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KUKAMA RADIO: THE POLITICS AND AESTHETICS OF INDIGENOUS MEDIA IN
PERUVIAN AMAZONIA

by

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A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Doctor of Philosophy Degree

School of Anthropology, Political Science, and Sociology
in the Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
August 2023

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DISSERTATION APPROVAL

KUKAMA RADIO: THE POLITICS AND AESTHETICS OF INDIGENOUS MEDIA IN
PERUVIAN AMAZONIA

by

Gabriel Torrealba Alfonzo

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the field of Anthropology

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June 20, 2023

AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Gabriel Torrealba Alfonzo, for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Anthropology, presented on June 20, 2023, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: KUKAMA RADIO: THE POLITICS AND AESTHETICS OF INDIGENOUS MEDIA IN PERUVIAN AMAZONIA

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. David Sutton

This dissertation is about the political and aesthetic dimensions of Indigenous media in Peruvian Amazonia. It explores how Kukama media-makers use aesthetic mastery to engage in three key political fields in Amazonia: indigeneity, historicity, and environmentalism. I specifically examine the audiovisual discourses and media-making practices coming from an Indigenous radio station called Radio Ucamara, located in the town of Nauta in Northeastern Peru (Loreto region). Drawing on place-based ethnography and digital research methods, I analyze the way this radio station instrumentalizes multiple digital and non-digital media forms to make visible (and also audible) their identities, violent histories, and cosmological worlds amidst their confrontation with the Peruvian neoliberal state and oil companies. The dissertation also contemplates how through these processes of mediatization, Amazonian ontologies, mytho-histories, and identities are being reimagined. For this purpose, I focus both on the analysis of media products (e.g., music videos, documentaries, journalistic reportage, murals, books) and the social dynamics surrounding those creations, to understand the way Kukama media producers take part in ongoing struggles for the revitalization of the Kukama language, seeking justice for the rubber times violence, and stopping the pollution of Amazonian rivers. Following theoretical frameworks derived from the anthropology of media and the anthropology of music and verbal art in Lowland South America, I argue that media aesthetics is becoming a major instrument in building political power in the region.

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DEDICATION

To Jonathan D. Hill

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE GENERATIVE AESTHETICS OF INDIGENOUS MEDIA

This dissertation is about the political and aesthetic dimensions of Indigenous media in Peruvian Amazonia. It explores how Kukama media-makers use technical and aesthetic mastery to engage in three key political fields in Amazonia: indigeneity, historicity, and environmentalism. I specifically examine the audiovisual discourses and media-making practices coming from an Indigenous radio station called Radio Ucamara, located in the town of Nauta in Northeastern Peru (Loreto region). Drawing on place-based ethnography and digital research methods, I analyze the way this radio station instrumentalizes multiple digital and non-digital media forms to make visible (and also audible) their identities, violent histories, and cosmological worlds amidst their confrontation with the Peruvian neoliberal state and oil companies. The dissertation also contemplates how through these processes of mediatization (Fisher 2016), Amazonian ontologies, mytho-histories, and identities are being reimagined. For this purpose, I focus both on the analysis of media products (e.g., music videos, radio broadcasting, video documentaries, journalistic reportage, murals, books) and the social dynamics surrounding those creations, to understand the way Kukama media producers take part in ongoing struggles for the revitalization of the Kukama language, seeking justice for the rubber

times violence, and stopping the pollution of Amazonian rivers. Following theoretical frameworks derived from the anthropology of media and the anthropology of music and verbal art in Lowland South America, I argue that media aesthetics is becoming a major instrument in building political power in the region. Radio Ucamara is an example of how media worlds are having transformative impact on the way Indigenous politics and activism are imagined and practiced in Amazonia and elsewhere.

My research on Radio Ucamara speaks to the politics of Peruvian Amazonia but also engages in larger theoretical questions about the issue of power and aesthetics. The central theoretical premise of this dissertation is that the link between politics and aesthetics shaping Indigenous media carries a generative power. Radio Ucamara, like many other cases of Indigenous media globally, operates through local understandings of image, sound, narrative, and poetic production as forms of social action. Boosted by the contemporary global “turn to digital media” (Fisher 2013), the capacity of dissemination of subaltern political and poetic discourses has now amplified significantly. Building on intellectual genealogies that have reflected on the link between power and aesthetics in Western philosophy (e.g., Sartwell 2010; Ranci re 2010; Fischer-Lichte and Wihstutz 2018) and anthropology (e.g., Cant 2016; Epps and Paiva Ramos 2020; Gell 1992; Ginsburg 1994b; Hill 1993; Stalcup 2016; Stainova 2022), I argue for the existence of a *generative aesthetics* whereby Indigenous media-makers in Nauta understand their own creations not only as socially and politically “embedded” but also potentially transformative. Echoing the event analysis scholarship in anthropology (Kapferer 2010), I sustain that the production of Indigenous video, radio broadcasting, pop music, documentaries, animations (just to name a few) in Peruvian Amazonia is not only inscribed in

historical trajectories of power imbalances but is also rooted in the imagination of potential futures and the factual possibility of intervening in socio-political realities.

This dissertation is also about the intersection between music and politics. In my analysis of Kukama processes of mediatization, music videos play a central role. One of the main strategies of Radio Ucamara aesthetic politics is the production of video-clips based on multilingual pop songs (with a prevalence of the hip-hop genre). I situate the examination of Kukama pop music within the anthropological scholarship on music and verbal art in Amazonia developed since the 1970s (Menezes Bastos 1978; Basso 1985; Graham 1986; Seeger 1979, 1987; Hill 1993). I draw on Jonathan Hill's concept of musicalization (Hill 1993, 1994, 2002, 2004, 2013, 2015, 2018a, 2018b) to analyze the way Kukama videoclips rely on hip-hop, rock, and other pop musicalities to engage in different arenas within Amazonian politics. I argue that Radio Ucamara videoclips represent novel forms of "musicalizations of the other" in which patterns of musical sounds are used to manage conflictive relations with dangerous others (namely, state and corporate powers) and thus enact socio-political transformations. In these new forms of musicalization, political discourses are amplified through modern pop sounds and audiovisual artistry that is effectively disseminated across the digital space. My research shows how the mobilization of musical sounds and musicalized political discourses is influencing political praxis in Nauta. In my analysis, I highlight the way music videos have become one of the most powerful aesthetic devices employed to challenge dominant linguistic ideologies and resist the constant violence of oil extraction. Kukama pop songs and their associated music videos encapsulate different forms of artistry (poetic, musical, visual, performative) that are connected to broader ontological, cosmological, and identitarian dimensions of Amazonian life.

Data for this dissertation derives from both ethnographic fieldwork and the use of online research methods. I engaged the internet both as a field site and a research tool (Markham 2004). The digital space was used as means for data collection and sometimes as a vehicle for participant observation in virtual events and social media interactions. As indicated by other scholars, offline and online dynamics form a continuum in which ethnographic research can start in a face-to-face setting and shift to digital (as in my case) or vice versa (Ardévol and Gómez-Cruz 2014). The fieldwork portion of this research was conducted in the Summer of 2017, when I visited the Amazonian town of Nauta, located in the Loreto province of Peru.¹ Between the months of June and July, I undertook preliminary participant observation at Ucamara radio station. During this period, I could interact with Indigenous media-makers, witnessing creative processes of media production, and engaging in conversations while I was taking part in their daily activities. In early 2020, right before departing for a year of fieldwork in Nauta, ethnographic research had to be put to a halt due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the Fall of 2020, my project relied on the analysis of Radio Ucamara's extensive production of media, and the corpus of digital creations found online. I developed my research tasks by closely following Kukama social media activity and by attending virtual events where Radio Ucamara members were involved. Additionally, I dedicated time to the analysis of Kukama media creations found online, such as videos (including documentaries), podcasts, and digital maps. I carried "fieldnotes," transcribed songs, and made "thick" descriptions of audiovisual content found in the digital space. This process also included conducting video phone call interviews with

¹ Nauta is a Peruvian city located on the banks of the Marañón river close to the confluence with the Ucayali in the Loreto Department. It was founded in 1830 by the Kukama leader Manuel Pacaya and today is the capital of the Loreto Province, with a population of 28,681 inhabitants (Castro 2015; Fernandes Moreira and Ramírez Colombier 2019).

Kukama interlocutors and taking virtual lessons of Kukama language. Following Faye Ginsburg and Terence Turner's seminal insights, in this dissertation I am concerned with both formal and social aspects of Kukama media, approaching "media as mediation" (Turner 2002b) as much as possible while being physically distanced.

This dissertation also deals with the mediatization of the invisible. Although lack of visibility is a common feature of the subaltern experience, the Kukama people have been explicitly associated with images of invisibility in both ethnographic and public discourse. In the 1980s, anthropologists Anthony Stocks (1981) labeled the Kukama as "Invisible Natives" to refer to their mimetic strategies of hiding their indigeneity to navigate anti-Indigenous discrimination. I re-work the notion of invisibility here and turn it into an analytical premise that informs the politics of the visible/invisible common in Indigenous media production (Ginsburg 1993; 1994b). My research contributes to examine how Kukama activists instrumentalize media as a vehicle to make visible worlds that are hard to see for outsiders (see also Cabel 2022; Calderón 2020). Media is used to fight multiple expressions of invisibility as a strategy of effective political action. These invisible landscapes take multiple forms in Nauta. In my analysis (unfolded throughout the chapters), I focus on three of them: 1) indigeneities; 2) histories of violence; and 3) cosmological worlds.

The mediatization (Fisher 2016) of Amazonian indigeneities, historicities, and cosmologies are driven by a consistent politics of anti-invisibility. Through multiple modalities of audiovisual expression, Radio Ucamara has been challenging tropes built around the Kukama as "acculturated natives" or "ex-indigenous." By mediatizing and musicalizing the Kukama-Kukamiria language and Kukama mythologies, Ucamara activists conceptualize a politics of difference that sustain their indigeneity. Part of this strategy consists of visualizing the historical

process of ethnic marginalization and forced assimilation experienced among the Indigenous population in Peruvian Amazonia. Through the same expressive forms of communication, Radio Ucamarca media-makers have been shedding light on often obscured Kukama histories of colonial violence placed in the Rubber Boom era. In this case, media is used to amplify a set of mytho-historical narratives situated in (or derived from) the rubber times that challenge the silencing of these events in the national historical imagination. Lastly, Radio Ucamarca has been bringing to the surface the multiple spiritual worlds that constitute Kukama cosmology, currently threatened by oil pollution. Media in this case (especially music videos) highlight the existence of other-than-human actors that inhabit Amazonian rivers and forests, not visible for the capitalist gaze. Kukama media, thus, relies on the mediatization of cosmopolitical discourses to enter the realm of environmental struggle. The digital space is now the place where these mediatized invisible worlds exist (re-imagined and re-made) and turned global. In the following sections, I outline the theoretical, methodological, and ethnographic frameworks that sustain my exploration of a small Indigenous radio station in Peruvian Amazonia.



Figure 1. Map showing the location of Nauta, Loreto Region, Peru. Source: Infraestructura de Datos Espaciales del Perú. Accessed, May 8, 2023.

Radio Ucamara

Radio Ucamara 98.7 FM is an Indigenous radio station that belongs to the Roman Catholic Church in Peru. Located in the city of Nauta, in the Loreto region, the station is part of the Amazonian Social Promotion Institute (Instituto de Promoción Social Amazónica or IPSA), the media division of the Apostolic Vicariate of Iquitos, a missionary jurisdiction in Northern Peruvian Amazonia. Radio Ucamara was created on April 2, 1992, with the name “Radio La Voz de la Selva-Nauta” (The Voice of the Forest), operating as part of the media resources of the Nauta Parish.² During its early years, this radio station was managed by priests who dedicated to the broadcasting of religious content alongside music and news coverage. After a period of crisis, the radio station ceased its activities in 2003 but reopened in 2006. By this time, and under the renovated leadership of two Augustinian priests, the station changed its orientation and strategies to adopt a more activist drive. By focusing on the Indigenous problems and touching on subjects usually ignored by mainstream regional media, the radio station started broadcasting a style of programming centered on Amazonian politics (Angulo 2019; Calderón 2020; Espinosa et al 2021; Ramírez Colombier 2016). The station also changed its name to Radio Ucamara—Ucamara being a collapsing of the words Ucayali and Marañón, the names of two major rivers in the region whose confluence forms the Upper Amazon (Angulo 2019). Three years later, the priests decided to give total creative control of the station to Indigenous media-makers. That is when Leonardo Tello (a Kukama intellectual) became Radio Ucamara director in 2009. Tello was responsible for the expansion of Radio Ucamara into the audiovisual arena (Calderón 2020).

² The original *Radio La Voz de la Selva* was founded in Iquitos in 1972, also belonging to the Catholic church in Peru (Calderón 2020; Espinosa et al 2021).

From that moment on, Radio Ucamara became an instrument to counter the hegemony of the Peruvian state and private companies in the area (Tello 2014). As Tello explains, Ucamara is a radio station that gives priority to Indigenous communities navigating the challenges of ethnic and environmental discrimination (Tello in Cubías 2019).



Figure 2. Radio Ucamara building in Nauta, June 2017. Picture by Gabriel Torrealba.

