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Chapter 7: A hitch-hiker's guide to 'slowing down' heritage engagement?

Archaeological Ethnography, Indigenous Heritage and Decoloniality in the south-central Andes

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Abstract

The chapter outlines archaeological ethnography as an undisciplined source for decolonising hierarchical classifications and state-authorised discourses about heritage, indigeneity and rights. Two vignettes describe how consultation and consent-seeking processes with Indigenous governance bodies have influenced the definition of common terms of collaboration and my own participation in and understanding of heritage politics at the World Heritage Site of Tiwanaku (Bolivia) and the Sacred City of Quilmes (NW Argentina). Adopting a hitch-hiker's perspective as a kind of "walking methodology" helped me to notice what was slowing down consultation with local communities and turn it into a source of inquiry. Through multi-site ethnography, counter-mapping of meeting places, and interviews with Indigenous leaders and community authorities, these interactions and materials challenge mainstream conservation and development regimes by foregrounding indigeneity as an alternative to state self-determination and neoliberal multiculturalism. The affirmation of a space for the co-creation of knowledge and the commitment to return the results of the research puts politics back into community consultation and participatory ethics, revealing the generative and transformative capacities of anthropological engagements with decoloniality. Archaeological ethnography renews the complexities of collaboration and discloses alternative ways of linking Indigenous heritage and rights beyond disciplinary frameworks and the entrenched coloniality of modern nation-states.

Decolonial Engagements with Indigenous Heritage Rights

The intersection between cultural heritage and human rights is at the heart of contemporary socio-political issues, such as multicultural citizenship, sustainable development, and international relations. These concerns have typically been addressed at the state and intergovernmental levels, but the claims formulated by non-state actors, especially by Indigenous peoples, have progressively widened the scope of heritage policy since the last quarter of the 20th century. From an object-oriented and conservationist focus, heritage is now approached as a collective human right in multiple and interrelated dimensions (Blake 2011; Logan 2012). Driven by Indigenous demands to redress historical injustices, the cornerstone of rights-based heritage practice is respect for the decision-making, histories and values of local communities through the requirement of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC).

The corpus of Indigenous rights frames FPIC within “the historically continuous, if legally unrecognized, exercise of sovereignty” (Doyle 2014: 116). This is crucial for ensuring compliance with effective participatory governance over land and resources in the heritage sector and beyond (Larsen and Gilbert 2020; Vrdoljak 2018). Adopted by national and international regulations and professional codes of ethics, it is also key to exploring decolonial engagement in anthropological theory and practice. Processes of community participation, consent and consultation open up spaces of encounter, negotiation and friction between incommensurable histories and lifeworlds, leading me to consider the role of heritage in state recognition policies and the “indigenization of human rights” (Merry 2006: 39; Orlandi 2022). Early critiques of Indigenous heritage rights have focused on how these claims may be at odds with both the cosmopolitan principles of heritage conservation and anthropological reflections

on identities as relational, fluid, historically and contextually situated (Brown 2007; Clifford 2013). Others have suggested that disenfranchised communities may resort to essentialist portraits of *their* “indigenous” heritage as a means of resistance to gain visibility and economic benefits from state and international development agencies on the wave of cultural diversity and biodiversity policy agendas. This scholarship looks at the discursive construction of heritage as a political resource that can be defined, appropriated, and mobilised by different social actors, at multiple scales of community imagination (e.g. Macdonald 2018; Waterton and Smith 2010). Particularly in the field of archaeological heritage (e.g. Atalay 2012; Meskell 2009), postcolonial awareness and cosmopolitan ethics have called for the bridging of local knowledge and scientific practice at all stages of research design and dissemination, in an attempt to provide descendant communities and the public at large with access to a multivocal understanding of the past and enjoyment of sustainable development.

Another set of critical perspectives has suggested that the call for “multivocality” in archaeological and heritage practices – and related buzzwords emphasising the “democratisation” of heritage, such as “interculturality”, “community engagement”, as well as “decolonisation” – may in fact be aligned with the dominant neoliberal multiculturalism as it relies on the rhetorical accommodation of docile subjects and the concealment of conflicts for the sake of consensus (Coombe 2016; González-Ruibal, Alonso González and Criado 2018; Haber and Shepherd 2015). These arguments consider how the participatory ethical turn in archaeology and anthropology has failed to live up to the promises of redistribution and social justice articulated through the grammar of cultural rights. This has prevented counter-hegemonic heritage assemblages and weakened non-linear ideas, instead accommodating them to market-oriented corporate and disciplinary interests.

