday celebration, which had caught our attention during a previous workshop at her home. Unlike earlier sessions, this became an exclusively female space that fostered intimacy and trust, enabling a deeper engagement with memories of the ritual. Together, we agreed to depict the initial stage of the rite, when, following her first menstruation, a girl is secluded by her mother in a hut. Both Ema and the women of Pocnolec explained that during this period, the girls subject to a series of prescriptions – including restrictions on movement and dietary practices during present and future menstruations – intended to protect both her and her community from illness and misfortune. They also agreed on ritual acts associated with the transitional, or liminal, stage, such as the moment when the grandmother – or another elder woman recognised as a 'good woman' – feeds the initiate honey and transmits teachings through songs and myths, thus passing on her qualities in a form of *nawoga* (contagion).

For the filming, Graciela played the role of the initiate, Rosa the mother, and Ema the grandmother. The significance of the teachings transmitted during this stage of the ritual is especially evident in the lyrics of *Qa'añe,* performed by Ema in the video, with caring bodily gestures such as caresses and embraces, directed towards the initiate. As we mentioned before, Ema's recording is, to date, the only documented version of this phase of the ritual. Given its cultural significance, the lyrics of this song had already been translated by Ema and published in our collaborative book, together with other Qom teachers (Citro; Cuañeri; Diarte et al., 2016), which also included a description of this ritual. Building on this earlier work, we agreed to subtitle the song in Spanish for the video and subsequently translated the subtitles into English, as Ema was interested in disseminating it internationally.[13] The lyrics instruct the initiate: *My*

[13] Available at: https://vimeo.com/741190466?share=copy#t=0. One example on how meaningful international dissemination was for Ema occurred when we agreed to present the video at the 2026 ICTMD World Conference

daughter, seclude yourself; so that she may learn to 'take care' of her people and prevent catastrophe: "The great mother serpent (*Araganaq lateé*) will take us beneath the world" and "we will be buried by the rainbow (*Qomogonalo*)." This verse refers to a widespread myth according to which a menstruating woman who failed to observe seclusion attracted *Qomogonalo*, the rainbow-serpent, a powerful being who unleashed a storm and buried her community (Metraux, 1937, p. 190; Citro; Cuañeri, Diarte et al., 2016).




Images 2 and 3: Ema with Graciela performing the female initiation ritual for the music video ***Qañe. Young Woman***, Chaco Province, May 2022, Photo: Soledade Torres Agüerro.

Another ritual act associated with the liminal phase, involved a song-dance performed with rattling sticks (*nasotaGalaqte*) to transmit *anañagat* (strength, power) to the initiate. This song-dance was also included in the music album. According to various sources, it was traditionally led by elderly women, accompanied by other women from the community (Citro, 2009). Although Pocnolec was unfamiliar with this particular repertoire, they agreed to learn and perform it, with Kelly also joining the group. Since rattling sticks were no longer being made in the community, we constructed them collectively. During this process, Pocnolec women recalled another ritual element previously unknown to Ema or ourselves: the initiate's younger brother would massage her back by walking on it. We considered this memory important to document as a novel contribution, and, consistent with our commitment to collaborative participation, encouraged its inclusion in the filming. Ema, however, remained silent when this was mentioned and later questioned whether the scene should be represented at all. Eventually, she insisted that the grandmother, rather than the younger brother, should

in New Zealand. She shared on her social media writing: "Our Qom song is being heard in New Zealand", and personally thanked us for making this possible. It is worth noting that, although we sought funding to enable Ema to travel to New Zealand, we were ultimately unable to secure financial support for her participation.

perform the massage. Once again, divergent repertoires of Qom groups from Formosa and Chaco came into tension – this time regarding ritual practices themselves. A further disagreement concerned the costumes used in the re-enactment. While Pocnolec initially wore outfits influenced by Kanak aesthetics, Ema brought natural-fibre textiles from the region, produced by Indigenous artisans who are highly valued for their local knowledge and craftsmanship. Following her and our support performers were invited to redesign their costumes by incorporating these fabrics over black garments. After a series of silences and brief conversations, the younger members of Pocnolec agreed to adopt the attire proposed by Ema, along with the ritual acts and song-dances she transmitted, through reference to our shared historical and ethnographic archive. As an elder with a long professional career dedicated to the research and dissemination of Qom cultural practices, Ema held considerable knowledge and authority and her representation of the ritual ultimately prevailed. Yet, at the end of the filming, Ema gifted the valuable handmade fabrics to the young women. This act of reciprocity helped compensate for the micropolitical tensions that had emerged throughout the collaborative process. The young women of Pocnolec joyfully received the gift and incorporated the new costumes into their artistic performances.

