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Cameras to the people: Reclaiming local histories and restoring environmental justice in community based forest management through participatory video

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Cameras to the People: Reclaiming local histories and restoring environmental justice in community based forest management through participatory video[3]

Indigenous peoples' histories and memories are almost invisible to the eyes and ears of Western civilization. When we do hear about them, we generally do so through accounts and reconstructions made by naturalists, priests, explorers and more recently historians, geographers, and anthropologists – rarely from indigenous people themselves. The invisibility of local histories is not accidental. It is the result of a historical hegemonic knowledge production system that has privileged particular ways of knowing the world, at the expense of others (dos Santos et al 2007, Quijano 2000). This lack of attention to locally experienced realities is a common feature of environmental narratives that place the blame of environmental change on local resources uses and practices (Leach & Mearns 1996, Martinez-Alier 2003), thus reinforcing the need for external control (western science-based knowledge) over indigenous peoples' lands. Erasing local histories is also convenient for de-rooting people from their lands as part of the imposition of development agendas by the state and the private sector interested in promoting extractive activities and other projects

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of "general interest" in indigenous peoples' territories (Acosta 2015, Swampa 2013, Harvey 2014).

Yet indigenous peoples in Latin America are very much aware that an important part of their struggle for cultural and physical survival involves telling the world their own histories. "We must tell government officials who we are and make them understand the importance of reconstructing our history" (Carlos Morales, Uwottüja Indigenous Leader). "We have to unearth our own history" (Belkis Bueno, Bariva Indigenous Leader). These were some of the urgent actions identified by a group of 50 Venezuelan indigenous leaders that participated in an "Environmental Conflict Transformation and Interculturality Workshop" that took place in Puerto Ayacucho in October 2014 (Mirabal, 2015). Similar comments are heard throughout the region all the time as part of indigenous peoples' wellbeing agendas (Buen Vivir) (Huanacuni 2010).

Some indigenous people are making important progress reconstructing their past as part of the development of their own "Life Plans" (Planes de Vida) (Cabildo de Guambia 1994; COINPA 2008; Jansasoy & Perez-Vera 2006; Roroimokok Damuk 2010, Espinosa 2014). A Plan de Vida is a plan made by indigenous organizations and communities in an effort to survive and to maintain traditions, customs, and the hope of establising a society with its own identity based on the traditional knowledge of its people. It is a way to guaranty better conditions and a better quality of life for indigenous communities (Perez 2009). Yet, the construction of Life Plans is not a linear or conflict free process. They can be difficult to develop due to frequent tensions between community fractions that often have different and conflicting value systems and views about what local well being should be (Rodriguez 2016). Something similar happens with the formalization of territorial rights, which often generates new conflicts at community level due to clashing notions of authority (Larson et al 2015), among others. Many of these tensions are often associated with market dynamics, which create social disassociation and weakening of community and intercommunity rules, making it all the more difficult to develop a common or shared view of well being or to consolidate the territorial autonomy agenda.

Here we discuss how "participatory video" (PV) can help with indigenous peoples' needs for cultural reassertion as well as with creating opportunities for restoring environmental justice in their territories when community-based natural resource management and autonomous development themselves have become issues of local contention.

The story we share is the one of the Monkox people of Lomerio, Bolivia, who recently started using video cameras to reconstruct the struggle for land rights in their territory and to document tensions around community forestry management as part of a participatory research project with the Universidad NUR from Santa Cruz, Bolivia, and the School of International Development (DEV) from the University of East Anglia (UEA). As we will see, participatory videos can have great power as part of an activist and practise based approach for environmental justice research.

The use of participatory videos in research

Participatory videos are part of a new global trend in action research (Shaw & Robertson 1997, White 2003). As video production has become increasingly easy to use by the general public, many facilitators and researchers are using it worldwide in different settings as part of research approaches that seeks to promote social change.

According to Tamara Plush (2012), participatory videos share three features with action research:

- Awareness raising and knowledge: participatory video as a medium for raising awareness about knowledge as power.
- Capacity building for action: strengthening social actors in the use of videos at community level with the objective of generating knowledge in a participatory manner within a long term framing.
- People centered: using videos as a strategy to communicate the knowledge generated by communities and to influence policy making at a global, national and local level.