Although the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities to participate in heritage and development processes have been recognised on paper, it remains unclear whether policy changes and decolonial methodologies can move beyond metaphorical gestures and rhetorical accommodation to actually transform extractive modes of knowledge production and governance (Graeber 2015; Tuck and Yang 2012). It is important to consider how the institutionalisation of FPIC and heritage compliance frameworks relate to the depoliticisation of claims for Indigenous self-determination. In introducing a recent collection of papers on “Heritage and Decoloniality”, we drew attention to the multiple genealogies and concrete manifestations of dispossession and disenfranchisement, as well as the potential pathways for transformative action within a “heritage matrix of power” across disciplines and national boundaries (Lazzari, Larsen and Orlandi 2024). This allowed us to gain insight into how global heritage regimes impact on, and are affected by, particular localities and regional contexts, exposing enduring colonial toxicities despite efforts to democratise academic traditions and public engagement

While ethical codes of conduct and collaborative methodologies reflect the cosmopolitan and postcolonial consciousness of the anthropological and archaeological disciplines, there is a risk that over-regulated consent-seeking mechanisms could become bureaucratic routines stuck in culturally appropriated ceremonialism, without fully taking into account the complexity and unpredictability of actual practice on the ground (Herzfeld 2023; La Salle 2013; Meskell and Pels 2005). FPIC may lose its emancipatory potential and ability to redress historical injustices through shared histories and community-based practice, instead reifying universal values and long-standing epistemic hierarchies that determine how and for whom heritage matters.

This is relevant to the purpose of this book because it shows FPIC as a site of action and onto-political disagreement (Blaser and De la Cadena 2018; Law 2015), where consensus is reached

on what constitutes a common heritage and how it should be studied in order to “reconnect the steps that link knowledge, globalization, citizenship and research” (Appadurai 2006: 176). But it is also here that the translation of Indigenous “realities” into “cultural beliefs” is all the more evident, as Law (2015: 127) puts it, thwarting efforts at plural representation and decolonisation because “however nice we are, we have not abandoned our basic commitment to the idea of a single all-encompassing reality”. This chapter considers the extent to which consultation and consent-seeking processes can expand the possibilities and scope of decolonial engagements with Indigenous heritage rights. It suggests that these interactions and materials can unsettle mainstream conservation and development regimes by making visible alternatives to state-authorised narratives and disciplined frameworks.

The following pages challenge the modernist assumptions of “authorised heritage discourse” (Smith 2006: 6), that is, the system of expert knowledge, disciplined techniques and institutionalised legality that shapes an “object of conservation” on the basis of past-present, tangible-intangible, and nature-culture dichotomies (Field et al. 2016; Jones and Yarrow 2022). I ask whether FPIC can be approached as a “boundary object” (Strathern 2010: 173) between theory and practice, which may exceed binary knowledge and good intentions, articulating conflicting perspectives and historical trajectories. The “undisciplined” (Hamilakis 2012) contribution of archaeological ethnography in unpacking community consultation is highlighted to shed new light on heritage rights arrangements. At the intersection of cosmopolitics and decoloniality, archaeological ethnography renews the complexities of collaboration in the otherwise idealised practice of FPIC. In these frictional movements, I locate alternative pathways for linking Indigenous heritage and rights beyond the entrenched coloniality of modern nation-states in the south-central Andes.

Background to case studies and methods: a hitch-hiker's perspective

Through multi-site ethnography, counter-mapping of meeting places, and interviews with Indigenous leaders and community authorities, the chapter outlines archaeological ethnography as an undisciplined source for decolonising hierarchical classifications and state-authorised discourses about heritage, indigeneity and rights. This approach was initially motivated by the need to “embed” consultation with local communities in research questions and design (Meskell and Pels 2005: 5). But attention to collaborative ethics should not overlook the underpinnings of contested issues of memory, sense of place and belonging.

As Meskell and Pels (2005: 23) further argued, ethics is “always embedded in specific social, cultural, and historical relationships of powers”. Conflicting understandings of heritage politics meandered more or less prominently during preparatory meetings for fieldwork at the World Heritage Site of Tiwanaku (Bolivia) and the Sacred City of Quilmes (NW Argentina). Illustrating the steps of consultation with local communities enhances transparency and self-reflection in the co-creation of the research object as a key feature of archaeological ethnography (Castañeda 2009; Hamilakis 2012; Meskell 2012), and brings a more nuanced perspective on the politics of heritage and indigeneity in the two case studies.

Both sites are prime regional examples of the political use of archaeological knowledge and cultural heritage for state-building in the 19th and 20th centuries. Yet a thread of continuity can also be drawn between the case studies in their similar contemporary circumstances, despite major differences in the weight, visibility and impact of Indigenous social movements in each national context. Tiwanaku and Quilmes are currently managed in partnership between government agencies and local organisations in their respective territories, after decades of struggles to renegotiate values and conservation strategies.