Radio Ucamara is an instance of a recent global phenomenon in which many Indigenous peoples and other minority groups have been incorporating media technologies to local political struggles and new modes of self-representation. Radio and other forms of media (especially digital media lately) are becoming worldwide tools for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples self-re-positioning in different context of ethnic, social, and environmental marginalization (Askew and Wilk 2002; Fisher 2016, 2013; Ginsburg 2016; Ginsburg et al 2002; Wilson and Stewart 2008). According to Marilez Tello, sub-director of Radio Ucamara, their radio station has an open Indigenous identity. Most Radio Ucamara media workers are of Kukama ethnicity, and the station operates in a region where the Indigenous population (and audience) is

predominantly Kukama, but with presence of Urarinas, Achuar, and Kichwa groups. Radio Ucamarca works at the periphery of the main urban centers in Peru and is engaged with an audience composed of the population usually ignored by mainstream news media. Indigenous politics, thus, is explicitly foregrounded as a pivotal force in Radio Ucamarca media production. A focus on the Indigenous experience, history, territory, and environmental struggle shapes the radio creative work. It seeks to use media as a tool to reinforce Kukama memory, culture, and identity, as well as to contribute to denouncing state/corporate environmental damage. According to Marilez Tello, the broadcasting area of Radio Ucamarca encompasses the territories where the main “lotes petroleros” (oil extraction lots) in Peru are located. Consequently, one of its purposes is to accompany the local Indigenous population to endure the ordeals of extractivism.³ Using a frequency modulation method of broadcasting, Ucamarca airwaves cover three provinces (Loreto, Requena, and Maynas) and seven districts in the Loreto region (Nauta, Parinari, Sapuea, Jenaro Herrera, Requena, San Juan, and Fernando Lores Tenazoa) (Cabel 2022; Calderón 2020; Espinosa et al 2021; Pau 2021). Their transmissions rely on 500 watts of power, reaching an area of 40 km and up to 120 km in a flat space (Cabel 2022). Radio transmissions can reach distant places in the forest since many communities use transistor radios even in places with no electricity or telephone coverage (Galli 2014).⁴

³ Marilez Tello’s intervention in the virtual conference “Conversatorio Virtual Memoria amazónica. Comunicación para la preservación de la memoria Amazónica” held on October 29, 2021, through Zoom and Facebook live.

⁴ Radio has been the primary means of mass communication in rural Peru since the latter half of the twentieth century (Dean 2004). Commercial radio began in Lima in the 1920s and then expanded to smaller provincial towns in the Andes and Amazonian regions between the 1950s and 1980s (Dean 2004, 60; Oyarce-Cruz et al 2019). In the 1990s, ONGs and the Catholic church were involved in the creation of radio shows to support the Indigenous population in Iquitos (see Dean et al 2000; McKinley and Jensen 2003).



Figure 3. Radio Ucamara team of journalists. Nauta, June 2017. Picture by Gabriel Torrealba.

But Radio Ucamara has become more than a radio station. The radio transcends its presence in the airwaves by operating as a recording studio, a social facility (an actual physical space) in which artistic, educational, and political events take place, and by having a strong audiovisual presence in the digital space (Angulo 2019; Pau 2021; Ramírez Colombier 2016). Their media practices and projects combine different forms of artistry and political discourses that encapsulate Indigenous perspectives, seeking to become tools of empowerment. Radio Ucamara's media apparatus produces (in both digital and analog formats) radio shows, journalist reportages, documentaries, podcasts, songs, music videos, books, murals, photography, animations, cultural maps, and more recently audio soap operas. Radio Ucamara also fosters the participation of the local population by promoting activities of linguistic revitalization, public contests, and the organization of social events and musical performances in their main building. Most of these activities are shared to a wider audience through social media platforms such as Facebook (expressed in multimodal posts and sometimes live transmissions) and a YouTube

channel. Lastly, Ucamara members constantly participate in public events (both in person and virtually) where they engage in regional, national, or transnational political discussions.

Radio Ucamara media-making does not operate in isolation but in an arena of rich collaborative dynamics. The station team works alongside multiple Indigenous and non-Indigenous allies at a local, national, and transnational level that form a “common middle ground” (Conklin and Graham’s 1995); that is, a space of exchange, power, and performance between heterogenous agents (High and Oakley 2020). These allies include, Indigenous political organizations, state institutions, universities, scholars, filmmakers, private companies, lawyers, journalists, artists, musicians, and especially NGOs. Among these partnerships, religious organizations play a special role. Institutions linked to the Catholic church in Peru, such as the Centro Amazónico de Antropología y Aplicación Práctica (CAAAP) or the Red Eclesial Panamazónica (REPAM Peru), are some of the organizations that support Radio Ucamara activities. At a supra-national level, several faith-based NGOs are part of the transnational entanglement of Radio Ucamara, which can be seen often credited in their audiovisual production. Radio Ucamara is also immersed in the world of global Catholic communication. As a local Catholic radio, the station is connected to Catholic media through SIGNIS ALC (Latin American and Caribbean Catholic Association for Communication), the regional section of the World Catholic Association for Communication. SIGNIS is a faith-based non-governmental media organization validated by the Vatican. In their webpage, Radio Ucamara appears as one of

their allies and, as a result, the station's work has had important coverage and promotion in Catholic media, including the agency Vatican News.⁵

Although Radio Ucamara media content is mostly non-religious, some of their productions explicitly manifest the Catholic identity of the station. Their Christian orientation and loyalty to the Catholic church is usually expressed by referring to Pope Francis's 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si* as a main source of inspiration for their political activities. This is clearly expressed in, for example, their video entitled "Animados por Laudato si" (Radio Ucamara 2018), in which they refer to the Pope's critique to current global environmental damage and threats toward Indigenous populations, as a guiding principle. Nonetheless, Catholic discourses are scarce in Radio Ucamara media content. The station keeps working as a faith-based radio with a dominant secular orientation where both Christian and Indigenous ontologies coexist in their media production. As Radio Ucamara director Leonardo Tello has explained, even though Radio Ucamara belongs to the Catholic Church, its message exceeds the Catholic population (Tello 2014). The mediatizations produced by Radio Ucamara are centered around Amazonian Indigenous politics and are designed to enact social transformations through a highly artistic mastery.

The Anthropology of Media: Politics and Aesthetics

The anthropology of media (Askew and Wilk 2002; Ginsburg et al 2002), also referred to as media anthropology (Ardèvol 2018; Rothenbuhler and Coman 2005), is currently a

⁵ Radio Ucamara is also affiliated with secular institutions, such as the Latin American Association of Radio Education (ALER) and the World Association of Community Radio (AMARC) (Angulo 2019).

consolidated subfield in the discipline that has produced a robust literature. A review of this body of work, yielded over last three decades, shows a copious assortment of articles and books dedicated to further the anthropological understanding of media activity around the world, including four influential edited volumes published in the early 2000s (Askew and Wilk 2002; Ginsburg et al 2002; Peterson 2003; Rothenbuhler and Coman 2005). But this was not the case thirty years ago. The presence and influence of media technologies and practices in different ethnographic settings was a neglected subject for anthropologists up until the 1980s (Peterson 2003, Ginsburg et al 2002).⁶ As Ginsburg explains (1991; Ginsburg et al 2002), mass media remained a taboo topic in anthropology for decades due to its association with Western modernity and experiences of “acculturation.” Although many non-Western societies had been in contact with media technologies and images for decades, anthropologists tended to dismiss these practices for being too far from the conventional topics explored in the discipline (Ginsburg 1991).

Nevertheless, pre-1980s anthropological study of media existed on a minor scale (Boyer 2012; Latham 2012). The initial interest in mass media started with the analysis of propaganda films in the 1940s (Bateson 1943; Mead and Metraux 1953) and Hollywood films in the 1950s (Powdermaker 1947,1950). Although the study of the cultural impact of broadcasting kept having a small role in the 1960s and 1970s, these decades saw the emergence of the field of visual anthropology, alongside the increasing incorporation of film and photography in

⁶ For analyses of the intellectual genealogy of media anthropology see for example Boyer (2012), Postill (2017), Pertierra (2019), and Peterson (2003).

ethnographic practices (Boyer 2012; see Ruby 1976).⁷ The 1980s are usually identified as the starting point of the ethnographic interest in media (Turner 2002b). It was not until this decade that anthropologists began to systematically scrutinize the way Indigenous peoples and other marginalized groups were appropriating of Western technologies of communication to represent themselves and engage in political activities. In the 1980s, anthropologists began to turn to media as a social practice, as in the case of Eric Michaels' analysis of television in aboriginal Australia (Michaels 1986). The work of Faye Ginsburg (1991, 1994b) in Australia and Terence Turner in Brazil (1991, 2002b) would set the basis of a new conceptualization of the anthropology of media nurtured with a highly activist drive.

The consolidation of anthropology of media as a differentiated subfield took place in the 1990s (Boyer 2012; Ginsburg et al 2005). In this decade there was a significant increase in research productivity (Boyer 2012), initially focused on the sociocultural dimension of television (e.g., Abu-Lughod 1993), film (Ginsburg 1991), radio (e.g., De Gerdes 1998; Spitulnik 1992) and video (e.g., Turner 1991). The anthropology of media emerged in the context of a "crisis of representation" in the discipline (1980s and 1990s) that came along with radical ruptures in anthropological theories and methodologies as well as the conceptualization of more dynamic notions of culture and new multisided ethnographies (Ginsburg et al 2002, Marcus and Fischer 1986). Likewise, since the 1990s research on media became entangled with broader analysis of modernity, postmodernity, and globalization. Arjun Appadurai, for example, created the concept of "mediascapes" to address the centrality of mass media and the role of imagination in the reproduction of culture and identity in the late twentieth century (Appadurai 1991, 1996).

⁷ During the 1960s and 1970s, Raymond Williams's work on the cultural significance of mass media (1974) also had a significant influence on social analysis.

Benedict Anderson's work on nationalism also became highly influential in the development of a new anthropology of media. His examination of the role of print media in the formation of imagined communities beyond space constriction and formal definitions of culture became a model for the analysis of other forms of media (Anderson 1991). Media anthropology in the 1990s contributed to critique essentialist conceptions present in the discipline as well as in communication studies, where old concepts of culture as bounded and static units were still prevalent. Ginsburg and Turner debunked the idea of mass media being a homogenizing force erosive of cultural diversity. For this, they highlighted the agency and creative responses of people using media to construct new worlds (Ginsburg 1994c).

Postill (2017) identifies two historical phases of the subfield of anthropology of media: 1) the "take off" phase of the 1980s and 1990s, already described, and 2) a phase that goes from the 2000s to the present, characterized for its diversification and theoretical innovation. In this phase, the ethnographic interest in radio, film, and television, has been complemented with the study of the internet and the different forms of digital media (e.g., Miller and Slater 2000). The anthropology of media solidified in the early 2000s with this interest in digital worlds and practices (Boyer 2012; Latham 2012). In this decade, an emergent media anthropology of Internet-based communication (the field of digital anthropology) went beyond the production and reception duality to study networks and the technologies and institutions of digital culture, including mobile communication practices (Boyer 2012). Digital and non-digital media are now ubiquitous, and anthropologists are attending to their presence and significance. Media forms are being studied as vehicles for the mediation and expression of social processes and cultural meanings (Ginsburg et al 2005). Since the 2010s, anthropologists started to reflect on the norms and statements about how media should be used (media ideologies) (Gershon 2010) as well as

the link between community media and forms of statecraft (Schiller 2018), activism, and structural violence (Stone 2015, 2021).

The consolidation of the subfield of media anthropology came with definitional challenges. Given its interconnected intellectual legacies between anthropology and media studies (Ginsburg et al 2005) as well as the interdisciplinary overlapping with sociology, history, cultural studies, literary studies, cinema, and communication studies (Ginsburg et al 2002), there was a need for sub-disciplinary demarcation. Boyer (2012) points out that the term media in anthropology follows the popular sense of communicational media: communicational media practices, technologies, and institutions (e.g., print, film, photography, video, television, radio, telephony, internet). However, the research focus in this subfield has been concerned with the way in which the production and reception of media (content and technologies) have shaped processes of cultural and social reproduction. A central premise in the field of media anthropology is that operational practices of communication cannot be separated from broader socio-political processes (Boyer 2012).⁸

Fay Ginsburg has provided some of the most important insights in the definition of an anthropology of media. She placed the focus of this sub-field in the social relations built around the production, circulation, and reception of different forms media, including the positionality of subjects and audiences involved (Ginsburg et al 2002; Ginsburg et al 2005). Ginsburg, alongside the work of Terence Turner (1991), developed a model through which anthropologists can analyze both the textual content and the social organization and activities of media work, defined

⁸ In the 1980s and 1990s, there were attempts to link anthropology with journalism. Media anthropology was understood as the application of the theoretical principles of anthropology in the dissemination of information to the public (a sort of anthropological journalism in which anthropologists become more engaged in media activities) (Allen 1984; 1994).

as a form of social action. She identifies the main contribution of anthropology of media in ethnographically grounded analysis of the complex ways in which people engage in media practices in specific historical contexts. (Ginsburg 1994a; 1994b). As a form of social practice, media is framed by shifting cultural and political fields. Thus, anthropologists can study the way media is used for hegemonic and counterhegemonic purposes. The analytical units derived from Ginsburg's model of anthropology of media, and later developed by many other authors (see Ginsburg et al 2002), include issues of power and activism (interest in minority groups' media or "small media"), the role of imagination, the construction of social identities (including nationalisms), memory, subjectivities, the social life of media materiality, and the emergence of alternative modernities and transnational circuits. The ethnographies that follow this model include both producers and audiences and contemplate the "wider social fields within which media practices operate" (Ginsburg et al 2002: 2).

The centrality of the social fields of media practices and the way they are embedded in broader social and historical processes kept defining the anthropology of media in the 1990s and 2000s (e.g., Ardevol 2018; Eisenlohr 2011; Peterson 2003). Spitulnik (1993), for example, identified the object of the study of anthropology as "mass media," which can be defined as practices, process, and artifacts all at once, that can be approached anthropologically in multiple ways: "as institutions, as workplaces, as communicative practices, as cultural products, as social activities, as aesthetic forms, and as historical developments" (Spitulnik 1993, 293). In their edited volume, Askew and Wilk (2002) define media anthropology as the ethnographic study of media technologies. For them, media anthropology comprises "ethnographically informed, historically grounded, and context sensitive analyses of the ways in which people use and make sense of media" (Askew and Wilk 2002, 3). For them and many other authors, politico-economic

goals, meaning-making processes, and social dynamics around the production of media are the central topics of media anthropology. This includes issues of representation (of self and others), communication, community formation, imagination, social action, power, and nation-building (Postill 2002; 2005). Contemporary notions of media anthropology keep conceptualizing this intellectual field as the study of media situated in socio-cultural processes, placing culture at the center of media production, and taking an ethnographic and relativistic approach (Ardevol 2018).