Additionally, on a similar trend to other media based action research methods of Latin American origin like "the Theater of the Oppressed" (Boal 1993), participatory videos are known for their potential for stimulating local reflexivity and building communication as part of a wider research agenda. As suggested by Kolb (1984), action research involves repeated cycles of activity followed by reflection on that action, with the purpose of improving some aspect of the social world. In this sense, participatory video can be conceptualized as an emergent interactive process, involving iterative cycles of learning in this action research tradition, rather than a way of producing research output. Therefore, the research interactions that evolve are better perceived as akin to the ongoing conversation of ethnography, which may contribute to a research report, rather than a way of collecting data such as interviews to be delivered on video (Shaw 2012).

Thus, the process of doing participatory videos and not just the product (the video) is perceived as having a great value both for research, assisting in the understanding of peoples' views, choices, hidden narratives and power relations during the different phases of the video production, and for social change, due to the learning process and reflexivity that it triggers when local views, knowledge and marginalized voices are made visible and discussed collectively.

Due to its visual nature and ability to capture the voices of peoples and of marginalized groups, participatory video has the potential to educate, persuade and influence decision making in a way that can bring about positive change. In Latin America, there are interesting experiences where participatory videos are used with this aim in some intercultural research and programs in universities (e.g. the International Network of Intercultural Studies of the Universidad Católica from Peru (RIDEI-PUCP) http://red.pucp.edu.pe/ridei/sobre-ridei/presentacion/). Participatory videos have proven to be a valuable tool promoting intergenerational dialogue, making social, economic and education inequities visible and helping to revalue and recover local knowledge, practices and identities (see for example Sandoval 2015). This method is also increasingly used in the region as a tool for social mobilization and awareness-raising about environmental injustices associated with

development projects and extractive and industrial activities[4]. Yet, its use in environmental justice research, such as to help to uncover the complexities of social exclusion in community led natural resource management, seems to be in its infancy.

In the following paragraphs, we discuss a case in which participatory video has helped to shed light to different dimensions of environmental (in)justice (procedure, distribution and recognition) in community forest management while helping to revitalize local identities and develop a sense of restorative justice.

Introducing the Monkox people of Lomerio, Bolivia

The communal indigenous territory (TCO) of Lomerio is an area of 256,000 hectares located in the department of Santa Cruz, in the lowlands of Bolivia, legally owned and managed by the Monkox indigenous peoples since 2006.

In 2009, after a process of intense political mobilizations, Bolivia changed its national constitution to become a "Plurinational Nation-State" that acknowledges differentiated rights for indigenous peoples (Article 2). TCOs are legally owned indigenous territories that resulted from this intense period of mobilizations. There are currently 190 TCOs in Bolivia, covering 20.7 million hectares.

The TCO land distribution model has important implications for the management of common property resources such as forests, as it provides the legal framework for local control and property rights on natural resources for the use and management of forests through community forest management plans.

Thus, forestry marks the identity of the conquest for land in Lomerio, as developing a communal forestry model in the area was a strategy used by the Monkox People to gain property rights over the territory and control illegal logging in the area. Lomerio

[4] Visit http://www.newsreel.org/guides/Maquilapolis/MAQ_DiscussionGuide_Espanol.pdf for an example of the use of participatory video in a transnational campaign against maquila factories in Mexico. Also visit http://revoluciontrespuntocero.com/cheran-keri-para-nosotros-aqui-en-el-pueblo-los-partidos-politicos-estan-muertos/ for an example of a community television project in Cheran, Mexico, where participatory videos are used as part of a wider communication strategy of strengthening local identity, autonomy and territorial control. For a series of 15 participatory videos developed in Peru against mega mining visit: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WL93OHxUTEQ&index=2&list=PLokUKtHRc9TibkfbbjT5b-7Q6Y7ntXg8l

is the first case of forest certification in Bolivia through the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). The Lomerianos are also known as one of the first indigenous peoples in Bolivia to fight for territorial indigenous autonomy. Currently, all villages in Lomerio are trying to establish a market-oriented forestry management model under local control. There are a total of 23 communities in Lomerio that have set aside areas for this kind of management.