The co-management of these important sites for national and international prestige has soon revealed the underlying fractures in the common understanding of what heritage is and how it affects the surrounding landscape and communities. On the one hand, these fractures have surfaced in the multicultural re-signification of the ruins of Quilmes as the Sacred City of the Diaguita-Calchaquí people, the last bastion of resistance to colonisation during the 17th century in NW Argentina. On the other hand, state-authorised imaginaries of decolonisation in Bolivia have drawn on the contradictory and complementary visions of Tiwanaku as a world-famous archaeological site *and* as the centre of Indigenous Andean cosmology.

There is yet another reason that justifies bringing these two sites into conversation with each other and with me as a fieldworker, which is the main focus of this chapter. Archaeological ethnography allowed me to record a variety of social artefacts, interactions, and infrastructures that were designed to secure and maintain consensus. This particular kind of materiality frames the ethical-political dimension of fieldwork in a lived “knowledge space” (Turnbull 2002: 289), where relationships of trust can develop and be nurtured, but also break down and become part of “a constellation of rubble created by ongoing forms of disruption” (Gordillo 2014: 9).

The chapter argues that to follow the traces of fellow travellers, researchers and locals in the landscape is to inscribe collaboration in a kind of “ambulatory knowing” – as Ingold (2000: 231) would put it – “stepping stones along the way, punctuating the process rather than initiating it or bringing it to a close”. In doing so, I turn to hitch-hiking as a metaphorical crutch and practical way of co-creating knowledge, forging solidarities and emergent socialities between people with places and things through recurrent processes of recalling memories and crafting aspirations (Purkis and Laviolette 2024). Hitch-hiking involves the interplay of sense of place and collective memory, the complementarity of solitude and sociality, the patience of waiting and the prudence of standing still. All of this captures the complexity of ethnographic

fieldwork, and points to anthropologically informed anarchist imaginaries for rethinking critical heritage studies outside epistemic hierarchies (Graeber 2015; Field et al. 2016 Purkis 2012). Adopting a hitch-hiker's perspective as a kind of "walking methodology" (Shepherd 2023; Springgay and Truman 2019) helped me to notice the equivocal nature of consultation, transforming what was slowing down engagement with local communities into a source of inquiry and "counter-mapping" (Byrne 2018).

The following section shows how consultation processes have influenced the definition of common terms of collaboration and my own participation in and understanding of Indigenous heritage politics in both fieldwork sites. The two vignettes foreground indigeneity as an alternative to state self-determination and neoliberal multiculturalism in order to reorient heritage rights relations towards more creative and sustainable futures.

Counter-mapping heritage, indigeneity and community consultation

Developing relationships of trust at Tiwanaku

Looking through the prism of heritage politics in and around Tiwanaku reveals the intertwined temporalities and pathways to sovereignty and self-determination of the Bolivian state and the *ayllu*, i.e. the fundamental political and kinship structure in the Andes. This complicates the understanding of Tiwanaku as a fenced-off heritage site with multiple stakes on it. Kojan and Angelo (2005: 397) remarked that the inclusion of Aymara people and communities' perspectives in participatory policy as an exercise in multivocality becomes "an empty and cynical gesture" if it is not supported by a thorough assessment of nationalist and state-led decolonisation imaginaries of Indigenous heritage.

Since the site was inscribed on the UNESCO List of World Heritage List in 2000 as the "Spiritual and Political Centre of the Tiwanaku Culture", the authorities of the municipality of

Tiahuanaco¹ and the Indigenous peasant organization CACOT (*Consejo de Ayllus y Comunidades Originarias de Tiwanaku*) have demanded greater representation in decisions concerning the management and redistribution of tourism revenues to the rural communities. Prompted by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, which had urged the Bolivian government to establish a functional organisation chart and a participatory master plan to preserve the “outstanding universal values” of the site, the inter-institutional *Centro de Investigaciones Arqueológicas, Antropológicas y Administración de Tiwanaku* (CIAAAT) was established within the framework law on local autonomies and participation to showcase the Bolivian plurinational state on the international stage.

At the time of my fieldwork, an archaeologist from a community of the Municipality of Tiahuanaco was the Executive Director of the CIAAAT. He was appointed on the initiative of the CACOT, which was dissatisfied with the previous direction of the CIAAAT for misrepresenting local actors’ demands over the heritage of Tiwanaku. According to the Director, the revision of the participatory management strategy was needed to show that “we have our autonomous technical decision now; we can determine our North”. The first-person plural “we”, in this case, refers to a collective subject that the Director identified as the “contemporary Tiwanakota”. Nationalist policies disempowered this collective subject by exploiting the cultural capital of Tiwanaku for assimilationist purposes; the “contemporary Tiwanakota”, instead, manifests the aspirations of decolonisation through a wide array of

¹ The term “Tiwanaku” is used to refer to the archaeological site and the socio-territorial relations involved in heritage policies, while “Tiahuanaco” refers to the municipality under the state administrative system. The latter is composed by 23 rural communities and 2 villages, including the colonial *pueblo* of Tiahuanaco, adjacent to the monumental core of the archaeological areas.

interactions performed in continuity with community governance, reciprocity, and care of the land embedded in *ayllu* relationality.