The concept of mediation has been a central theoretical piece in the definition of the field of media anthropology. The notion of “media as mediation” (Turner 2002a) emerged in the 1990s in order to expand the analytical scope of anthropological studies from mere representational media to the way social mediations took place, which entailed emphasizing the agency of media producers and receivers (Boyer 2012). Anthropologists began to pay attention to the way media affected the circulation of cultural meanings and the formation of identities (Ginsburg 2008; Spitulnik 1993; Turner 1991). Ginsburg (1991) expressed this interest in the mediation of culture since her early work. She manifested more interest in the social and cultural mediations of media-making practices than in the formal qualities of film and video. Mediation implies looking at media in relation to other cultural forms, and how social worlds are mediated by film, video, or radio. For example, producing media to address the historical ruptures of capitalism and colonialism can help to mediate the contradictions of contemporary life. People can also use media to restructure cultural identities in situations of historical disruption (Ginsburg 1991), or mobilize social categories such as kinship, rituals, or commodities (Ginsburg 1994a).

Within the sub-field of anthropology of media, radio became the subject of anthropological inquiry only in recent decades. Even though rural, Indigenous, and other

subaltern communities tend to be avid radio listeners, anthropologists did not show much ethnographic interest in radio during most of the 20th century (O'Connor 2002). Radio only became an object of scholarly analysis with the rise of the anthropology of media in 1990s (Bessire and Fisher 2012). In a context in which many Indigenous peoples had already engaged in radio-making practices (Browne 1998), ethnographic approaches situated radio broadcasting on a multiplicity of social and political fields (O'Connor 2002). Radio production and listening was studied in articulation with the formation of colonial subjects (Spitulnik 2002), the production of ethnicity and nationalism (Postill 2002), or discussions about democracy and political agency (Kunreuther 2006). As an oral medium, radio has been studied as mechanism to amplify and revitalize Indigenous languages (usually through the use of music) (Browne 1998). De Gerdes (1998) work on the poetics of radio among the Kuna of Panama, for example, explores how verbal art takes a central place in Indigenous politics. Bilingual broadcastings in Kuna and Spanish rely on verbal skills and aesthetics that become strategic weapons for survival.⁹

In recent years, anthropologists have shown a renovated interest in radio. Bessire and Fisher (2012), for example, have reflected on the ubiquity of radio (the most widespread electronic medium in contemporary world) and the need of anthropology to conceptualize it as a domain of ethnographic research. For them, the study of historically and culturally situated “radio fields” (the intersection between radio technologies and social relations) can illuminate broader social topics in the discipline, including the metaphysical dimensions of radio, its

⁹ There has been also a significant interdisciplinary interest in Indigenous radio linked to activism, identity politics, agency, and community building (Cárcamo 2013; Michelsen et al 2018; Rodríguez and El Gazi 2007). The role of radio in challenging dominant linguistic ideologies and fostering linguistic revitalization processes has become a common topic on analysis among scholars of multiple disciplines (Ennis 2019; Hames 2017).

articulation with collective imaginaries, or how radio sounds shape subjectivities and identity formation. Within these examinations, the analytical concept of “voice,” understood as a historical and cultural construct associated with empowerment, has become one of the main phenomena explored in the anthropology of radio (Kunreuther 2006; Fisher 2016). The work of Daniel Fisher (2012; 2016; 2019) in Australia, for example, explores the sociocultural dimension of audio media and processes of mediatization of Indigenous voices. Fisher (2012; 2016) conceives Indigenous radio as a site where the voice is culturally produced. Radio can amplify voice’s social meaning and contribute to the construction of Indigenous agency and political power. Fisher explains how Aboriginal voices are mediatized through a set of multiple musical genres and sound technologies that bring different forms of reflexivity. For him, radio, more than representative, is pragmatic and normative. It attempts to restore worlds and forms of relatedness disrupted by colonial forces (Fisher 2013).

Indigenous Media: A Generative Aesthetics

Although the field of anthropology of media encompasses a myriad of socio-cultural phenomena, the topic of Indigenous media has been a central piece in the consolidation of this area of study. Multiple authors identify the 1970s and 1980s as the starting point of the global phenomenon of Indigenous peoples producing their own media (Ginsburg 1994b; León Mantilla 2015; Wilson and Steward 2008). Since the early 1980s, Indigenous and other minority groups have appropriated different forms of audiovisual technology to defy the structures of power that they inhabit and gain cultural control of their own images (Ginsburg 1991, 1993; Ginsburg et al 2002; Turner 2002a). Many indigenous peoples have seen media as a means of expression and

communication with potential culturally revitalizing effects (Ginsburg 1993, 1994b; Turner 1990).

Faye Ginsburg and Terence Turner became the leading figures in the emergence of anthropological studies of Indigenous media. Ginsburg (1991) defined Indigenous media as an analytical category that indexes the political circumstances, colonial histories, and networks of institutional power in which Indigenous media-making is situated. Indigenous media is thus a cultural product and a social process embedded in broader movements for self-determination existing in tension with global political and media powers (Ginsburg 1993, 558). But Indigenous media is also situated in a set of transnational networks and alliances that many times intersected with the production and contestation of national imaginings. Indigenous media includes a wide range of work, technologies, and institutional bases that goes from small-scale video, radio, or digital projects to national Indigenous television and filmmaking (Ginsburg 1993, 2008). Although Terence Turner did not explicitly define the category of “Indigenous media,” his study of Kayapo video-making outlined some of the major analytical topics that consolidated this area of research. Echoing Ginsburg, Turner was interested in both the social dynamics of the media-making process and the meanings of the videos as a process of self-objectification (Turner 1991; 1995). Turner studied media representations as a socially contested process. He examined the acts of video-making in relation to internal social and political conflict among the Kayapo (Turner 1991; 1992, 2002a; 2002b). Turner also analyzed the way Kayapo cultural values and aesthetics shaped videomaking practices (Turner 1991; 2002a; 2002b). He conceptualized media as new techniques of representation that allowed the possibility of building political power.

Power was produced through the pragmatic mobilization of “polyphonic representations.” Turner

deconstructed the text and forms of Kayapo video by focusing on its polyphonic aesthetics (the interplay of multiple voices) (Turner 2002a).

The emergence of the field of Indigenous media came along with debates around issues of strategic objectification and the mediatization of culture (Ginsburg et al 2002; Turner 2002b). Some scholars warned about the risks that media production entailed for Indigenous peoples and the potential tensions between empowerment and disenfranchisement that media could bring.¹⁰ Whether minority subjects could incorporate communication technologies to their own cultural systems, or instead becoming a dystopic force, became a widespread discussion (Ginsburg 1994a; Ginsburg et al 2002). Ginsburg famously referred to the dilemmas of the Indigenous engagement with modern media as a “Faustian contract” that allows certain degree of agency but can also potentially disrupt cultural systems (Ginsburg 1991, 1993, 2003). Anthropologists were quick in debunking essentialist arguments about the impact of media among Indigenous forms of representation, autonomy, and sovereignty. Turner, for example, defended media as a tool for the empowerment of Indigenous actors. Instead of eroding Indigenous social worlds and worldviews, media could be produced under their own moral, political, and aesthetic premises (Turner 2002a; 2002b). Anthropologists argued for the continuity of Indigenous socio-cultural perspectives in their media productions. Media was seen as a vehicle for the amplification of Indigenous structures of sociality and kinship rather than its disruption (Fisher 2013; Turner 2002a). Indigenous artists and activists have been using media technologies to produce culturally

¹⁰ See for example James Weiner article (1997) and subsequent debate in *Current Anthropology*. Taking a critical stance toward Ginsburg and Turner’s work on Indigenous media, Weiner argues that the technologies of visual media inevitably reproduce Western ontologies and conventions of representation among Indigenous media-makers, obliterating “cultural difference.”

distinct communication that speak to local aesthetics and politics but hoping to reach larger audiences (Wilson and Steward 2008).¹¹

Indigenous media went from mostly analog in the 1980s and 1990s to mostly digital (“digital shift”) in the 21st century. Although technologies have changed with the impact of digital media, political motivations have remained. For example, digitality and images of futurity in Indigenous media have produced forms of self-representations that challenge indigeneity as a category of the past (Lempert 2018). The broadcasting capacities of Indigenous media have expanded with the arrival of the internet. Digital worlds became indigenized to gain media sovereignty and build political networks (Ginsburg 2016). Lately, there have been discussions on the implications of the arrival of a “digital age” for Indigenous peoples. Anthropologists have been reflecting on the uneven access to digital platforms and the opportunities and obstacles that this entails for media-makers (Ginsburg 2008; 2016).

The anthropology of media in Indigenous Amazonia had a promising start in the early 1990s with the work of Terence Turner and the Kayapo Video Project (Turner 1991, 1992, 1995, 2002a, 2002b). Turner analyzed the sociopolitical and aesthetics dimensions of Kayapo media-making practices by paying attention to the social and textual configurations of Kayapo video. But despite Turner’s influence, Amazonian Indigenous media had been mostly neglected topic

¹¹ The study of Indigenous media has been highly interdisciplinary. The politics and poetics of media conceptualized and produced by Indigenous peoples has been studied from multiple approaches. The edited volume *Global Indigenous Media* by Wilson and Steward (2008) is an example of this. Scholars from areas as communication studies, cultural studies, and media-makers have also contributed to the understanding of Indigenous media worlds. Anthropologists and non-anthropologists have often addressed common topics such as political and cultural rights, discrimination, self-representation, or indigeneity/indigenization, associated to multiple forms of media (Wilson and Steward 2008). For example, the poetic and political dimension of Indigenous video has been a well explored topic among anthropologists and non-anthropologists working in Latin America (León Mantilla 2015; Mora 2015; Salazar and Cordova 2019).

among anthropologists. Notable exceptions include the work of Gallois and Carelli on video in Brazil (1995) as well as Richard Pace (1993) research on the influence of television consumption in social life, worldview, identities, and politics among Brazilian Amazonia audiences. This interest in television effects in rural Amazonia during the 1990s (see also Reis 1998, Roberts 1995), extended in the following decades (Pace 2009; Pace and Hinote 2013). In the field of radio, another notable contribution is the work of Oscar Espinosa (1998) on the political dimension of Shipibo radio and process of identity construction in Peruvian Amazonia. In the same region, Bartholomew Dean (2004) has examined Amazonian radio within the broader context of Indigenous radio activity in Peru. Dean analyzes the influence of shortwave radio broadcasting (including musical forms) in Peruvian Amazonia's construction of regional and national identity, as well as radio as means of communication between Amazonian settlements.

Even though Amazonian Indigenous peoples have been involved with media practices since the 1970s (Coelho 2020), only in recent years, after the rapid expansion of the internet and access to digital communication, has media started to become a frequent topic of inquiry among Amazonianists anthropologists. Virtanen (2015) explored the use of social media among the Arawakan and Panoan speaking Indigenous groups in Brazil and the way it regulates social relations. Likewise, Laura Graham (2016) examined A'uwẽ-Xavante peoples' use of audiovisual social media, as well as video and film, to discuss issues of representational sovereignty. Recently, an edited volume on Indigenous media in Latin America (Pace 2018b) included explorations on Kayapo digital worlds (Parra et al 2018), digital recordings of shamans among the Araweté (Heurich 2018), and even classic media topics such as photography among the Kawaiwete (Oakdale 2018), and television among the Kichwa (Shenton 2018) and the Kayapo (Pace et al 2018). Patricia Bermúdez and Michael Uzendoski's (2018) work on the polyphonic

aesthetics of Napo Runa Community cinema in Ecuador, represents a significant contribution in the study of Amazonian media, politics, and myth. They analyze the way Napo Runa cinema is grounded in Indigenous aesthetics and perspectivist philosophies that allow dialogical relations among human and non-human multiple voices (Bermúdez and Uzendoski 2018). Lastly, the political dimensions of Shipibo-Konibo radio in Peru has also recently returned as a topic of interest (Oyarce-Cruz et al 2019).¹²

Currently, Indigenous media is a robust field of cultural production that has grown significantly in the last three decades (Ginsburg 2016). Indigenous media-makers “see media as a means of furthering social and political transformation by inserting their own stories into national narratives as part of ongoing struggles for Aboriginal recognition and self-determination” (Ginsburg 2008, 302). Some authors have dedicated their work to identifying the distinctive features of Indigenous media from other forms of media-making. The criteria, always attached to notions of subalternity, go from the capacity to create alternative narratives (Salazar and Cordova 2008), and the ability to respond to hegemonic powers (Ginsburg et al 2002), to making visible (and audible) cultures, histories, and political realities made invisible by dominant societies (Wortham 2013). Pace (2018a) identified four areas that delimit the social field of Indigenous media: 1) aesthetics; 2) technology and techniques; 3) political goals (empowerment); and 4) engagement (social impact). Among these criteria, aesthetic issues have

¹² Media in Amazonia has also been a topic of study outside anthropology. Scholars from communication and cultural studies have analyzed the dynamics of radio networks in Brazilian Amazonia in connection with the Catholic church (Almeida et al 2018), and the articulation between Indigenous Amazonian cinema and national identities in Brazil (Macedo Nunes et al 2014). Amazonian digital worlds have also become object of interest from multidisciplinary approaches. Studies include analysis of the social dynamics around the Digital Village Project among the Xavante (Coelho 2020), as well as the uses of digital media in Indigenous ethnic and environmental activism (Leite 2014, Coelho 2019; Cabel 2022).

been a central concern. Pace (2018a) discusses if it is possible to identify a constant “Indigenous aesthetics” in image filming, song recording, editing processes, or narrative styles. Zamorano Villareal (2017) has questioned the idea that Indigenous media aesthetics is formed by inherently Indigenous features. Drawing on his research in Bolivia, she argues that the Indigenous aesthetic found in films is more tied to a political need to convey indigeneity than the existence of intrinsically Indigenous forms revealed in the process of filmmaking. As other authors have argued, Indigenous approaches to media can coexist with mainstream aesthetics and techniques (Wilson and Steward 2008).

Faye Ginsburg’s notion of “embedded aesthetics” is perhaps one of the most cited concepts in the field of Indigenous media. Through this analytical category, Ginsburg was able to capture the multiple social dimensions in which Indigenous media in Australia operates. According to her, Aboriginal media-makers see media production as a form of social action and see themselves as responsible for a community of origin. Media practices are thus subordinated to the reproduction of a larger community (Ginsburg 1994b). Ginsburg defines “embedded aesthetics” this way:

[F]or many Aboriginal producers, the quality of work is judged by its capacity to embody, sustain, and even revive or create certain social relations, although the social bases for coming to this position may be very different for remote and urban people. For the sake of discussion, I will call this orientation embedded aesthetics, to draw attention to a system of evaluation that refuses a separation of textual production and circulation from broader arenas of social relations [Ginsburg 1994b, 368].