After filming the ritual scenes, we were aesthetically drawn to a large tree near the adobe house, where sunlight created striking patterns of light and shadow. We invited Pocnolec performers to improvise gestures and movements around it. Although tree climbing had once been part of their childhood games, some still retained bodily memories and enthusiastically embraced the proposal. Inspired by our earlier work with trees in the video-dance *Transmutations* (2014), we also began to suggest specific poses and movements for the performers to photograph and film. In parallel, we created a site-specific installation by combining Ema's *chaguar* textiles and *tegete* with ritual elements from Rosa's fifteenth-birthday celebration —long dresses, high heels, even the Barbie doll that had decorated her birthday cake. These objects were interwoven into an assemblage linking past and present forms of the initiation ritual, which performers explored through movement, sensation and improvisation. We also recalled the *nawe epak*, the 'black tree of shamans', they climbed in dreams to acquire power through the reception of gifts (Wright, 2008).



Image 4. Site-specific installation combining Ema's ***chaguar*** textiles, ***tegeté*** (gourd rattle)**,** feathered ceremonial headband and fifteenth-birthday dresses, Chaco Province, May 2022. Photo: Soledad Torres Agüero.

This creative experimentation in a natural environment reflects our performative methodology of site-specific creation that we have been developing and analysing in previous works (Citro, 2018). It begins with multisensory openness to the affective materialities of the place, connected to an ethnographic approach of holistic immersion and listening with all the senses. From this openness, we propose situated and playful forms of experimentation that emerge from specific genealogies—in our case, those shaped by ethnographic experience, artistic practice, and accumulated knowledge. In summary, this intercultural artistic experimentation brought together diverse experiences: our aesthetic choices and performative methodologies, Qom embodied memories such as childhood tree climbing and ritual objects associated with both past and present forms of female initiation. The resulting images acquired a hybrid, and at times surreal quality sharply contrasting with the more mimetic aesthetics of the earlier ritual scenes. We addressed this new tension in the final step of our research-creation process: the editing of the video, which was developed in Buenos Aires where the necessary technical resources were available. Although Ema participated in much of the album's post-production, budget limitations prevented her from remaining in the city during the editing. Nonetheless, we maintained regular consultations through online meetings and ongoing communication until we reached a final version, agreed upon with Ema and Pocnolec.

In the final version of the video *Qañe*, two distinct modes of representation can be identified. The opening sequences, portraying the isolation and liminal phase of the initiation ritual, adopt a staged and mimetic aesthetic grounded in Ema´s memories and interpretations. By contrast, the latter part uses montage to metaphorically evoke the girl's reintegration into her community as a transformed person. To achieve this, we proposed combining two types of footage: rare historical images of the ritual from our ethnographic archive, and excerpts from the tree explorations with Pocnolec. In the final edit, for example, images of the 'ancient' *tegeté* (gourd rattle) used by shamans are juxtaposed with images of "modern" dresses and high heels from fifteenth-birthday celebrations. In this way, the video extends the montage aesthetic we had previously developed in *Transmutations, an assemblage in becoming*.



Image 5: Film still from ***Qa'añe. Young Woman*** showing Ema performing the ***nmi*** song-dance with a ***tegeté***, together with Rosa, Kelly, and Graciela, juxtaposed with archival footage of an ancestral female song-dance performed with rattling sticks. Photo: Soledad Torres Agüero.

The final sequence foregrounds the sound of electric chainsaws recorded during the outdoor shoots. Reinforced by an explanatory caption, this sound functions as an indexical marker of the capitalist exploitation that has devastated the Qom forest and the lifeways it sustains, including ritual practices. Through these editing choices, we sought to destabilise representational regimes that exoticise Indigenous traditions, by freezing them, as the American scholar of visual anthropology and film studies Tobing Rony (1996, p. 196) argues, "in a taxidermic past" where the indigenous body still serves as evidence of a time before history and

are the "Native is redeemed" through taxidermic reconstruction: "the dead is brought to life". Finally, it is worth noting that Ema and Pocnolec remained open to these proposals and ultimately endorsed them. In sum, the video editing enabled us to articulate two modes of ritual representation, each reflecting distinct aesthetics tied to our epistemic and political intentions, according to our positionalities. The first is a mimetic, staged representation of the past, aligned with Ema's aim as Indigenous elder and artist to reconstruct and give visibility to ancestral ritual practices masked by the violence of coloniality. The second is an assemblage aesthetic, based on juxtaposition and dialogue among archival fragments of diverse cultural, spatial, and temporal origins. This approach reflects our perspective as Latin American hybrid researcher-artists, seeking to exercise critical reflexivity and suspicion in aesthetic experimentation to destabilise the representational politics of modernity-coloniality, particularly the exoticisation and temporal fixation of Indigenous traditions[14].