The state authorities in the Bolivian capital, La Paz, were not receptive to the interdisciplinary orientation of my research towards the complementarity of histories and knowledges, discursive and material iterations of Tiwanaku in public space. Going back and forth between the government departments responsible for research and conservation of the archaeological and anthropological heritage, I was still unable to overcome the bureaucratic and disciplinary barriers between one dealing with the tangible aspects of the past and the other exclusively interested in the intangible and the present. In Tiahuanaco, too, there were factors that slowed down my expectations, but of a different origin and without excluding the possibility of negotiating and weaving a common research object with the local authorities. In line with the attention paid by the Director of the CIAAAT on the complementarity between *thakhi* [culture-as-knowledge] and *sarawi* [culture-as-doing]², engaging with community consultation in the field became a process of crafting relationships of trust without subsuming them in universal ethics or disciplinary assumptions.

On the recommendation of the Executive Director of the CIAAAT, I first arranged a meeting with the CACOT authorities. I entered the room at the organisation headquarters in the village of Tuahuanaco, where the *mallkus* [authorities] who would grant me permission to carry out the fieldwork in the municipality were waiting. We began sharing coca leaves and tobacco,

² Both Aymara terms can be translated as “culture”, but their use denotes different meanings: *sarawi* is more related to “contextualised practices”, whereas *thakhi* is “more akin to a tradition of knowledge” (Burman 2016: 173–175). Significantly, they both derive from verbal forms that express movement: *thaqaña* [to get, seek, obtain], and *saraña* [to go, walk]; thus, while *thakhi* designs an “established path”, *sarawi* conveys the meaning of “making the path by walking”.

while I was introduced as an archaeologist interested in “discovering” new sites and “valorising” the heritage of Tiwanaku. Then, they asked me, “Where are you going to dig your hole?” and immediately afterwards, “How many people from the communities will be hired for the excavation?”. Significantly, the reaction of the *mallkus* revealed that the my research project was being received within a dominant framework of technical conservation of the archaeological heritage, which stemmed from their experiences, inevitably linked to previous encounters with foreigners seeking permission to work there in similar areas of disciplinary specialisation.

I explained that limited funding prevented me from employing anyone, and that the research was not directly concerned with the “discovery” of new sites, but rather that my proposed community survey and mapping of memory sites could be seen as a preliminary step to an archaeological excavation. This clarification informed my interlocutors that the research would give local deliberative bodies more control over whether to proceed with future investigations in their territory. We eventually reached an agreement and I was invited to attend the next CACOT General Assembly to find out which rural community might be interested in the research.

The meeting with the *mallkus* brought to the fore how economic aspects are variously linked with heritage making at Tiwanaku, from the tourism revenues to the availability of paid jobs for community members. A research participant in a preliminary fieldwork in 2016, told me that “money is embedded in how archaeology is managed in Tiwanaku”. This was a common perception among the people I interviewed. A young woman working on restoration work at the archaeological site insisted on this point when, in response to my question about the rotation of rural community workers under CIAAAT’s participatory management strategy, she candidly replied, “money rules, don’t you see?”. While the issue of “money” triggered memories and

expectations around my fieldwork, it also provided a common ground for assessing the superimposition of authorised heritage management on local lifeworlds.

The opportunity to conduct my fieldwork in the Ayllu Originario Huancollo, one of the communities most affected by state-sanctioned heritage making at Tiwanaku, was also made possible by a chance encounter at the intersection of money circulation and the relationships of trust and reciprocity within the *ayllu*. It so happened that the contractor hired by a friend of mine in the village of Tiahuanaco to renovate the roof of her house that year was the *sullka mallku* of the Ayllu Originario Huancollo, according to the annual rotation of community authorities at the heart of *ayllu* governance³. We then agreed to talk more about my research over a cup of coffee at my friend's house, and again, on the sidelines of the monthly CACOT General Assembly.