The concept of embedded aesthetics is rooted in an emic reality. Under this perspective, Aboriginal producers understand media production as an extension of their collective self. It is a self-conscious strategic choice whereby Indigenous media-makers can also rely on Western aesthetic conventions coming from the dominant society to render visible subaltern cultural and historical realities (Ginsburg 1994b). Practices of socially embedded media could rapidly be seen in other ethnographic experiences of Indigenous media activism. Even before Ginsburg created this notion, Terence Turner's analysis of Kayapo videomaking reached similar conclusions. In his own words: "The point is that the use of video, and the meaning of the videos produced, cannot be conceived or understood in abstraction from the social and political dynamics which inevitably accompany their making, showing, and viewing" (Turner 1991, 74). Kayapo media-makers saw themselves as producers of beauty that used foreign technologies to reproduce traditional Kayapo values (Turner 1991). For Turner, Kayapo representational media was concerned with the generation and use of collective power (Turner 2002a, 246). Since the 1990s, the concept of embedded aesthetics has been used and expanded to understand a myriad of other cases of Indigenous media where aesthetic representation is understood as political praxis (e.g., Bermúdez and Uzendoski 2018; Cabel 2022; Pace 2018a).

This brief literature review on the anthropology of media does not intend to be exhaustive and has therefore left many critical issues untouched. In this dissertation, I specifically concentrate on the analytical relationship between politics and aesthetics shaping Indigenous media production in Peruvian Amazonia. My theoretical examination of the political aesthetics of media follows the intellectual tradition initiated by Faye Ginsburg and Terence Turner, in which media (conceptualized both as a text and social process) is inscribed in multiple political

and social fields. I expand on the discussion of power and aesthetics commonly present in anthropological analysis of media by proposing the concept of generative aesthetics. A notion of generative aesthetics, which builds on Ginsburg's concept of embedded aesthetics, not only encapsulates the social "embeddedness" of media practices but also includes media-makers understanding of communicative practices as actions and events that have potential transformative power.

The links between art and politics as well as the transformative capacities of aesthetic forms is a well discussed topic in Western philosophy (see Fischer-Lichte and Whistztus 2018; Sartwell 2010). One of the most influential contributions in contemporary philosophy on the subject is Jacques Rancière's (2010) analysis of the aesthetics dimension of politics and the political dimension of aesthetics. Rancière argues that the work of the senses and emotions have a crucial role in the political representations that reproduce social hierarchies. For him, politics operates through a partition of the sensible whereby a common shared world is distributed and divided through sensory experience. This sensorial distribution arranges what can be visible and audible and what cannot. Rancière therefore considers both politics and aesthetics as forms of dissensus (the manifestation of a gap in the sensible) that structures power relations. In a similar terrain, Crispin Sartwell's (2010) notion of "political aesthetic" is based on the premise that not all art is political, but politics is always aesthetic. For him, political ideologies are aesthetic systems rooted in multisensory contexts. Therefore, the analysis of political texts requires the understanding of its formal and stylistic features, which have concrete social effects.¹³ Recently,

¹³ Anthropologists and other scholars have used Sartwell's notion of political aesthetics to examine popular revolts and protests around globe (Werbner et al 2014). Based on the idea that aesthetics is a central part of political practices, they explore how music, humor, poetry, narrative, and performance nurture recent anti-governmental uprisings. They observe that in the

Fischer-Lichte and Whistztus (2018) introduced the concept of “transformative aesthetics” to address the capacity of artistic forms in affecting people’s subjectivities and enacting political and social changes. According to this concept, artistic practices can shape people’s perceptions, emotions, imagination, and cognition based on the power of aesthetic creation in causing a sensory effect on audiences and the society at large.

In anthropology, Alfred Gell’s (1992; 1998) analysis of the social dimension of art has focused on the power of artistic objects in affecting people’s subjectivities. Gell argues that aesthetic virtuosity gives objects the capacity to exert agency. Art objects and their aesthetic properties create a state of fascination that he defines as a “technology of enchantment,” which “is the power that technical processes have of casting a spell over us so that we see the real world in an enchanted form” (Gell 1992, 44). More recently, Yana Stainova (2019, 2022) revisited the concept of enchantment (conceptualized as an ethnographic method) to understand the politics of musical practices as devices linked to both hegemonic perpetuation and processes of empowerment. Stainova argues that musical enchantment has a world-building potential based on a “generative energy” whereby music practices emanate their own forms of power (Stainova 2022).

Research on Indigenous communities have also contributed to understanding the intersection between power and aesthetics. In analyzing the “aesthetics of indigeneity” in Mexico, Alanna Cant (2016) conceptualized aesthetics as a relational process that permits one to take account of the sensory and affective dimensions of political practices. Referring to the existence of a sensuous participation in politics she argues that “we must not assume aesthetic

age of global media and social networks, political movements are creating innovative and unprecedented aesthetic forms and sensual manifestations that spread non-verbal images, sounds, performances rapidly and effectively.

participation is the antithesis to the exercise of power; often the two go hand in hand” (Cant 2016, 31). Another category that captures the interplay between the political and sensorial is the notion of “enactive aesthetics” proposed by linguist Patience Epps and anthropologists Danilo Paiva Ramos (2020). Based on their analysis of Amazonian shamanic practices, Epps and Paiva Ramos use this concept to refer to the practical and artistic dimensions of poetic discourses to effect control of reality. They refer to the poetics of shamanic incantation as a discourse that is “at once maximally artistic and maximally enactive, such that its utilitarian function is in fact instantiated and enabled via the aesthetic” (Epps and Paiva Ramos 2020, 3) Under the concept of enactive aesthetics, poetic speech acts are considered effective actions driven by aesthetic mastery.

Within the field of anthropology of media, scholars have already examined the transformative capacities of media-making practices. Terence Turner wrote about the “potent facticity” of Kayapo media (Turner 2002b, 87) to discuss how video-making and recording are not passive activities but tools to establish reality. Kayapo media-makers see media representations as forms that help to create social reality. Likewise, while Peterson (2003) considers media a form of symbolic and performative action that seek to cause an effect on other individuals, Zamorano Villareal (2017) highlights the role of affects mobilized through audiovisual media in shaping political arenas. Similar to the case of Radio Ucamara in Peru, Meg Stalcup (2016) explains how in Brazil, media activists see their work as capable of fostering sociopolitical change as well as creating new subjectivities and social relations. She says that media activists enact an “aesthetic politics” that they explicitly define as a production of images that generate transformative action.

My concept of generative aesthetics builds on this intellectual genealogy. A generative aesthetics operating in media worlds acknowledges the “embeddedness” of the media practices but also contemplates media-makers ideologies of power. Many subaltern media activists around the globe, in including the Kukama media producers from the Peruvian Amazonia, understand the production of radio, television, video, and other forms of communication, as creations with a transformative potential. The power of these creations is usually placed in the aesthetic forms chosen to mobilize collective sensibilities and intervene in political realities. Media activists tend to explicitly express this ideological stance and consider aesthetic resources as a way of building political power. Even though this power is limited, media-makers constantly harness the potential that media brings in amplifying their voices and achieving certain political goals.

Drawing on Kukama media ideologies and the theoretical conceptualization developed in the context of the methodological turn towards “the event” in anthropology (Kapferer 2010), I propose that politically driven media-making is a machine for producing significant events. Media events should not be considered an illustration of durable structural orders but as episodes with the capacity to open “new potentialities in the formation of social realities” (Kapferer 2010, 1–2). As the literature on event analysis proposes, events condense historical trajectories, but are not necessarily tied to the past; they represent situations of intense creativity (Kapferer 2010). Audiovisual production disseminated on the digital space, radio broadcasting, print, and painting acts can be conceptualized as “events” that are both situated in local neocolonial histories but also carry a generative potential for the opening of possible futures. Music videos, for example, address contemporary realities rooted in decades of discrimination towards Indigenous peoples and environmental destruction in Amazonia, but also open spaces for resistance, negotiation, defiance, dialogue, and alliances. Indigenous media-makers use aesthetic mastery to create

spaces of communication with powerful others that have the capacity to reimagine local politics. Thus, a generative aesthetics in media practices is not only locally valued in terms of its social “embeddedness,” but also by virtue of its transformative capacities.

Digital Fields and Digital Ethnographies

Methodologically speaking, this dissertation is situated within the field of digital ethnographies or “digital fields” (Airoldi 2018). Facing the impossibility of conducting fieldwork due to the challenges the Covid-19 pandemic posed for ethnographic activity worldwide, my research was developed through and about different forms of digital media. The decision of doing anthropological research online was a response to the multiple ethical dilemmas brought up by the biological and social intricacies of the virus, which made more evident the privileges and differential positionalities involved in our relations with research participants (see Kiderlin et al 2020; Olson 2021). The pandemic has not only forced us to rethink ethnographic research, but also generated an intense debate and reflexive dialogue around the very notion of fieldwork from an ethical, epistemological, and operational perspective (Kiderlin et al 2020). One of the main outcomes of these conversations was bringing center stage debates that have been circulating in anthropology and other disciplines since the 1990s on the sociocultural and methodological dimension of the use of the internet. Due to the global expansion of digital media, a significant group of scholars have been calling attention to the ubiquity of digital communication and its implications in reshaping classic notions of place-based ethnographies (Miller 2018; Whitehead and Wesch 2012). Online worlds added yet another dimension to the critique of conventional notions of culture and ethnography developed since the 1980s (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Marcus 1995).

From the multidisciplinary corpus of literature on digital ethnographies, I draw on recent work from anthropology and other disciplines advocating for fieldwork research that considers online spaces; this is, the methodological interplay between online and offline data, as well as face-to-face and web contexts (Airoldi 2018; Ardévol and Gómez-Cruz 2014; Gajjala 2013; Hallett and Barber 2014; Miller 2018; Miller and Slater 2000; Postill and Pink 2012; Whitehead and Wesch 2012). Departing from early approaches on digital fields focused on self-contained virtual worlds, in recent decades some anthropologists have been fostering the inclusion of social media as part of ethnographic practices (Miller 2011). This scholarship builds on methodological and theoretical understandings of ethnographic settings previously conceived as “multi-sited” (Marcus 1995) and more recently as “un-sited” (Airoldi 2018).

I find particularly insightful John Postill and Sarah Pink’s (2012) arguments on the study of social media, where the analysis of internet “events” can be combined with field site travels. For them, digital ethnographies are about “making connections between online and locality-based realities” (Postill and Pink 2012, 123) and understanding “how social media ethnography produces ‘ethnographic places’ that traverse online/offline contexts and are collaborative, participatory, open and public” (Postill and Pink 2012, 124). For Postill and Pink, this means going beyond conventional ethnographic practices (participant observation, interviews, etc.) to incorporate online discourses by following and participating in social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or YouTube. In their own words, they advocate for an “ethnography that engages with internet practices and content directly, but not exclusively...” (Postill and Pink 2012, 125). Considering online spaces has important epistemological implications for ethnographies in worlds where life is constantly shaped by the internet (as in the case of Amazonia). As Hallett and Barber (2014) explain, many ethnographers find themselves

in online spaces and discover “that doing contemporary ethnographic research [means] following our participants online” (Hallett and Barber 2014, 308).

As Ardévol and Gómez-Cruz (2014) have pointed out, online research can imply the engagement of verbal and textual data that is complemented with visual, sound, and kinetic information. For this dissertation, I accessed this type of information through Radio Ucamara videos posted on their YouTube channel, social media activity coming mostly from Facebook, online news articles and interviews, Radio Ucamara online articles, and virtual events. The use of this universe of digital sources was conceptualized as an online archive that was highly dynamic and always in the making, but sometimes elusive. This obliged me to spend large amounts of time daily monitoring and taking notes on the posting activity of Kukama interlocutors and other actors involved with Radio Ucamara. Likewise, I spent time documenting significant events that were part of the political dynamics of the region. Following previous contributions in the field of anthropology of media, I analytically approached these media creations both as culturally and socially situated activities as well as “texts.” From this body of data, videos were particularly revealing. Radio Ucamara’s YouTube videos are usually framed by written descriptions that become useful for discursive interpretations and analysis. The textual descriptions of the videos provided another dimension of Radio Ucamara media-makers’ voice and often made explicit issues of positionality and reflexivity. Videos’ written descriptions also deal with issues of opacity. They provide context and explanation to meanings that could be elusive to part of their target audience (the non-Indigenous world). Within this corpus of media, I explore the different aesthetic devices used by Indigenous media to re-make and re-signify Kukama worlds. Additionally, I analyze the reflexive discourses coming from Kukama

broadcasters, where they make explicit the enactive power of media in the highly asymmetrical context of the Loreto region.

Musicalizations in Amazonia

In Lowland South America, music is a central aspect of social experience (see Seeger 2013; Hill and Chaumeil 2011). Anthropologists, linguists, and ethnomusicologists have studied the significance of music in Indigenous Amazonia since the late seventies. The pioneering works of Rafael José de Menezes Bastos (1978), Ellen Basso (1985), Laura Graham (1986) Anthony Seeger (1979, 1987), and Jonathan Hill (1993) on the role of music, musical performances, and verbal art in ritual communication and shamanic practices, opened a prolific field of musical ethnographies that have grown in subsequent decades.¹⁴ Since the 1990s, there has been an interest in the production of musical sounds embedded in social and economic practices, political activities, conceptualizations of history, and cosmologies (Hill 2018a, 167). Although Indigenous musical forms tend to be particularly prevalent in ritual life and ceremonial activities (Seeger 2013), as Jonathan Hill explains, native musical traditions are dynamic and creative processes in which musical sounds and voices extend to other sociocultural domains such as politics, economic practices, gender, ecology, cosmologies, and history (Hill 2018a, 168).