Concluding remarks

In the first part of this article, we analyse how, throughout these long-term processes with the Qom people, we sought to deepen our collaborative approaches by tactically adapting our methodologies to shifting sociopolitical and academic contexts. Over more than twenty-five years, we have progressively attempted to transcend some of the violences inherited from modernity–coloniality, particularly the extractivist model of the "anthropologists and their informants," exemplified by the hegemony of individually authored ethnographies. What began as a doctoral project conducted in a context marked by ongoing coloniality later gave rise to collaborative research-creation processes that generated videos, books, performances, and albums alongside academic publications. These alternative forms of production helped circulate Indigenous expressions in more accessible ways, both within communities and to broader audiences. Furthermore, Qom artists, as Ema and Eskina Qom, expanded their professional trajectories nationally and internationally —performing in Buenos Aires, Madrid, Manchester, and Brunswick— and generated valuable income through festivals and screenings[15].

[14] As many authors have suggested, exoticisation was part of the modernity–coloniality representations and still persist in certain heritage policies under contemporary neoliberal multiculturalism in Latin America (García Canclini, 1990; Žižek, 1998; Citro and Torres Agüero, 2015b; Citro, Torres Agüero, and Mennelli, 2017).
[15] For documentation of these presentations, see the video recording available at: https://vimeo.com/1014971521?share=copy and the Ko'eyene programme at Festival Theaterformen: https://www.theaterformen.de/Theaterformen_2024/en/programme-2024/koeyene.html

In the second part, our analysis of *Qa`añe* revealed the complexity of these intercultural collaborative processes, especially when divergent knowledge and aesthetic choices came into tension. Epistemically, such processes allowed us to deepen existing understandings and generate new insights, for example concerning the different ways of transmitting and legitimising music and dance repertoires, as well as contrasting understandings and practices of the female initiation ritual. Micropolitically, however, they also produced tensions over which repertoires, memories, and aesthetic forms should be represented. These tensions were linked to interethnic (Qom, Kanak, and non-Indigenous) and intraethnic (Qom from Formosa and Chaco) affiliations, as well as to differences in generation, social class, professional trajectories, and positionalities we occupied as artists and anthropologists. They also reflected contrasting modes of transmission: the authority of archives in Western scientific tradition, family-based transmission in Ema's case, and the agency of non-human beings in Pocnolec's understanding of ancestrality. As we have argued, the Indigenous ethics of reciprocity we learned through years of collaboration proved a fruitful way of navigating these tensions, without abandoning the critical reflexivity of our position as anthropologists attentive to contexts, genealogies, and power relations.

In this regard, it is also important to note that, although decision-making authority throughout the process remained with Ema, as the principal author and performer of both the album and the video, the micropolitics of reciprocity fostered the emergence of other experiences that, to some extent, compensated for the asymmetries arising from these differential positions, without dissolving them. Among these experiences, Pocnolec also recorded its own repertoire and received new costumes from Ema for its artistic performances. For our part, as artist-anthropologists, we incorporated, toward the end of the video, scenes that responded more directly to our own aesthetic choices and epistemic-political concerns. These experiences reflected the desires and choices of the different participants in the collaborative process and, we argue, helped to compensate, at least partially, for the tensions generated by the unequal distribution of decision-making power.

In sum, this long collaboration illustrates possible articulations between ethnography and art, combining multisensory and affective approaches with critical-reflexive distancing, documentary practices with experimental montage, and efforts to maintain reciprocal balance

among diverse aesthetics, epistemologies and positionalities. In doing so, it challenges some of the epistemological dichotomies inherited from modernity–coloniality, such as scientific research versus artistic creation and ritual, theory versus practice, and their concomitant ontological oppositions, such as reason versus emotion, and mind versus body. Instead, we move "in-between" (Bhabha, 2002), engaging in a "border thinking" —as Mignolo (2005) suggests— in a *chi'xi* or 'motley' world where tensions and contradictions coexist. As Rivera Cusicanqui explains through the Aymara concept of *chi'xi*: "Far from fusion or hybridity, it is about living with and inhabiting contradictions. Not denying one side or the other, nor seeking a synthesis, but admitting the permanent struggle in our subjectivity between the Indigenous and the European." (2015, p.) This perspective resonates with the 'critical' and 'decolonial' interculturality proposed by the decolonial theorist Walsh (2008), which seeks to expand cultural dialogue across traditions while reflecting on inequalities and political transformations.

For those of us who live, research, and create in this controversial and turbulent corner of the Global South, it is precisely the micropolitical potential of collaborative research-creation that encourages us to continue experimenting with practices oriented toward a horizon we long for: one that is simultaneously decolonial and intercultural.

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