Despite the success in obtaining territorial property rights and the existence of a communal forestry model, the collective management of this vast territory is complex due to the diversity of actors and public policies pressuring for access and use of its rich natural resources. Public policies to support community resource management models are still weak. There is also an increasing pressure from external informal mining cooperatives to exploit the territory. Additionally, the national government is incentivizing cattle grazing projects in the communities, which could create a large scale land conversion process in the area in the coming years.

CICOL, the Indigenous Organization of the Native Communities of Lomerio, the legal authority over the territory, is experiencing great difficultly to regulate resources management in the area. Some communities enter into very unfavorable negotiations with timber companies without following CICOL recommendations. The government on its side is promoting mining and incentivizing cattle grazing without undergoing free, prior and informed consent procedures or involving CICOL in local territorial planning. What is perhaps more worrying to the Monkox leaders and elders is that despite the success in obtaining legal rights over their territories, the younger Monkox generations are oblivious of how the conquest of the land took place and know very little about their own history. The Monkox elders and leaders feel an urgent need to help remember the past, in order to revitalise their identity, and have a clear view of a desired future among the younger generations.

Making participatory videos on environmental justice in Lomerio

In 2013, CICOL started a research partnership with Universidad NUR from Santa Cruz and the School of International Development (DEV) at the University of East Anglia (UEA) to carry out the "Conservation, Justice and Markets Project" (CJM).

Participatory videos were used in conjunction with other ethnographic methods, such as interviews, participant observation and secondary data collection, as a tool to examine local notions of environmental (in)justice in community forestry and to help give public visibility to environmental justice concerns. CICOL chose four of its members (three young women and a member of the council of elders) to work as community researchers in the project for a year, hand-in-hand with two external researchers/facilitators (the authors of this paper).

Participatory videos were made entirely by village members through a process that involved:

- Learning by practicing: overcoming the fear of cameras through games.
- Participatory analysis (through the use of a variety of participatory assessment tools used to help creating the story (e.g. time lines, community mapping, problem tress, Venn diagrams, thematic pictures).
- Creating a story line.
- Filming, screening and editing.

The realization of each video took approximately 10 days, excluding the time to fine-tune the editing. This final editing process generally takes longer, depending on the type of support images community members wish to include in the video, and normally requires external support due to the equipment and software needed.

Three participatory videos were made. The first one, titled "On the road to freedom: the History of the Monkox People", focuses on reconstructing the long struggle of the Monkox people of Lomerio to obtain territorial rights over their lands. It was carried out by a team of 10 people from CICOL. The remaining two videos, titled "The forest is our life, our home" and "Our forest, our development", were carried

out by community members from two small villages (Todos Santos and Santo Rosario respectively) and focus on experiences of (in)justice in community forest management.

The final versions of the video have been shown and discussed in general and with community assemblies, and are being used by CICOL as a dissemination tool in meetings with other Bolivian indigenous peoples related to claims for territorial autonomy. They have also been posted in YouTube for their wider dissemination.

What environmental injustices did the videos reveal?

The making of the videos as well as their stories revealed significant feelings of injustice in community forest management at different levels and over different issues.

As mentioned before one of the biggest concerns of many Monkox leaders and elders is that current young generations do not value the heritage they have received from those who fought for a very long time to obtain legal rights over their territories and natural resources. They perceive that younger generations are responsible for a generalized lack of local governance in community forest management and worse of all that they are being left out from benefit sharing from community forestry. These concerns were captured in the initial exploratory interviews, which as we shall see bellow, were brought out to the open in the forestry videos:

> "Now that we have a joint title, people don't want to respect the other communities. Before, people didn't use to go through or carry out activities in the territory of other communities without seeking permission from the community authorities. Now, they don't respect, they go through as if they were the owners, there is none of that common respect. What will it be like later? You will have to think about what you are going to do with your children [talking to the community researchers]. You have to educate them so that they don't lose their culture". (Interview with Domingo Tubari Soqueré)