The main source of equivocation was the multiplicity of meanings of the words that we used to communicate with each other. In this case, by referring to my fieldwork as a “project”, I was inadvertently intercepting a category that is preferentially used to express a variety of interventions in the territory, all of which have in common the accessibility of wage labour. Because of this semantic overlap, the *sullka mallku* told me that he was concerned about the suspicions that the proposed “project” might have raised among community members. He

³ The *ayllu* is administered by a directorate of *mallkus* and *mallkus taytas*, male and female counterparts of the community authority, who serve for one year. The *sullka* (minor) is the second highest office after that of the *jilir mallku* [main authority], while other roles include the administration of justice, infrastructure, and agriculture. Every household in the community must participate in this system of governance, fulfilling its obligations according to a precise progression of tasks from minor to major responsibilities. Far from being a source of individual power, this obligation is often deplored by community members as a burden because it takes time away from paid work, while placing the *ayllu* as the primary collective subject in front of state and international agents. See Andolina, Radcliffe, Laurie 2005; De la Cadena 2015; Rivera Cusicanqui 1990.

explained that they might have thought that there was a financial reward attached to the “project” and suggested that I should be careful in explaining how my research was funded and by whom. He also advised me to be clear about my plans for returning the data collected in the field. These issues of research funding and restitution of fieldwork results were indeed raised in subsequent meetings with the Directorate of Mallkus and at the General Assembly of the Ayllu Originario Huancollo.

On the day of the meeting with the Directorate of Mallkus, we met again to share coca leaves and an *apthapi* [lunch], and to discuss the terms of our collaboration. The community authorities were reassured that my research was not part of a “project”, but rather aimed to strengthen collective memory and place-based education by increasing the visibility of names, places and histories that were in danger of being forgotten due to the concentration of interest on the main archaeological ruins. They agreed that the resulting “*historial de la comunidad*” [community track-history] could be useful in the process of updating the legal status of the Ayllu under the framework law on local autonomy and Indigenous self-determination enshrined in the plurinational constitution.

The Ayllu General Assembly was held in the Community House after I had been in the field for over a month (Figure 1). While I waited patiently, struggling to understand a few words in Aymara, several topics were discussed, ranging from disputes over the inheritance of family plots to preparations for agricultural work on the *aynuqas*, the communal lands collectively owned by the Ayllu. Finally, the *sullka mallku* introduced me to present the research to the community members. As expected, some inquired about the funding, others were concerned about taking things away from the community, and how the research would actually benefit them.

[Figure 1 near here] **Figure 1.1:** General Assembly of the Ayllu Originario Huancollo. Picture by the author, May 2018.]

The *mallkus* then signed and stamped the “official” consent form, and I was given permission to begin the “real” fieldwork. Beyond the formalities and institutional ethics, the meetings with the community authorities and the general assembly demonstrated the importance of properly introducing myself into community relationships of trust and reciprocity. When it came to surveying the field and collecting oral histories, this proper introduction meant that I was recognised not – just – as another *gringo* [foreign] archaeologist with some specialised interests in the ruins of Tiwanaku, but also as doing community-based memory work. As a result, most of the community members were willing to share their memories or to help me talk to Aymara-speaking elders. They complemented my limited knowledge and experience of the site in order to reassemble and affirm the Indigenous heritage of the Ayllu in the shadow of the state-controlled, fenced-off perimeter of Tiwanaku.

“Ups and downs” of consultation in the Calchaquí valleys

The Calchaquí valleys are an interconnected system of canyons and rivers that stretch across the provinces of Salta, Tucumán and Catamarca in NW Argentina. Following the multicultural reform of the Argentine Constitution in 1994, which recognised the rights of Indigenous peoples for the first time in the history of the country, the region has seen a sharp increase in tourism development and conflicts over the control of natural and cultural resources. Interested in understanding how the re-signification of heritage has contributed to Indigenous rights struggles for recognition and governance, I focused on the archaeological site of Quilmes, which has been one of the main flashpoints of conflict between the state and the Diaguita-Calchaquí Indigenous communities.

On an early day in July 2017, I stepped into the office of the National Institute against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism in San Miguel, the capital city of the province of Tucumán, to meet with the secretary of the Union of Peoples of the Diaguita Nation in Tucumán (*Unión de Pueblos de la Nación Diaguita de Tucumán* – UPNDT). As soon as the secretary saw me, he greeted with a joke: “What are you trying to sell me again?”. At first, I was puzzled; only a few days had passed since my arrival in Argentina, and this was the very first time we had met thanks to mutual connections at the Institute of Archaeology and Museum of the University of Tucumán. As we talked, I began to understand how his greeting was nested in previous encounters and suspicious agreements.