Some of these active links between musical and non-musical practices have been analytically examined through Hill's concept of musicalization (Hill 1993, 1994, 2002, 2004, 2013, 2015, 2018a, 2018b). Hill defines the term 'musicalization' as the "process of using non-verbal or semi-verbal patterns of sound to enact various kinds of social transformation: lifecycle

¹⁴ For a general revision of the work on ethnomusicology in Amazonia see Menezes Bastos (2007) and Hill (2019).

transitions, shamanic journeys, exchanges between affines, revitalization movements, political-economic resistance, and so forth.” (Hill 2018a, 181; Hill 2018b, 280). For him, musicalizations occur in broader contexts of verbal and non-verbal practices (Hill 2018b, 281) where musicality becomes a formal device to energize speech through beauty. In shamanic rituals, for example, musical sounds make speech a powerful and transformative force through multiple dynamics, such as loud-soft contrast, accelerations and decelerations, or tone changes that enact engagements with spirits and mythic beings (Hill 2018a, 182). Therefore, Hill advocates for a methodology where it is important to pay attention to the details of musical sounds and the way they are organized (Hill 2018b, 280).

The concept of musicalization has also been useful to understand social relations with others and the management of alterity in Amazonia. Musical practices are central to mediate the relations between humans and a variety of others (human, non-human, spiritual, Indigenous, or non-Indigenous) (Basso 1985; Whitten and Whitten 1988; Graham 1986, 1995; Hill 1993, 2009, 2011; Piedade 2013; Franchetto and Montagnani 2012), and a key resource to provide meaning and make sense of those others in Indigenous Amazonia (Hill 1994; Hill 2018b). Some Indigenous groups have drawn on musical practices to transform social categories that sit at odds within the logics of local social orders (Hill 2002, 348). Musicalizations, thus, act to manage contradictions in power dynamics or situations of power imbalance (Hill 2002, 348). Hill coined the term “Musicalizing the Other” to refer to the notion “...of musical performance as a process of acknowledging the otherness of the other (defined not only as other indigenous groups, affines, and non-indigenous peoples, but also as non-human species or objects, and various categories of spirit-beings), or making history through engaging and sharing the social time and space of others, yet always returning to one’s own identity” (Hill 2018a, 170). Musicalizations

are dynamic processes that rely on the production of musical sounds and speech to socialize, transform, or domesticate violent relations with various categories of others, especially non-Indigenous peoples and institutions (Hill 1994, 124; Hill 2018b, 279; Hill 2018a, 185-186). Shamanic musicality, for example, has been used to rehumanize social relations with non-Indigenous agents whose actions represent a threat to Indigenous communities' existence (Hill 2018a, 186). Music in Amazonia, therefore, tends to be understood as a fundamental aesthetic resource that can turn violent relations into peaceful ones (Hill 2013). Musical practices are central resources whereby Amazonian Indigenous peoples create new political spaces to negotiate their experiences with Latin American nation states and global forces (Hill 2018a, 178).

The way ritual music and verbal art permeate political praxis and negotiations with nation-states has been of interest among Amazonianists (Graham 2002; Hill 1994, 2002, 2018a; Menezes Bastos 2007; Seeger 2013; Uzendoski 2020). Among Amazonian Indigenous peoples, music often moves from sacred spheres to political ones in the struggle against the assault of Latin American nation-states (Seeger 2013).¹⁵ Music, thus, can encapsulate modes of politico-historical consciousness and reflect the way Indigenous peoples understand their place in history (Hill 2018a, 177). From 19th century millenarian movements (Wright and Hill 1986; Hill 2018a, 177) to more contemporary scenarios of interethnic conflict with non-Indigenous actors and institutions (Hill 1994; 2002), the use of music and collective musical performances has been an

¹⁵ Rafael José Menezes Bastos observes that one of the main characteristics of the ethnomusicology of the South American lowlands is its markedly political aspect (Menezes Bastos 2007, 4). In his revisions of ethnomusicological studies in the region, he refers to the growing recognition of political relations between Indigenous societies and the “white world.” In this context, many Indigenous peoples have produced a significant amount of music recordings, compact discs, videos, and performances (Menezes Bastos 2007; see also Mello 2003).

effective form of action in situations of identity-based discrimination. For example, in 1981, the Wakuenai and Yeral of the Rio Negro region, relied on musical dances, vocal performances, and flute music from traditional exchange ceremonies to fight exploitative capitalist practices from white/mestizo traders (Hill 1994; 2002; 2018a; 187). Similarly, in 1989, the Xavante and the Kayapo of central Brazil creatively instrumentalized singing and dancing in the resistance against the building of the Altamira hydroelectric dam on the Xingu River (Beckham 1989; Graham 2002; Turner 1992). Likewise, Anthony Seeger observed how the Suyá relied on ceremonial music to mobilize political action (mostly raids) in their territorial struggle against Brazilian cattle ranchers. Seeger refers to the effectiveness of music (including the “enemy’s music”) for managing conflictive relations with the non-Indigenous society and fostering proper social behavior and peaceful interactions (Seeger 2010, 123).

As Jonathan Hill (2020) and Anthony Seeger explain (2013), the persistence of musical performances in the political strategies of many Amazonian Indigenous peoples against politico-economic exploitation or socioenvironmental destruction is more than expression of strategic essentialism. They represent genuine expressions of Indigenous identity (Hill 2020) and cosmological approaches to political tensions (Seeger 2013). Recently, anthropologists and ethnomusicologists have engaged in sonic ethnographies of the non-human worlds to highlight the significance of music in Indigenous Amazonian cosmologies (Hill and Castrillón 2017; Brabec de Mori and Seeger 2013; Brabec de Mori et al 2015). Efforts to integrate the audible, the musical, and the sonic into anthropological theory have been conceived as a critique to Amazonian perspectivism’s stress on visibility and predation (Brabec de Mori 2012, Hill 2013, 2018; Hill and Castrillón 2017). Music has been particularly salient as a vehicle to communicate with spirits and to effect change in the material world (Callicot 2013; Hill 2013). Although most

ethnographies of musicalities focus on the role of musical communication with multiple others in ritual spaces, some authors are discussing the entrance of pop music in these mediations.

Recently, the dynamics of contemporary Indigenous musical practices in Amazonia in contexts of global and nation-state pressures have been a topic of discussion among anthropologists (Alemán 2011; Hill 2018a, Hill 2020; Uzendoski and Calapucha Tapuy 2012). Hill addresses how, in facing the effects of global and national forces in South America, the purpose of performing music among Indigenous communities is not only to enter in contact with the sacred, spiritual, or mythic worlds of Amerindian cosmologies but to create political and symbolic spaces to avoid the disruption of those worlds (Hill 2018a, 188). Young generations are increasingly using national languages and genres of popular music that are transforming Indigenous music making processes. Within these current intergenerational changes in Amazonian musical traditions, Indigenous youth are recreating their worlds in different historical conditions (Hill 2018a, 2020). New generations are engaging in the musicality of “changing global soundscapes” (Hill 2018a, 191) and re-working both their own and other musicalities (Hill 2018a, Hill 2020). Popular music such as hip-hop and rock are now providing new avenues to urbanized Indigenous youth to reconnect with Indigenous oral histories, mythic narratives, territorialities, cosmologies, languages, and identities (Hill 2020). Experimentation with popular music genres that are accessible through radio, television, and multiple forms of digital media is having a significant impact in contemporary identity politics in South America (Hill 2018a, Hill 2020). The influence of global soundscapes via mass media and the internet is helping Indigenous people’s younger generations to rely on genres of popular music to navigate fields of power and contestation in their own culturally specific ways (Alemán 2011; Hill 2018a, 2020). The Kukama people from Peru are following that trend.

The Kukama

The Kukama are an Amazonian Indigenous group that belongs to the Tupí-Guaraní language family. In Peru, the Tupí-Guaraní family is represented by the Kukama, the Kukamiria (a sub-group of the Kukama) and the Omagua.¹⁶ The Kukama are located in the Loreto Department and to a lesser extent in the Ucayali Department (Aparicio and Bodmer 2009). Upon their arrival to this region centuries ago, the Kukama settled in riverine areas of Lower Huallaga, Lower Marañón, Lower Ucayali, and Upper Amazon. Today, they continue to live in these regions but also occupying rivers such as the Amazonas, Nanay, Itaya, Lower Napo, and Putumayo (Angulo 2019; Rivas 1993, 2003, 2004; Pau 2021). Most Kukama populations are concentrated between the rivers Huallaga, Lower Marañón, Lower and Upper Ucayali, Amazonas, and Lower Nanay (Aparicio and Bodmer 2009: 229) and they are the cornerstone of the riverine culture and knowledge that characterizes the Loreto region (Rivas 2003, 10).¹⁷ The Kukama population also has a significant presence in urban spaces. They live in the peripheries of major Amazonian cities such as Iquitos, Pucallpa, Yurimaguas, Nauta, Requena, Tamshiyacu, and Lagunas (Angulo 2019; Gow 2003; Ramirez Colombier 2016; Rivas 1993, 2004). There is also Kukama population living in Brazil and Colombia. While in Brazil, the Kukama live in the

¹⁶ The Peruvian Amazon, which covers more than 60% of the nation's territory, is the most linguistically diverse region in Peru. According to the Peruvian Ministry of Culture and the National Institute of Statistics and Computing, there are 44 languages spoken in this region, divided 13 linguistic families: Arawak, Cahuapana, Harakmbut, Huitoto, Jivaro, Pano, Peba-Yagua, Quechua, Tacana, Tukano, Tupi-Guaraní, Zaparo, and unclassified families. Tupi-Guaraní is one of the most widespread language groups in Amazonia. In Pre-Columbian and colonial times, the Tupí-Guaraní groups were characterized by their traditions of long migrations, thus their wide dispersion across South America Lowlands (Aparicio and Bodmer 2009)

¹⁷ The Kukama territorial distribution can also be considered by the different sub-groups. While the Kukamiria are located in the valley of Marañón and the Lower Huallaga, the Kukama are distributed through the rivers Marañón, Ucayali, and Amazonas (Gow 2003).

cities of Belém do Pará, Benjamin Constant, and Tefé, at the shore of the Amazon River, the Colombian Kukama live in the cities of San Juan de Atacuari, and Leticia (Petesch 2003).

The Kukama are considered one of the largest Indigenous groups of the Loreto region. However, there is no agreement regarding the exact amount of the Kukama population living in Peru. Since the 1970s, ethnographers have been offering numbers that oscillate between 11,000 and 25,000 members (Aparicio and Bodmer 2009; Stocks 1981; Rivas 2004). The Kukama people would only appear in official demographic registers by the end of the twentieth century (Petesch 2012; Ramirez Colombier 2016), and yet, anthropologists questioned the accuracy of the data collected. For example, the census that reflected a Kukama population of 10,705 members in 1993 was questioned by Roxani Rivas Ruiz, who dismissed those registers as not reliable due to the Peruvian state overlooking the complexities of the Kukama identity dynamics (Rivas 2000). The main problem with the census, according to Rivas (2004), is not considering the Kukama strategy of hiding their identity to avoid discrimination and their long-term insertion in urban communities (Rivas 2004). Rivas considers the Kukama-Kukamiria the largest Indigenous group of the Peruvian Amazonia with a population of approximately 85,000 members (Rivas 2003, 2004). Recently, Stefano Pau (2021) also cast doubt on data from the most recent census conducted in 2017 (10,762 Kukama members). For him, as well as Rivas, census data was not useful to calculate the Kukama population since its questions on ethnic identity were too focused on language (Pau 2021).

In the ethnographic literature, the Kukama people can be referred as Cocama, Kokama, the Great Cocama, Kukama, Cocamilla, and Kokamilla. In this dissertation, I use the term Kukama, since this is how my interlocutors self-identified and how ethnographers are now referring to this group. As Ramírez Colombier explains, the Kukama ethnonym has been now

adopted by most Indigenous communities and it is preferred over the previous term “Cocama,” sometimes used as a racist insult (Ramirez Colombier 2016). According to Rivas (2003), the name Kukama is made of two words: Ku, which means “garden” or “chacra” in Spanish, and Kama, meaning “breast.” Kukama therefore means “garden-breast” or those who feed from the gardens. As for the name Kukamiria, the morpheme “miri” means “small” and “ia” means “heart” or “center,” building up the meaning of “small garden” or “Kukama by heart” (Rivas 2003, 9).

Kukama-Kukamiria is one of the many Tupí-Guaraní languages spoken in South America. This language, along with Omagua, is highly endangered due to its limited use, spoken mostly by elders in northeastern Peru. Despite the important efforts of linguistic revitalization developed since the 1980s (Aparicio and Bodmer 2009: 233), in 2009 UNESCO included the Kukama-Kukamiria language as a critically endangered language (Pau 2021). There are two dialects of the Kukama-Kukamiria language: Kukamiria, spoken along the Upper Huallaga River, and Kukama, spoken on the Ucayali, Marañón, and Amazon rivers (Aparicio and Bodmer 2009; O’Hagan and Wauters 2012). Michael Lev (2014) argues that the emergence of both Kukama and Omagua languages were not the product of linguistic interaction in colonial times (17th and 18th centuries), but rather the outcome of language contact in the pre-Columbian period. For him, Omagua and Kukama languages already existed in a way similar to their modern forms by the time European Jesuit missionaries arrived in Maynas in the 17th century (Lev 2014).

In terms of their history, the contemporary Kukama communities are descendants of the big nation of Tupían language established in the mainstream of the Upper Amazon when Europeans arrived (Gow 2003). In pre-Colonial times, the Kukama were a powerful Tupí-

speaking tribal confederacy that lived in large towns at the margins of the Huallaga and lower Ucayali rivers (Roe 1982). The Kukama population arrived in their current territory in Peru three centuries before the European conquest after a sequence of migration processes common to Tupí-Guaraní groups (Stocks 1981). Between the ninth and sixteenth century, different migratory movements occurred from Brazil (East Coast and Central Amazon) towards the Peruvian Amazon. These migrations might have been caused by the search for better resources, interethnic warfare, religious reasons, or to escape from European colonizers (Angulo 2019; Aparicio and Bodmer 2009; Pau 2021; Stocks 1981).¹⁸ The Tupí migrations continued throughout the colonial period (with at least twenty migratory movements between the 15th and 19th centuries) and groups started to divide into different ethnicities such as Yurimagua, Xibataona, Omagua, and Kukama-Kukamiria (Métraux 1927; Pau 2021). The first recorded European contact with the Kukama took place during the expedition of Juan Salinas de Loyola in 1557 (Agüero 1992; Aparicio and Bodmer 2009; Petesch 2003). During the early colonial contact, they were living in communities of 200 to 400 houses each along the margins of the Ucayali River. The Kukama territory covered around 300 Km², with an approximate population of 10.000 or 12.000 inhabitants (Aparicio and Bodmer 2009). The Kukama kept migrating downstream along the Ucayali, where they established large settlements, and then moved towards the Marañón and Amazon rivers. The groups settled in the Lower Huallaga are the Kukamiria, which might have separated from the Kukama in the seventeenth century (Aparicio and Bodmer 2009; Castro 2015; Petesch 2003; Rivas 1993).