> "We gave a good fight, we won our battle with the State, but with time, this has created problems. The younger generations now manage our heritage. We ended

> up working for them, but it should not be like that. Those who fought for what we have should be the first to benefit, then the others. It's important that the young ones know how much it cost us to have what we have. But as they have no idea, they don't care. And we, who struggled to obtain what we have, suffer when only some people benefit. The community, those of us who are the absolute owners, have not benefited. We are still in battle…" (Group interview with José Chávez García, Juan Chuvé Soqueré, Santiago Peña)

It is with this concern in mind that the research team, in conjunction with CICOL's Board of Directors, decided to devote the first participatory video to reconstructing the long struggle for liberation and territorial rights in Lomerio. The first half of this video captures, through the living testimonies of the elders, the long history of oppression experienced by the Monkox ancestors since the establishment of Jesuit Missions in the Bolivian lowlands (17th century), followed by the rubber boom of the late 19th and 20th century, when the Monkox were brutally exploited as forced laborers on plantations. Elders describe their own parents as having been slaves and subject to exploitation by large landowners, which continued into the late 20th century, even after they had escaped the mission towns and (re)established in their territory. The second half of the video recounts the process of liberation experienced by the Monkox people in this last century, as initiated first through the agrarian and education reforms in the late 1950s and more recently since the 1990s through new legislation and structural political reforms that acknowledge indigenous peoples' differentiated rights, including among others, property rights to their collective territories through new figures like the TCOs. In this latter part of the video, attention is paid to explaining the contribution that the lowland indigenous movements, including CICOL, had in making these political reforms possible. The video production team also devoted considerable time to reconstructing the different processes that CICOL had to undergo to obtain the territorial rights for the Lomerio TCO.

The forest videos focuse on exposing injustices related to community forest management and use. In both cases, the story lines emphasize situations of injustice as perpetuated by actors outside of the TCO. The two main concerns relate to

inequitable negotiations with the external timber companies or intermediaries when selling their timber, and regulations from the central government in forestry management. The latter weakens local control on the activity and subjects villagers to significant fines when forestry procedures are not correctly followed. In one of the communities were the research project was based (Santo Rosario), the village was charged a 10.000 US$ fine by the Bolivian Forestry Agency (ABT) for not complying with forestry regulations when carrying out its forest management plan. The feeling of injustice behind this huge fine is expressed very strongly in the Santa Rosario Forest Video.

Yet, interestingly, the making of the PVs also helped to air internal frictions in forestry management, giving a voice to marginalized community groups to express their justice claims, in particular elders and to a lesser extent, women. Elders vocalized a strong resentment for being excluded from local forestry management. A major source of tension concerns the monetization of forests, leading to some opposing forestry activities altogether. Many of them claim that the TCO was created for protecting the forests and not for finishing them off. Others however, base their claim on the fact that they do not receive any monetary benefit out of the exploitation of forests, as observed in the following extracts from the participatory videos:

> Video 1 (Todo Santos) Mr. Anacleto, what benefits have you perceived as representative of the village elders from participatory forest management plan?
>
> Well, in the last plan, I was promised 5,000 Bolivianos, but until now I have received nothing, I don't know why. In this new plan, I hope they can think as brothers, that they don't act so selfishly among brothers and neighbors …Hopefully in this new plan we will be able to see this money, or whatever there is to share, because I need to buy things to improve my house. It is only fair that everybody benefits from that money. So that our children and those that are to come can also benefit, because the wood might run out, and then there will be no more to share.
>
> Video 2 (Abuelo Jacinto, Santa Rosario) In the first management plan I didn't understand anything because I was not taken into account. That's what happened. But I always attended the meetings. In the second plan I have attended 4 meetings. It was clearer. The engineer came and explained everything. He said that everybody was going to benefit. Then, the young ones received motorcycles, but nobody told me anything else. Everybody has kept very quiet. The people from Santa Rita asked

> me, have you received anything? And I said, nothing. I don't know anything, I said. In Santa Rita and San Simon, they have all benefited, but in Santa Rosario, nothing!