The first thing the secretary wanted to make clear was that the results of the research must be returned to the communities in which they were collected, “Because we need them; to know how foreigners see us is a tool for our struggle”. The “struggle” was that of having to prove the “indigenous” status of the communities to the state, within a framework in which, on one side, there is “a science approved by the university and recognised by the state”, and, on the other, disciplined ethnic subjects whose political claims are downplayed as “cultural beliefs” to be protected and managed, or worse criminalised and prosecuted for being contrary to the interests of the state. The political use of heritage for state-building in Argentina was based on the assumption that Indigenous peoples had been wiped out by military rule or forced assimilation into the national imaginary and market system. In most cases, this meant the erosion of the limited autonomy that Indigenous communities had been able to maintain during the colonial period. Despite the progress in the recognition of Indigenous rights, the secretary insisted that, “There is a gap between the discourse and the practice; this is a road that still needs to be travelled”.

A key weakness in the implementation of rights-based heritage practices is the inconsistency of ceremonial forms of consultation. The secretary mentioned the case of the “Quebrada de Humahuaca”, in the northern province of Jujuy, where “they came with forms to fill in, meetings to attend, and called it a consultation”. In this case, the more the land increased in value due to the World Heritage designation and transnational investments, the more the local communities were displaced from their territories and had their water cut off to satisfy the growing thirst of tourism⁴. For this reason, grass-roots organisations, such as the UPNDT, have worked to create autonomous frameworks for informed consent and consultation to ensure that their constitutional rights are respected.

According to the secretary of the UPNDT, “Informed consultation involves a lot of discussion, but it also involves a lot of *ups and downs* that researchers, government agencies or other institutions often do not have the time to go through”. Looking through the divergence of temporalities made visible by consultation, the secretary’s ironic greeting might well point to this unnoticed and perhaps irreconcilable contradiction in the logic of recognition. Together, we drafted a letter of commitment, including the return of the fieldwork results, which the secretary signed on behalf of the UPNDT, enabling the next steps of the consultation with the community authorities of Amaicha del Valle (*Comunidad Indígena Amaicha del Valle – CIAV*) and Quilmes (*Comunidad India Quilms – CIQ*). Despite their geographical proximity, the two communities have very different post-colonial histories, which are reflected in their current governance structures (Figure 2).

⁴ Similar problems have arisen in the case of the UNESCO World Heritage Site “Qhapaq Ñan – Andean Main Road”, in terms of imposing a simulacrum of participation and decision-making autonomy on Indigenous peoples in NW Argentina and the other countries involved in the management of this transnational heritage. See Korstanje 2016; Gnecco 2019; Uribe Chinen 2024.

On the one hand, the CIAV has a long legacy of community governance, dating back to the granting of a Royal Deed by the Spanish authorities in 1716, recognising the ownership of the land to the descendants of the Diaguita people who had resisted colonial occupation, and the subsequent negotiations to maintain the collective title enshrined in this historic document within the Argentine Republic in the late 19th century. In addition to the uninterrupted history of Indigenous leadership embodied by the role of the *cacique*, the town of Amaicha del Valle is also a “rural municipality” within the administrative structure of the province of Tucumán⁵. In the last thirty years, marked by legislative change and an acceleration in the visibility and political influence of Indigenous peoples in the region, it was not unusual that the same person held the positions of *cacique* and elected representative of the rural municipality of Amaicha del Valle (Isla 2009: 89-93). To prevent excessive concentration of power and misappropriation of funds, the Council of Elders was established at the beginning of this century as a consultative body within the CIAV governance.

[Figure 2 near here] **Figure 1.2:** The CIAV House of Governance (*left*) and the CIQ House of Community (*right*), Pictures by the author, August 2017 – October 2018.

This meant that I was first received by the Elders to illustrate my research idea and, following positive assessment, they invited me to meet with the *cacique* to formulate a collaboration agreement in accordance with the UPNDT’s letter of commitment. In this case, the *cacique* and I quickly found common ground on which to work together. The *cacique* was eager to explore practical ways of reorienting community heritage practice beyond state-authorised narratives,

⁵ The administrative subdivision of the “rural municipality” was created at the beginning of the 20th century to extend government control to the more isolated areas. The representative of the “rural municipality” was appointed directly by the provincial government of Tucumán until the 1990s, when the position became elective. See Isla 2009.

and to “re-educate” archaeologists, heritage professionals, development technicians and the public at large about the values and respect due to Indigenous rights.