¹⁸ According to archaeologist Donald Lathrap, the Polychrome Ceramic Tradition associated with Tupí-Guaraní culture appears in the Ucayali by A.D. 1320. This is considered to mark the arrival of the Kukama to the Ucayali River (Lathrap 1970; Myers 1974).

In 1642 the Kukama entered contact with Catholic missionaries and the process of evangelization. During the period of the missions in the Upper Amazon (1637 to 1768) epidemics caused a significant demise of the Kukama population (Aparicio and Bodmer 2009).¹⁹ After the independence of Peru in the early nineteenth century, a strong competition for the Indigenous labor force between political authorities, extractive companies, and traders began (Aparicio and Bodmer 2009). During the nineteenth century, the expansion of the agro-extractive economies caused severe ethnic fragmentation and more Indigenous mobilizations (forced or voluntary). Several Kukamiria families running away from the abuse of their bosses migrated from the Huallaga to the Marañón, founding in 1830 the community of Nauta, today an important Amazonian port (Petesch 2003). Later, in 1851, would start the process of colonization of the Peruvian Amazon on a larger scale. In this period the Kukama worked as enslaved or indebted rubber tappers and as peons in the hacienda system, like other Indigenous population, up until the mid-twentieth century (Santos-Granero and Barclay 2000).

Contemporary ethnographic production among Kukama communities started in the 1970s. Even though ethnographic attention on the Kukama people and language emerged in the 1930s with the presence of missionary catholic priests such as Lucas Espinosa (1935), for most of the twentieth century anthropologists overlooked the Kukama for being too “acculturated”

¹⁹ According to Thomas Myers (1974), the ethnohistory of the Ucayali can be divided into five major periods prior to the emergence of the first anthropological studies and ethnographies. The first period goes from the mid sixteenth century, when Juan Salinas de Loyola made the first European contact with the Kukama and other groups from the Ucayali. The second period starts during the mid-seventeenth century, when the Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries enter the Ucayali. It ends with the withdrawal of the Jesuit towards the Huallaga under threats of Shipibo groups. The third period takes place between 1682-1698, when the priests were massacred, and the lower Ucayali was practically uninhabited. The fourth period starts in the mid eighteenth century, when missionary orders attempted to re-establish in the Ucayali, and with expulsion of the Jesuit order. Finally, the fifth period starts in in 1791, when the Franciscan managed to settle in the Ucayali for good (Myers 1974, see also Grohs 1974).

(Gow 2003). Since the 1970s, ethnographers working in Loreto have shown a great interest in the nature of Kukama identity. The complex status of this group's indigeneity in the aftermath of colonial processes of assimilation and their mimetic strategies to avoid discrimination have been important topics of discussion within Amazonianist anthropology (Castro 2015, 2022; Chibnik 1991; Gow 2003; Mora 1995; Pau 2021; Petesch 2003; Rivas 1993, 2000, 2003b, 2004; Stocks 1976, 1981). The Kukama-Kukamiria language has been another key point of ethnographic interest. The first works on the Kukama language were developed by missionaries such as Lucas Espinosa (1935) in the 1930s, and later the Instituto Lingüístico de Verano in the 1970s, led by Norma Faust (Pau 2021). Both historical (Lev 2014) and structural aspects of language (Faust 1971, 1972; O'Hagan and Wauters 2012; Vallejos 2015, 2016a), including processes of linguistic revitalization (Vallejos 2016b), have been part of the scholarly interest on the Kukama-Kukamiria language. These efforts include the production of a few dictionaries (Espinosa 1989; Vallejos and Amias Murayari 2015), and projects of bilingual education run by institutions and organizations such as FORMABIAP (Ahuanari Ríos 2003; Pau 2021).²⁰

In the 1980s and 1990s, there was an interest in the involvement of Kukama population in millenarian movements (Agüero 1985, 1992, 1994a, 1994b; Regan 1983; 2019). According to authors such as Métraux (1927) and Clastres (1995), Tupí-Guarani populations are characterized by an "ethnodynamism" with a religious resolution: the search for a "Land Without Evil," a paradise on earth that can be reached after a march towards the forest guided by a prophet (Agüero 1992). Anthropologist Oscar Agüero (1992), for example, studied the case of the "Brethren of the Cross", a religious movement of millenarian character in which the Kukama

²⁰ A significant part of the ethnographic analyses on the Kukama has focused on women's experiences and perspectives (Stocks and Stocks 1984; Chirif 2011; Rivas 1994).

from the Nauta District took part. Between 1971 and 1987, numerous Kukama families joined this millenarian movement created by the Brazilian priest Francisco Da Cruz, who preached his message of the imminent end of the world across the Amazon, Ucayali, and Marañón rivers (Agüero 1992).

Since the early 2000s there has also been concern about the cultural significance of rivers for the Kukama communities, materialized in the study of aquatic cosmologies through myth, shamanism, and fishing knowledge (Ramirez Colombier 2015, 2021; Rivas 2003a, 2004, 2011; see also Stocks 1983). Closely related to these topics, some authors have examined the cosmological concept of spirit mothers as a central part of Kukama spirituality (Rivas 1993) and the different forms of humanity conceived in local ontological systems (Tello 2014; Campanera Reig 2018; see also the work produced by religious scholars Berjón and Cadenas 2011, 2014, 2018). Scholarly and political concerns regarding Kukama territorialities and territorial claims have also been part of recent ethnographic studies. Underwater cities, spiritual words, and economic activities associated with Kukama territorialities have become major topics of interest for anthropologists (Barclay and Payaba 2010; Ramirez Colombier 2018, 2021; Fernandes Moreira and Marco Ramírez Colombier 2019a, 2019b). In recent years, scholars have shown interest in the study of Kukama myth and oral histories, especially the narratives positioned during the rubber economy era (Pau 2015; 2019a; 2019b; Tello and Fraser 2016), as well as the responses to oil pollution and environmental politics (Okamoto and Leifsen 2012; Grados Bueno and Pacheco Riquelme 2016; Maetzke 2017; Martínez Zavala, 2018). Lastly, explorations on suicide events among young Kukama population from Nauta (Bustamante 2016, 2017, 2018), and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic (Ulfe and Vergara 2021) have figured among the current ethnographic inquiry on the Kukama people.

Within the corpus of ethnographic literature focused on the Kukama, Radio Ucamara media politics has been the subject of a growing academic interest in the last decade. Scholars from multiple disciplines have been interested in the different media texts and social dynamics produced by Radio Ucamara since 2006. Radio Ucamara tends to be mentioned in recent publications on the Kukama politics of linguistic and identitarian revival (e.g., Castro 2015, 2022), but there has also been a small yet growing ethnographic production exclusively focused on this radio station. Ucamara Radio has been examined in terms of a variety of topics that include: the production of images of self-representation and politics of identity (Galli 2014), environmental politics and territoriality (Torres Navarro 2015; Calderon Vives 2020), memory and linguistic revitalization (Ramirez Colombier 2016), the politics of narrativity and cosmological discourses (Angulo Giraldo 2019; Cabel 2022), and communicative strategies in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (Espinosa et al 2021). Andrea Cabel's (2022) work on the politico-aesthetic dimensions of Radio Ucamara's documentary videos through the concept of "voz memoriosa" (memory voice) is proximate to my own analysis. Cable explores Radio Ucamara's highly artistic method of communication by analyzing narrative discourses, metaphors, and polyphony. In the following chapters, I discuss and expand in more detail on some of the main themes previously explored in the recent literature on Radio Ucamara.

CHAPTER 2

EX-INVISIBLE: THE MEDIATIZATION OF KUKAMA INDIGENEITY

Introduction

In the summer of 2017, during my conversations with members of the Radio Ucamara team and their collaborators from Nauta, I learned about the power of music videos. On repeated occasions, Radio Ucamara activists proudly expressed how one of their videoclips had an unexpected social impact in the region. The music video in question was called *Kumbarikira*, and it was based on a hip-hop song about the revitalization of Kukama language and identity. Produced in 2013 and released on YouTube, the song included lyrics in Kukama-Kukamiria and Spanish that articulated urban musical sounds with positive ideologies about the Kukama language. Ucamara media-makers told me how the song became a massive hit and made numerous people who previously denied their Indigenous identity feel proud of being Kukama. Other members told me how the song had mixed responses. The videoclip received significant backlash from anti-Indigenous mestizo sectors, but at the same time it helped to minimize children's experiences of discrimination at school. In local discourse, the *Kumbarikira* music video represents a landmark in the history of the Kukama revitalization process. A song with a catchy rhythm performed by children suddenly conquered large audiences in Amazonia and made it to the national news in Peru. The song has also been covered by multiple local artists and

adapted to other musical styles over the years. In decades of Kukama revitalization efforts, nothing caused that impact on the public imagination. Kumbarikira became a generative event that helped Kukama media specialists to build strong political alliances. Moreover, the creative performances of indigeneity reflected in music videos allowed for the amplification Indigenous voices in national and regional spheres. What is the source of this musical power?

This chapter explores the political and aesthetic dimensions of indigeneity as expressed in Kukama media activism. Through an analysis of Radio Ucamara discourses and practices, I examine the way Kukama media-makers use highly artistic digital and non-digital forms (e.g., radio broadcasting, books, music videos, documentaries, and social media) to counteract anti-Indigenous racism and strengthen Kukama linguistic revitalization in Peruvian Amazonia. By combining the theoretical frameworks of indigeneity studies and the anthropology of media, I argue that Radio Ucamara's multimodal aesthetics has become a vehicle to creatively reimagine Kukama identities and rework linguistic ideologies through mediatized performances of indigeneity. Radio Ucamara media poetics is creating novel online and off-line performative spaces whereby Kukama identity is refashioned and empowered. In these mediatized performances, language and myth have become the most notable features of Radio Ucamara notions of indigeneity (Kukama or otherwise). The interplay between linguistic, meta-linguistic, and mythological discourses characterizes Radio Ucamara media production focused on identity politics. Such interplay is enacted in media actions such as: 1) the broadcasting of radio shows in Kukama language; 2) the musicalization of Kukama language, meta-linguistic statements, and mythological narratives through hip-hop songs; 3) videos visualizing experiences of forced assimilation; 4) books and audiovisuals containing reflexive statements on linguistic ideologies; and 5) the cultivation of online and offline Kukama transnational networks. All these practices

allow Ucamara activists to challenge tropes of cultural “invisibility” associated with Kukama experience and to promote novel notions of Kukama modernity.

The central premise of this chapter is that indigeneity is an aesthetic category as much as it is political. Artistic expressions of Indigenous identities like those created through media have the capacity of building political power. To support this premise, I draw on the body of scholarship that has analyzed indigeneity as a historically and socially positioned construct. Recent research focused on the politics of indigeneity shows how Indigenous identities are fluid, unstable, contextually defined, and continually negotiated in national and global arenas (De la Cadena and Starn 2007; Graham and Penny 2014; Hansen 2018; Langer and Santoro 2018; Merlan 2009; Postero 2013; Trigger and Dalley 2010). Notions of Indigeneity are always relational, defined in contrast with the non-Indigenous worlds and socially produced in relation to specific politics of difference and sameness (Canessa 2005, 2018; De la Cadena and Starn 2007, Merlan 2009; Postero 2013). This production of indigeneity also entails aesthetic and performative dimensions (Cant 2016; Graham and Penny 2014; Martineau and Ritskes 2014). The dynamic articulation of Indigenous identities with musical sounds (Bigenho 2002; Tucker 2016; Voirol 2021), including hip-hop (Bodunrin 2019, 2021; Leza 2019; Woloshyn 2021), exemplifies the relevance of artistry in the study on Indigenous politics. Following Cant (2016), I approach aesthetics here as a relational process that allows us to better understand the affective and sensory experiences of Indigenous politics in Amazonia. I argue that indigeneity can not only be articulated with a multiplicity of socio-political categories but also inhabit multiple artistic realms. When reworked through media, Indigeneity as the discourse of the subaltern, becomes aesthetic potency. Radio Ucamara illustrates how the use of musical sounds and

audiovisual creations can reconfigure and mobilize images of Kukama-ness to effectively empower their voices.

I also situate my analysis of indigeneity and media within the discussions on the problem of Kukama identity in Peruvian Amazonia. Since the 1970s, ethnographers have shown a considerable interest in understanding Kukama experiences of “acculturation,” “hybridization,” and the resulting ambivalence around their Indigenous identity. Famously, the Kukama were categorized as “invisible natives” (Stocks 1981) to refer to the mimetic practices locally used to avoid anti-Indigenous discrimination. In this chapter, I examine how Radio Ucamara media-makers have politicized the ethnographic trope of “invisibility” as a relational referent to create mediatic images of “contra-invisibility.” Through acts of mediatization, the notion of “invisible natives” is turned into a semiotic field of power and contestation where media aesthetics becomes a tool for hyper-visibility. Kukama journalists explicitly situate their identity-based activism in a recent history of state anti-Indigenous policies and linguistic ideologies in Peruvian Amazonia. Thus, the Ucamara team see media-making as anti-racist praxis. Radio Ucamara is part of a recent process of Kukama ethnic revival that seeks to reverse their “invisibility” by virtue of a multimodal aesthetics of indigeneity. This revitalization agenda includes performative practices where musical sounds have been highly effective in challenging Eurocentric linguistic ideologies and primitivist tropes. By articulating Indigeness with the modernity and subalternity indexed in hip-hop music, indigeneity is performed to re-accommodate Kukama identity. In Radio Ucamara media practices, Kukama mythology and language are used to produce a field of difference and sameness inhabited by Indigenous subjects. At the same time, through digital media and global soundscapes, Radio Ucamara is making and promoting modern images of Kukama indigeneity. I argue that Radio Ucamara media worlds can be considered an

example of the emergence of Amazonian Indigenous modernities, where a twofold process of “indigenization of modernity” and the “modernization of indigeneity” takes place to fight invisibility (Halbmayer 2018; see also Uzendoski 2010).