These and other similar claims were made during the PV training activities and also as off-camera comments during the filming of the videos, and in the case of Todo Santos, as part of the video story line. Women on their part, although less vocal than elders, had their own preferences for benefit distribution from forestry activities that have not been taken into account so far. These included buying mills to grind corn for making chicha and peeling rice, buying a communal truck to transport agriculture crops and setting up a plant nursery to grow tree seedlings to replace those that are felled for commercial purposes. These views were expressed during the exploration of environmental justice issues in the video training activities and were included as part of the story line in the two videos.

All these claims touch upon different justice dimensions. They clearly address the issue of distribution, as elders' and women's needs are not being represented in the way income distribution is taking place. So far, in both communities, young men and some families seem to be getting the bigger share out of commercial forestry. The inequitable distribution of benefits being experienced by elders and women also touches upon procedural justice. Although decisions about income distribution are taken in community assemblies, elders seem to have little opportunity to meaningfully participate as they are no longer active participants in the forestry sector and therefore viewed by the wider community as 'unproductive.' Instead, it is assumed that benefits will trickle down to them through benefits perceived by their children and grandchildren. Both claims are in contradiction with the principle of equitable distribution of common resources, which should guide community life in Lomerio and which commonly plays an important part in indigenous peoples' value systems:

> With regards to benefit distribution, we respect the community's decisions, because we believe that communities have communal principles, which gives them sovereignty over their decisions. In their assemblies they must decide how to invest their income. We know communities invest in the needs that they prioritize. Some for instance have decided to invest in house furniture, transport units and others in home infrastructure improvements. Communities do this as part of the principles

> of equitable distribution, where by all should benefit on equal terms. Thus, we always appeal to this principle, of collective benefit, of social communal benefit, and also to the principle consensual decision making through our customary decision making institutions, which are the assemblies. (General Chief of CICOL, Anacleto Peña, Santo Rosario video).

Despite elders' distributive concerns, the core of their complaint stems from an issue of recognition. Not only are they claiming rights to a common resource by appealing to equitable distribution communal values, but they are also demanding public acknowledgement of the key historical role they have played in the consolidation of existing communities and current forest management and territorial rights.

Although the justice claims expressed in the Lomerio videos largely placed the blame of the injustices in disrespect to community procedures and values, such injustices must be understood as part of a wider and complex process triggered by forestry becoming a market based economy. Similar processes of communal values erosion around equitable distribution of benefits from common resources have been reported in other parts of Bolivia where forestry activities have been strongly influenced by the market:

Our data shows that when indigenous communities are not pressured by timber companies or forestry concessions, they manage to carry out a satisfactory wood sawing activity without breaking basic rules of allocation of family benefits through the use and exploitation of communal forests. But when indigenous communities are pressured by timber companies or forestry concessions, wood sawing and distribution becomes a mechanism for social disassociation and weakening of community and intercommunity rules for forest use (Betancourt 2013).

The outcome of the process

From what we have discussed above, it is clear that the Monkox People from Lomerio face big challenges in the management of their common property resources and their territory. The shift to a plurinational nation-state has with no doubt represented an improvement of their rights in society and general well being, but it has not solved all their problems. If anything, new challenges have emerged with the new structure

of territorial ownership, plus the pressures from the market remain more or less the same as with the mono-cultural nation-state model. This is coupled by the facts that public policies still provide little support to common property natural resource management and that younger generations are subject to strong cultural changes which create tensions with traditional value systems and governance rules.

Reflecting collectively about this context and the challenges involved in achieving a just and sustainable management of their territory has been an important contribution of the research process to the Monkox people. Participatory videos have helped make this process of self-reflection possible, with important concrete outcomes.

First, participatory videos have had a great value bringing about a sense of restorative justice among the Monkox through creating their own (public) narrative of their history and of "wrongs" in community forestry.