Unlike the CIAV, where decision-making power is spatially concentrated in the town of Amaicha del Valle and politically delegated to the executive figure of the *cacique* and the balancing authority of the Council of Elders, the deliberative system of the CIQ is fragmented into small base communities, corresponding to the fourteen villages scattered across the territory. This is a key difference between the two communities: while the CIAV has maintained control over its collective territory over the centuries, the part of the land belonging to Quilmes that was originally included in the Royal Deed of 1716 was occupied by foreign landowners and divided into large estates (Korstanje, García-Azcárate, Arenas 2013). It was not until the 1970s that a political organisation emerged from the struggle to amend this historical injustice. In practice, each of the fourteen villages has retained a degree of autonomy since the CIQ was officially recognised as an “indigenous” community within multicultural policy in the 1990s. Each village sends two representatives to the Council of Delegates, which has ultimate responsibility for decision-making and the empowerment of the *cacique*, whose role is less operational than symbolic, giving the CIQ a “more democratic structure” than the CIAV (Isla 2009: 96).

In addition to the historical and administrative differences between the two communities, there was another reason that slowed down the consultation process with the CIQ. At the time of my fieldwork, the community was divided into two factions over the management of the Quilmes archaeological site. The site had been occupied by a collective intervention in 2008 and subsequently re-signified as the Sacred City of Quilmes. However, this counter-heritage narrative was soon echoed in the multicultural rhetoric of the province of Tucumán, and tensions arose between community members over the possibility of yielding control of the site

to the state authorities in order to exploit tourism revenues to improve living conditions in the villages. When I first visited the community in 2017, the *cacique* had lost all authority and the Council of Delegates had not met for more than two years due to the bitter conflicts within the CIQ.

The collaborative work carried out in the CIAV helped me to overcome the difficulties of approaching the neighbouring community of Quilmes. I was able to contact the delegate of Talapazo, a CIQ village involved in the same rural development project whose ruined remains and conflicting memories I had already started to map in various localities of the CIAV. He allowed me to continue my fieldwork there while I waited for the necessary authorisation from the Council of Delegates. In fact, when I returned to the Calchaquí valleys the next year for my second season of fieldwork, the CIQ Council of Delegates had resumed regular meetings, as the opposing factions had reached a truce thanks to the Tucumán Tourism Entity's promise of a new local museum, which would have increased tourist flows and revenues.

At the next meeting of the Council of Delegates, the *cacique* asked each delegate to introduce themselves and then one of them read out the UPNDT's letter of commitment and the information sheet I had prepared to ask for permission to work in the community. As soon as he finished, he asked me suspiciously, "If yours is an archaeological research, why are you doing ethnography?" This objection took me by surprise as it tended to restore disciplinary boundaries that I was instead trying to blur and erase in an attempt to decolonise methodological strategy and collaboration. This was followed by a thorough interrogation by the other delegates, which revealed fears of being "scrutinised" as research objects and a sense of suspicion about whether I was actually planning to take anything from the community, or what I intended to give back to them in terms of findings or specialised training for young community members.

In proposing an archaeological ethnography of the community's recent past and involvement in the co-management of the Sacred City of Quilmes, I both challenged what the locals had learned to be of archaeological interest and undermined what the discipline has traditionally been good at: finding in the more distant past the evidence of cultural continuity that could legitimise "indigenous" identity and rights before state and international development agencies in the present. In a sense, the discussion has always revolved around the extent to which my research could be used for political struggle or internal factionalism. If the research project does not address the familiar disciplinary boundaries and good intentions, the methods may also be mistrusted and therefore questioned.

Eventually, the *cacique* settled the discussion and we all agreed that "whatever the subject of study, the crucial thing is to meet again and talk over a cup of mate tea about what has affected you on your journey". I could not have found better words to wrap it up.

Materiality and spatiality of consultation: learning how to greet and control the equivocation

The fragility of the consensus linking Indigenous heritage and rights practices lies in the uneven interplay between community governance and the regulation of multiculturalism. Meaningful consultation was key to exploring the interstices where Indigenous heritage making collides with state policies, transnational and disciplinary orders. Moreover, these preliminary encounters sparked curiosity and attention to the cosmopolitical subjectivation of people with things and places. Knowing how to walk in the animated landscape, how to properly reciprocate greetings, and how to share coca leaves or a mate tea before engaging in any kind of activity were as much, and sometimes more, imperatives for a sustainable collaborative ground than prescribed ethical guidelines, information sheets, and consent forms. Confronting

the steps of consultation during my multi-sited fieldwork in Tiwanaku and the Calchaquí valleys, I found in these materials and interactions an anthropologically informed translation tool to “control the equivocation” (Viveiros de Castro 2004: 4) and offer a better translation of Indigenous heritage and rights arrangements in both locations.

The divergence between place-based histories, disciplinary regimes of conservation and multicultural recognition policies informs about the “communicative disjuncture” (Viveiros de Castro 2004: 9) underpinning attempts to democratise and decolonise Indigenous heritage rights. Expanding on Viveiros de Castro’s (2004: 9) explanation of “equivocation” as “a difference in perspective” that drives rather than hinders communication, and on Stengers’ (2005: 995) formulation of “cosmopolitics” as that which “slows down reasoning”, Green (2015: 240-241) noted that the slow, often frustrating and uncomfortable aspects of consultation materialise in “moments of partial connection, in which the divide between scholarship and what we have termed ‘the indigenous’ begins to break down and one begins to comprehend the incomprehensible”.