The Politics and Aesthetics of Indigeneity

In the last 20 years, the concept of indigeneity has become a prominent analytical category within anthropology and other social disciplines. Scholars interested in the study of Indigenous identities and ethnic politics have highlighted the dynamism of notions of indigeneity, showing how the “Indigenous” category is a historically and socially positioned construct (De la Cadena and Starn 2007; Graham and Penny 2014; Halbmayer 2018; Hansen 2018; Li 2000; Postero 2013; Trigger and Dalley 2010). There seems to be a consensus around the fluidity and instability of Indigenous identities, always contextually defined and continually negotiated in local, national, and global arenas. Notions and self-definitions of Indigeneity, thus, can change over time and vary across political contexts (Langer and Santoro 2018). Under these approaches, Indigeneity is conceived more as a process than a static category (Langer and Santoro 2018). It can take many forms and produce novel ways of being native (Trigger and Dalley 2010). These conceptual frameworks emerged in response to primitivist and essentialist notions of Indigeneity that have historically defined Indigenous-ness as a fixed, timeless, self-evident, or intrinsic reality. Instead, indigeneity is conceived as a dialogical formation that is historically contingent, and shaped by a complex genealogy that also involves colonial institutions and actors (De la Cadena and Starn 2007). Indigeneity can be both a self-ascription and an imposed categorization coming from colonial empires and modern states (Halbmayer 2018). Indigeneity encompasses both academic and regulatory (operational) definitions.

Although situated in a space of oppositional categories, notions of indigeneity are shaped by institutions and political cultures tied to specific histories and positionalities (Merlan 2009).

One of the central features in contemporary conceptualizations of indigeneity is its relationality. In their highly influential volume entitled *Indigenous Experience Today*, Marisol de la Cadena and Orin Starn (2007) explain that indigeneity is always defined in contrast with the non-Indigenous world and is socially produced in relation to specific politics of difference and sameness (De la Cadena and Starn 2007). For them, “Reckoning with indigeneity demands recognizing it as a relational field of governance, subjectivities, and knowledges that involves us all indigenous and nonindigenous in the making and remaking of its structures of power and imagination” (De la Cadena and Starn 2007:2-3). Yet, relational designations of indigeneity coexist with pre-existent “criterial” or essentialist definitions based on the identification of inherent properties of “Indigeness” (Merlan 2009; Trigger and Dalley 2010). Sometimes the separation between “relational” vs “criterial” notions of indigeneity are not easy to distinguish. Both academic and regulatory definitions tend to intersect and oscillate between these two considerations (Merlan 2009). Nevertheless, most scholars agree to conceptualize indigeneity (in relational terms) as the result of complex social processes in which communities articulate their own politics against other actors (Hansen 2018).

Another key feature in the conceptualization of indigeneity is the issue of positionality. Tania Murray Li (2000) has argued that indigeneity or self-identification as Indigenous is not natural nor invented, but a mode of *positioning* in specific historical and political conditions. It takes form in fields of power, and it is tied to specific articulations with governmental and political forces. In these multiple sets of positionings, “non-dominance” (subalternity, subjugation, marginalization, dispossession) is one of the main relational criteria used to define

indigeneity (Halbmayer 2018). Along with the ideas of original presence and the continuity of cultural distinctiveness, subalternity amidst modern political systems is the main feature associated to notions of indigeneity. Although the meaning of indigeneity can vary among institutions, states, movements, and Indigenous actors, Indigenous forms tend to be associated with emancipation and postcoloniality (Halbmayer 2018). However, indigeneity does not always encompass subalternity. At times indigeneity can act as a tool of emancipation and resistance, but at others as a tool of governance (Canessa 2005, 2018; Postero 2013). Some Indigenous groups can exert dominance over others, and indigeneity can serve to justify state political agendas (Halbmayer 2018; Postero 2013). Moreover, indigeneity is not always recognized or self-defined through the claiming of original presence but by placing origins in colonial times' ethnogenesis (e.g., post-slavery Afro-Indigenous groups in Latin America) (Halbmayer 2018). Thus, Indigenous peoples can rework their positionalities to define and redefine their place within social hierarchies (Langer and Santoro 2018).

Indigeneity is politically produced. Scholars have been interested in the way the "Indigenous" category is culturally and socially produced through the politics of difference (Hansen 2018; Postero 2013). Indigeneity emerges in specific forms of governance and with different understanding of the self, alterity, and history (Hansen 2018; Postero 2013). In the context of social, political, and economic struggles, Indigenous peoples negotiate their criteria of indigeneity and its possibilities with states and their notions of culture and history (De la Cadena and Starn 2007; Postero 2013). These fields of governance also have a global dimension. There is a whole global institutional framework where indigeneity operates. Indigeneity is more than identities or social movements. It is a worldwide extended field of governance that includes multiple subjectivities and knowledge, merging both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples

(Merlan 2009). Indigeneity rose as a global identity during the Cold War era in connection with the circulation of human rights discourses. Global institutions such as the United Nations had a big role in defining the notion of indigeneity as an international category (Graham and Penny 2014:3; Niezen 2003). The term “Indigenous peoples” emerged in a specific political and legal context where Non-Governmental Organizations, and Indigenous movements were crucial in the development of legal frameworks to recognize Indigenous rights (De la Cadena and Starn 2007; Halbmayer 2018; Niezen 2003).

Performative practices have also shaped contemporary politics of Indigeneity. According to Graham and Penny (2014), performances of indigeneity became more frequent during the second half of the 20th century and were critical in the design of global policy. Since Indigenous identities are always negotiated in local, national, and global arenas, these negotiations require demonstrations of indigeneity (Graham and Penny 2014). Public display of Indigenous identities can take the form of speech and actions usually seeking recognition, self-determination, and cultural sovereignty. Indigenous performances use expressive resources that are crucial for some groups to gain political recognition, attract non-Indigenous allies, and build their voices in negotiations. In such performances, aesthetics becomes a vehicle to build political power.

Anthropologists and other specialists have recently been interested in the aesthetic dimensions of Indigeneity. Scholars have explored how expressive culture can inscribe “Indigenous aesthetics” into multiple creative practices and commodity forms. Alana Cant (2016), for example, has analyzed the “aesthetics of indigeneity” present in craftwork economies in Mexico. She argues that carvings and market dynamics are rooted in an Indigenous aesthetics that provides sensory qualities to objects sold in the markets. Similarly, Martineau and Ritskes (2014) explore how notions of Indigenous art creates a decolonial aesthetics of resistance and

resurgence that permits imagining possible futures. Musical sounds have also been considered an important dimension in the analysis of indigeneity, especially in the Andean world. Michelle Bigenho (2002), for example, explores the intersection between music and the trans-national cultural politics of indigeneity. She examines how Andean music allows listeners to imagine and experience Indigenous identities through sound (2002). Likewise, Tucker (2016) talks about “indigeneity’s sonorous parameters” in the Peruvian Andes by exploring the interaction between technical expertise in instrument making and ideological principles of Indigenous soundscapes. Similarly, Voirol (2021) explains how indigeneity is assembled in the transnational circulation of musical practices, objects, and sounds in the Ecuadorian Andes. For him, this circulation of musical practices produces ideas of tradition attached to places identifiable as “Indigenous.”

In recent years, hip-hop sounds have been at the center of attention of scholars studying the link between musicality and indigeneity. In her exploration of sounding, sonifying, and hearing Indigeneity, Woloshyn (2021) analyzes the “sounds of indigeneity” coming from Canadian hip-hop artists to problematize the distinction between exoticized music vs popular music. In the same line, Itunu Bodunrin (2021), examines how contemporary San youth in South Africa are challenging primitivist stereotypes of indigeneity through hip-hop music. They confront historical marginalization coming from essentialist representations by appropriating and participating in global popular culture. Indigenous rappers use hip-hop music to “position themselves as a modernised people” (Bodunrin 2021) as well as to digitize and strengthen endangered Indigenous languages (Bodunrin 2019). Likewise, Leza (2019) explores how hip-hop articulates with new notions of indigeneity on the US-Mexico border. For her, rap music is opening a broader notion of indigeneity in Arizona in which both Native Americans and Latino activists engage as partners in musical production. Through hip-hop (a musical medium that is

not recognized as traditional to Indigenous peoples) Indigenous voices can claim modern identities and become participants and makers of modernity.

The study of “Indigenous modernities” has been a key topic in recent discussions on indigeneity. Ernst Halbmayer (2018) argues that the concept of “Indigenous peoples” is a modern phenomenon. Shaped by their historical experiences with colonial systems, nation states, and globalization, Indigenous societies have been responsible for the emergence of multiple forms of modernity. Within that history, Indigenous peoples have had a crucial role in the expansion, creation, transformation, and pluralization of modernity (Halbmayer 2018). Recently, scholars have proposed to understand modern indigeneities beyond the dichotomies of continuity/discontinuity and tradition/modernity. Instead, they suggest concentrating on the multiple innovative directions and new scenarios that emerge in contemporary Indigenous settings (Halbmayer 2018; Meiser 2018; Rosengren 2018). Indigenous modernities entail paradoxical situations in which continuities and discontinuities happen at the same time. Beyond the focus on assimilation vs. continuity of Indigenous cultural forms, Halbmayer and other authors ask, “how the coexisting processes of the indigenization of modernity and the modernization of indigeneity produce distinct indigenous modernities” (Halbmayer 2018, 19).²¹ Halbmayer understands Indigenous modernities as the product of “joint becomings” where processes of creolization take place for both sides of the Indigenous-Other relationship. Indigenous modernities are forged through a mutual appropriation of Western and Indigenous categories. In these interactive spaces, Indigenous actors rework foreign practices that have the potential of strengthening the self by virtue of creatively incorporating otherness. People

²¹ The discussion on the indigenization of modernity has also emerged in ethnographies of hip-hop. Bodunrin uses his study among South African Indigenous rappers to ask if contemporary Indigenous people are indigenizing modernity or modernizing indigeneity (Bodunrin 2021).

continue reproducing socio-cosmological principles in new realities but also become modern (although not in the classical Western sense) by creating new hybrid forms (Halbmayer 2018). These dynamics, I argue, are fully expressed and expanded in the incorporation of new media technologies and pop music aesthetics in Amazonia.

Following Cant (2016), I approach aesthetics as a relational process that allows us to better understand the affective and sensory experiences of power. Kukama media illustrate how indigeneity is simultaneously a political and aesthetic notion. Indigenous media provides artistic layers of meaning and emotions crucial for the construction of transformative politics of identity in Nauta. Just as every generation may redefine Indigenous identity (De la Cadena and Starn 2007), Kukama media-makers are forging new aesthetics of indigeneity and political consciousness by relying on the instrumentalization of global soundscapes. The contemporary Kukama experience is marked by expectations and fantasies of ahistorical and nonmodern indigeneity. Younger Indigenous generations are changing this by expressing previous identitarian and political concerns through pop music. Electronic media and the digital space are providing new opportunities for urban Kukama to mobilize modern images of indigeneity. In such conceptualizations, Kukama media specialists articulate Indigenous languages and mythological discourses with modern musicalities. The video-performances of indigeneity rely on singing in and about the Kukama language as well as musicalizing fragments of mythological narratives. In Radio Ucamara media, Kukama-ness remains attached to distinctively Indigenous themes (myth and language) now boosted with the modern aesthetics of global soundscapes. Electronic media and pop music have the power of moving identitarian statements wider and faster.

The Kukama and the Trope of Invisibility

Since the 1970s, ethnographic literature on the Kukama-Kukamiria has shown a great interest in the nature of Kukama identity. The status of this group as “natives” in the aftermath of colonial processes of assimilation has been an important topic of discussion within Amazonianist anthropology (Castro 2015, 2022; Chibnik 1991; Gow 2003; Mora 1995; Pau 2021; Petesch 2003; Rivas 1993, 2000, 2003, 2004; Stocks 1976, 1981). Some scholars and sectors of the Peruvian national society interpreted the Kukama “acculturation” (usually identified as linguistic loss and adoption of “mestizo” lifestyle) as an unequivocal sign of abandonment of Indigenous identity. Kukama populations were included in what Darcy Ribeiro (1977) called the “generic Indian,” a category of Indigenous peoples that no longer recognized themselves as such. Similarly, archaeologist Donald Lathrap famously referred to this part of the native population of the Upper Amazon and Lower Marañón rivers as “ex-Cocama” (Lathrap 1970). As with many other Indigenous groups from Latin America (Gordillo and Hirsch 2008), the Kukama people’s experiences with state assimilationist policies entailed the invisibilization of their cultures and histories from national imaginings. But for the Kukama, notions of “invisibility” have been particularly prominent in the discourses around their ethnicity.

In the early 1980s, American anthropologist Anthony Stocks created the term “Invisible Natives” (Stocks 1981) to address this phenomenon. Stocks, who specifically worked with the Kukamiria communities from the Huallaga River, discussed the way Kukama people adopted the mestizo lifestyle and identities as part of a strategy to dodge discrimination. He explained that, due to the social tensions present in the class system of the Peruvian Amazonia, in certain

contexts it was beneficial for them to hide their Indigenousness.²² As a result, the Kukama forged an “ambiguous identity” that made them ethnically invisible but still subject to other forms of discrimination. With the term “Invisible Natives,” Stocks wanted to shed light on a significant portion of the Indigenous population in the Peruvian Amazonia that has been neglected by state institutions and scholarly research for being integrated to the White-Mestizo society. This social sector is usually portrayed as part of the rural Amazonian population, locally known as “*ribereños*” (riverine people), a category closely related to the Brazilian *Caboclo* and the Bolivian *Camba*. However, Stocks argued that the Kukama-Kukamiria belongs to a large portion of Indigenous population that have been “de-tribalized” but not assimilated. Although these groups have reshaped their own cultural practices to adapt to the Peruvian society, and many rejected being identified as “natives,” Stocks showed how some communities still maintained self-recognition as Indigenous and reproduced significant social practices (e.g., rituals) that sustain their ethnic frontiers. For Stocks, the Kukama experienced identity as a system of multiple levels: they self-represented as “Peruvians”, “Cholos”, “Kukamiria”, and displayed specific communal identities (Stocks 1981: 139). In defying essentialist representations of indigeneity, Stocks wanted to make the Kukama visible for the Peruvian society and contribute to gaining the recognition of their rights.