The history video in particular has been valuable strengthening the self-esteem and dignity of the Lomerianos, particularly of the CICOL members, who found a way of making their story of struggle for liberation and indigenous rights known to the younger generations and the general public. Recounting and making public the long and arduous process behind gaining territorial rights has been important for CICOL's legitimacy as territorial authority of the TCO. Most importantly, as said by the General Chief of CICOL, Anacleto Peña, "for the first time we are the protagonist of our own history, and we have been able to tell the story ourselves, not someone from the outside. That is why 'we' are the narrators and not some external person talking about 'them'".

The videos also helped giving visibility and public recognition to community fractions (elders, women) that are being excluded from forestry benefit distribution, with the elders being particularly successful in making their views heard and taken into account. For instance, in the Santa Rosario video, the elders' claims for more benefit sharing from forestry were included as part of the story line. In contrast, in the Todos Santos video, the group decided to emphasize in the story line the

important role that the elders have played historically in developing the first community forest management plans and consolidating the TCO territory.

Most significantly, as a result of the PV process, the Chief General of CICOL who participated in the production of the three videos, decided to make a public pronouncement in support of the elders, which was included in the Santa Rosario Video. The pronouncement reads as follows:

> We request all communities that benefit from commercial forestry to take into account the need to support the elderly, because it is this sector of the adult community who struggled and gave their lives for the consolidation of our communal lands. They are the ones that made it possible for us to have legal rights over our lands and that this is now a TCO. Thus, this pronouncement is requesting that all those community members that are currently fit for work and form part of the active population, consider giving a just percentage of the economic resources generated by forestry activities to the elderly, so that they feel satisfied and are compensated for all the effort that they invested in the foundation of our villages. This is a request from CICOL and the technical team that has been reconstructing this history.

The videos also triggered a process of critical reflexion about how to overcome asymmetries in their relationship with the timber market and the Bolivian Forestry Agency (ABT) in community forestry. Some of the suggestions made in the public screenings of the forest videos to ensure better prices when doing business with timber companies was agreeing on common prices among all villages to sell the timber, paying more attention to having a proper contract and finding more about the business ethics and trajectories of buyers before selling timber.

On a different level, the experience of participatory video and their mobilizing potential within the community has prompted CICOL to start using participatory videos as an education tool in schools to revitalize and document knowledge and skills of the communities in their everyday life as present in their oral history, language, practices and relationship with nature. As the Monkox people are predominantly an oral culture, they require tools like the videos to document their knowledge and cultural heritage. The new Bolivian education model integrates the communities into the schooling system, which opens opportunities for the whole

community to be involved in the systematization of their knowledge and skills in order to strengthen local culture and identity. Videos can be a very useful resource in this process. Due to its accessibility, it is a tool that can be used by any community member regardless of his/her level of education, allowing to rescue the voices and different histories of elders, women and youth, thus decolonizing knowledge (Quijano 2000). These local experiences can be shared with other communities, indigenous peoples, public policy makers and officials, and the "scientific community" at different levels: local, national and global, potentially playing a role in the construction of intercultural dialogues.

Additional to the value that participatory videos have had to the Monkox people from Lomerio, it stands out from this experience that they are also a powerful tool for the co-production of knowledge in research. Participatory videos:

- Help build trust and collaboration very quickly
- Cede control of research to community (they are a way of democratising science)
- Are a fun and dynamic way to co-produce knowledge
- Create a final product that is accessible to oral cultures
- Make the co-construction of knowledge of great local relevance and significance
- Allow external researchers to learn and examine aspects of the social reality that are often hidden or invisible to outsiders.

Thus, not only indigenous people and local communities but also the academic community can benefit greatly from its use. In environmental justice research, in particular, they proved to be very useful for unpacking different justice claims in territorial and forest management and for understanding the different dimensions of justice that these claims allude to.

Links to the Lomerio participatory videos can be found here:

On the Road to Freedom

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AdeWZXFqcWQ

"Our forest, our development" (Santo Rosario Community)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tTBIgbx3wkQ

"The forest is our life, our home" (Todos Santos Community)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tuUzTfFH6fM

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