The mediation of the materials and places involved in the shaping of an “object of conservation” have received little attention in ethnographic accounts and in the deconstruction of state-authorised discursive regimes (Field et al. 2016; Jones and Yarrow 2022). The specific focus of archaeological ethnography on multi-temporal and socio-material assemblages (Hamilakis 2012; Meskell 2012) makes consultation visible in the juxtaposition of intermediate knowledge spaces that slow down wicked heritage practices and ready-made community engagements. Looking at consultation processes as a bundle of possibilities and relations brings to light “a field of institutionalized expectations and instruments” (Strathern 2000: 4) that is the expression of sedimented encounters between local communities and outsiders with their burden of conflicting memories and aspirations.

The socio-material and spatial connections made possible by FPIC invite reflection on the intersubjective encounters and the different temporalities involved, in order to assess their implications for divergent heritage practices. All data generated in the field was returned to the communities in the form of activity reports, georeferenced maps, photographs, and audio-video recordings, so that these materials and interactions would have a life beyond the academic purpose for which they were collected. By making explicit the requirement of the return of fieldwork results, both case studies revealed the determination of Indigenous peoples to be recognised as active subjects of their historical and political development. Restitution gives local communities and individuals the right to disagree and to assert their role in a wider space of intercultural knowledge production. A commitment to trust and reciprocity is essential so that community consent is not taken for granted as an obligatory check to gain easy access to the field. The affirmation of co-creation and restitution puts politics back into community consultation and participatory ethics, disclosing the generative and transformative capacities of anthropological engagements with decoloniality.

Conclusions

As a key tool for ensuring a human rights-based approach to heritage, FPIC, far from being universally applicable, takes place in specific contexts, with dynamics that vary according to locally specific experiences and expectations. By counter-mapping the interplay of grass-roots organisations, national and international actors in contemporary heritage practices around two important archaeological sites in the southcentral Andes, I have documented how the legacies of dominant heritage rights arrangements reverberated in the steps of consultation with Indigenous communities and organisations during my fieldwork. Respecting the times and forms of community decision-making led me to a better understanding of the discursive-

material iterations and the past-present connections through which heritage acquires conflicting meanings and indigeneity becomes an alternative to state and intergovernmental policies.

Sedimented on the sites and materials of normative practice and socio-territorial relationality, looking at these encounters has revealed the “necessary partiality” (Jones and Yarrow 2022: 16), the case-specific, and equivocal unfolding of FPIC within the practice of Indigenous heritage rights. Consultation – like “hospitality” (see Grosso 2015) – is supposed to bring together the multiple temporalities of state and Indigenous self-determination in a space of mutual recognition. However, as a bureaucratic regulatory mechanism, itself an expression of unquestioned state sovereignty, it can often trap self and other in colonial forms of exploitation and subalternity.

The chapter has presented archaeological ethnography at the intersection of decoloniality and the cosmopolitical attention to ontological conflicts arising from contested heritage landscapes. Ignoring the “undisputable certainty of superiority” (Blaser and De La Cadena 2018: 18) within policies of recognition and neoliberal heritage management may recast social injustice and radical alterity into the division between “politics” and “cultural beliefs” (Graeber 2015; Law 2015). On the contrary, mapping how indigeneity is materialised in juxtaposed histories, uncomfortable objects and frictional movements can subvert modern colonial categorisations of time, space and materiality (Rivera Cusicanqui 2012; De la Cadena 2015). Accordingly, this chapter has focused on consultation as a “middle ground” (Merry 2006: 39) and a “cultural artefact” (Strathern 2000: 2) between ecologies of Indigenous and state-authorised heritage practices that illuminate “what should be unsettling about decolonization” (Tuck and Yang 2012: 3).

As in Douglas Adam’s classic, a *hitch-hiker’s guide* is useful for “not panicking” as the difficulties, contradictions and disturbing excesses of consultation became apparent in the field.

Counter-mapping consultation while waiting for the necessary permissions from the local bodies of Indigenous governance proved to be an effective strategy through which the territory revealed its materiality as an unexpected participant in the social relations of the communities, claiming its role in my efforts to establish a meeting place for collaboration. These slow steps and practical adjustments served to synchronise my research expectations with the historical and political development of the local communities. They tangibly created a common research object around contested Indigenous heritage rights, strengthening the engagement between anthropological inquiry and decoloniality to rethink pluriversal heritage futures.

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