The ethnographic literature on the Kukama-Kukamiria shows how last names played a key role in the invisibility game (Castro 2015, 2022; Gow 2003; Stocks 1981; Rivas 1993, 2003,

²² In a publication from 1976, Stocks mentioned how the Kukama from cities such as Requena, Pucalpa, and Iquitos did not recognize as Indigenous anymore and even felt insulted by the idea of being identified as natives. On the contrary, the Kukamiria population influenced by Catholic missions in the Huallaga and Marañón rivers had a strong sense of ethnic identity, even when having a lifestyle similar to the *ribereños* (Stocks 1976).

2004). As Stocks (1981) explains, last names act as important markers of status in Peruvian Amazonia. Some last names are associated with Indigenusness and considered inferior to mestizo or European last names. Indigenous last names are embedded in both ethnic and class differences since they tend to create barriers to economic and political power. Changing surnames, thus, has been a strategy to hide Indigeneity. In order to escape insults, mockery, and overall marginalization, some Kukama not only avoid speaking their language in public but also evade using their Kukama sounding last names. Rivas refers to this phenomenon as a “camouflage” strategy (Rivas 2003; 2004). As Castro (2015) explains, due to the strong history of social exclusion, for many people it is not easy to reveal their Kukama identity. Discrimination has been particularly harsh in the cities, and this led to a lot of the Kukama urban population adopting White-Mestizo last names.

In the 1990s, the Kukama featured in the ethnographic literature discussing the specific configurations of the category of “Cholo” in Amazonia (Chibnik 1991, Mora 1995). Originated in the Andean context, Cholo is a class and racialized identity that refers to socially marginalized people of Indigenous descent who no longer carry a specific native ethnicity. For Mora (1995), the category of Cholo is not extended in Amazonia as much as in the Andes since it has not fully become an ethnic identity. Mora argues that, since the 1980s, the cholo identity among the Kukamiria has been diminished by the recognition of their Indigenous identity, both in the eyes of the mestizos and the Kukamirias themselves. The Cholo identity in Amazonia is not strong among de-tribalized but not fully assimilated Kukama communities as they are able to reconstruct their native identities in new contexts (Mora 1995). Anthropologists Roxani Rivas Ruiz (1993) engaged in this discussion by following Stocks’ line of argumentation. In exploring the degree of “survival” of the Kukama culture, she argues that the Kukama riverine population

although integrated to the national society and considered non-Indigenous by Mestizo-White sectors, still maintain clear ethnic frontiers. For Rivas, although many riverine communities of Indigenous descent do not consider themselves Indigenous anymore, some keep their Indigenous identities despite being detribalized. She shows how the persistence of certain cultural practices in their ritual life, mythical narratives, and kinship organization permits them to reproduce Kukama identity.

In the early 2000s, anthropologist Peter Gow (2003) addressed the problem of Kukama identity through a new perspective. Gow problematized Lathrap's image of "ex-Cocama" to discuss the alleged Kukama "invisibility." According to him, the fact that many of the Kukama mask their Indigenous identity by displaying a mestizo one constitutes a paradox: how can the Kukama pretend to be something that they already are, he asks? (Gow 2003: 62). For Gow, it is possible that the Kukama are not transiting from one established identity to another. Instead, their unspecific identification is occurring in the context of a new identity specification: the riverine mixed people. The "ex-Cocama" phenomenon, thus, makes sense as a transformational variant of Amazonian cultural systems. For the Kukama, adopting riverine practices does not mean the collapse of the Indigenous logic, but a capacity for continuous transformation (Gow 2003: 58). For Gow it is possible that this reconfiguration of Kukama identity might be an old phenomenon unfolded in a new social mutation. Drawing on Greg Urban's argument, he suggests that the Kukama-Kukamiria language might not be their original language. Between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Kukama may have adopted the Tupinambá as a trade

language, which ended up prevailing as a mother tongue.²³ If this hypothesis is true, the ex-Cocama phenomenon at the end of twentieth century might be part of a process already experienced by the ancestors (Gow 2003: 71-72). Around the same time, Natalie Petesch (2003) explored the way Kukama identity articulates with national identities in Latin America. Petesch explains that among the Kukama from Colombia and Brazil there is the idea that the true Kukama were born in Peru, therefore portraying the Peruvian-Kukama identity as ancestral (Petesch 2003: 99). However, in Peru, the Kukama cannot use their national identity as Peruvians to legitimize their Indigenusness, since they are closer to the concepts of “White” and “civilized” than “Indigenous” (Petesch 2003: 107). In the Peruvian context, Kukama identity is thus characterized by a high degree of ambivalence in which indigeneity is expressed or hidden according to specific goals and specific contexts (Petesch 2003: 107).²⁴

More recently, anthropologist Meredith Castro (2015, 2022) relied on contemporary definitions of indigeneity (understood as a set of constructed and contextually defined categories) to highlight the multivocality of the Kukama identitarian experience. She argues that different Kukama generations and Kukama migrants relocated in cities feel and express their Kukama identity in multiple ways. In exploring varying notions of Kukamaness in the cities of Nauta and Iquitos, Castro shows how some communities do not identify themselves as Kukama but of “Kukama descent.” In certain communities, people consider that the original Kukama are those

²³ The Kukama language from Peru is located too far west from the original dominant area of the Tupí languages in the coast of Brazil. The wide dispersion of Tupi-Guarani languages has been explained as the result of long-term processes of utopian-based migration (Clastres 1995).

²⁴ Petesch also argues that there is a geographical dimension in Kukama identity dynamics. The mutation from *indios* to *civilizados* sometimes occurs in migratory movements to urban spaces. Although this is not a generalized situation, for some Kukama their main aspiration is to live in big cities like Iquitos and Manaus (Petesch 2003).

who were living in the forest. Yet, for others, being of Kukama descent is enough to reproduce and express their Kukama identity. Thus, the category of Kukama descendant works both as an index of Indigenous identity and as a form of taking distance from the Kukama ancestors. Many of them see themselves as Indigenous but less Indigenous than the original Kukama (Castro 2015).²⁵ Although, Castro uses the notion of “identity repertoires” in reference to features that make someone self-identify as Kukama (e.g., language, ritual life, or naming practices), she clarifies that reproducing these repertoires is not fully determinant. Not speaking the language or discontinuing traditional practices does not mean losing Kukama identity. New practices can appear, and older practices can take new forms. For instance, the digital space, she explains, has been crucial in re-working notions of Kukamaness. Social media has opened novel spaces of interaction for Kukama from different Amazonian regions (Castro 2015).

Although since the 1980s ethnographers have tangentially addressed Kukama efforts to reverse “invisibility,” only in the last ten years have scholars concentrated on analyzing the Kukama cultural and linguist revitalization processes. Castro (2015, 2022), for example, explains that the reaffirmation of Kukama identity, although not a generalized phenomenon among Kukama communities, is currently one of their most important political goals. Masking Indigenous identity to navigate discrimination is still a common practice in the area. Yet, this attitude seems to be changing. Among the Kukama, as well as many other Indigenous peoples globally (Sahlins 1999), the re-affirmation of their indigeneity is gaining strength. While in the 20th century most of the Kukama population avoided defining themselves as Indigenous by

²⁵ This resonates with Peter Gow’s affirmation that, in the area, being Kukama is referred to those that have Kukama last names. But they are not Kukama in the sense of a tribal group. The tribal Kukama only exists in the past and are the ancestors of the contemporary Kukama. Therefore, the current Kukama population is situated in between the tribal society and the foreign society (Gow 2003).

adopting other social identities (mestizos, ribereños, Peruvians), in the last 20 years part of this population has started to publicly recognize themselves as natives thanks to the efforts of multiple Kukama organizations, activists, and non-Kukama allies (Castro 2015; Pau 2021). Stefano Pau (2021) has analyzed Kukama discourses of self-representation coming from media-makers and young musicians. Pau (2021) focuses on some of the most recent efforts in the process of Kukama identitarian revitalization (e.g., songs, festivals, artistic workshops), and how they have become spaces for reflexivity and dialogue on identity issues. Researchers such as Pau (2021) and Castro (2015) shed light on the importance of analyzing Kukama media as a technological device that shows not only how Kukama identity has persisted underneath invisibility, but how it has added new layers of meaning to conceptualizations of Kukama indigeneity.

All in all, most of the discussion about Kukama “invisibility” seems to be rooted in an analytical tension between relational and essentialist notions of Indigenous identity. All the authors rightfully take anti-essentialist approaches in which the reduction of ethnicity to language or any other social “substance” is rejected to favor the maintenance of ethnic frontiers as a marker of indigeneity (Cf. Barth 1998). These approaches to the Kukama ethnicity conceive Indigenous identities as contextual phenomena forged in relational spaces. However, Stocks and subsequent authors tend to place the “locus” of Kukama identity in the persistence of cultural practices rooted in durable but dynamic traditions such as rituals, festivities, economic practices, or rules of descent. Even when Kukama dynamism and their capacity for transformation and adaptation is highlighted, these skills are conceptualized as “ancestral” capacities (Gow 2003). Amidst their integration into the White-Mestizo society, a sense of geographic and historical “stability” found among Kukama communities tends to be considered as the crucial feature of

their indigenusness. Furthermore, the use of notions of “recovery” or “reaffirmation” of Kukama identity tends to imply the existence of dormant cultural essences.

In recent years, the dynamics of Indigenous identities in Amazonia have been reexamined under the concept of *creolization*, providing an analytical framework that resonates with the Kukama experience. A group of scholars (Halbmayer and Ales 2013) have re-visited the concept of creolization, taking it out of its usual regional focus in the Caribbean world to use it in Lowland South America. Halbmayer and Ales (2013) initially discussed the process of “Amerindian hybridity” and Indigenous creolization in an issue of the journal *Tipiti* about the politics of Indigenous and non-Indigenous identities in Lowland South America. The authors involved in this volume do not conceptualize creolization as a process of socio-cultural mixture that necessarily leads to the emergence of creoles.²⁶ For them, classic distinctions between assimilation and continuity in cultural analysis are insufficient. Creolization is more about “internal restructuring, inventiveness, and reflexivity” (Halbmayer and Ales 2013). It is a “joint becoming” in which both sides change without fusing into one (Halbmayer 2018). Halbmayer and Ales identify “the paradoxes of creolization” as transformations that go hand in hand with the continuity and reproduction of Indigenous cultural forms. For Halbmayer (2018), creolization processes produce innovative cultural practices alongside the reproduction of native conceptions of the world. Thus, Indigenous groups using mimetic practices (e.g., the Kukama) should not be understood as desiring assimilation but employing a strategy of acquiring the practices of the non-Indigenous society to improve their lives in contexts of discrimination (Halbmayer 2018).

²⁶ Halbmayer (2013) distinguishes between classic concepts of creolization and “Indigenous creolization.” While one focuses on the cultural and biological emergence of creoles, the other refers to “processes of rearticulating indigeneity in social, cultural, and biological contexts marked by the introduction of new and formerly unknown elements” (Halbmayer 2013, 67).

Although I do think the term of “creolization” still carries a deep acculturationist connotation, Halbmayr and Ales’ useful re-conceptualization serves to build on a more updated analysis of Kukama indigeneity. I expand on these discussions by arguing that the transformation and reproduction of Kukama identity can be articulated with different practices and meanings even when they are distant from those frequently considered “Indigenous.” I draw on the most recent approaches to Kukama identity as a multivocal and constantly changing space (Castro 2015) to argue that the continuity of Indigenous self-positionings can gain strength in formal transformations. Kukama indigeneity operates within fields of inter-generational tensions and therefore can be linked with multiple practices (e.g., Western pop music). Even though many Kukama communities consider language and myth as key features that distinguish them from the non-Indigenous world, the content and form of what is defined as “Kukama” is contested and can change over time and space. My contribution to this discussion seeks to expand our understanding of the role of media-making in the dynamic restructuring of Kukama identity. Echoing previous authors, I keep scrutinizing the way media is making visible “Kukama” notions of indigeneity. However, I also explore the aesthetic arsenal re-formulating those notions. New forms and meanings of Kukama-ness are emerging through Indigenous media, building extra layers of performativity and musicality that mobilize Kukama indigeneity across the digital space as a tool for empowerment.

Kukama-Kukamiria revitalization

Kukama colonial and neo-colonial history is marked by experiences of severe discrimination common to many other Indigenous peoples in Peru. Multiple state and corporate agents advanced a set of anti-Indigenous practices and policies intended to assimilate Amazonian

population to national models of citizenship. The school system was one of the main institutions reproducing assimilationist practices in Peruvian Amazonia. According to Bartholomew Dean (2015), public education institutions enacted a series of pedagogical strategies dedicated to undermining Indigenous knowledge and languages. School became a key force in civilizing projects attempting to erase Indigenous alterity and promoting national homogeneity (Castro 2015; Dean 2015). National education programs in Amazonia were meant to satisfy Lima elite's plans of domestication and incorporation of Amazonia territories. Between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the Peruvian state launched campaigns of cultural assimilation in Amazonia in which formal schooling was based on monolingual models of pedagogy. The imposition of Spanish as the dominant language in literacy programs had the effect of diminishing Indigenous languages, knowledge, and historicities by promoting ethnic shame among Indigenous students. In 1926 the Peruvian state created the first public schools among Kukama-Kukamiria communities, and by 1935 they were operating in the main Kukama communities of Peru. These schools banned Kukama and relied on physical punishment and public humiliation against Kukama children for speaking their language (Stocks 1981). In this context of hostile anti-Indigenous ideologies and practices, making Kukama-ness visible became problematic. Many Kukama individuals decided to hide or cut ties with their indigeneity to avoid discrimination.

Since the 1980s, Kukama activists and organizations have been challenging decades of discrimination and assimilationist policies in Peruvian Amazonia (Castro 2015; Mora 1995; Pau 2021). Since this decade, efforts of cultural revitalization have emerged, diversified, and grown stronger to defy images of ex-indigeneity and ethnic vanishing. Different sectors of the Kukama-Kukamiria communities in Peru have been orchestrating and enacting different political agendas

dedicated to strengthening Kukama identity and language (Castro 2015, 2022; Petesch 2003). This growing interest in Indigenous identity, cultural, and linguistic revitalization, is particularly prominent in the cities of Nauta and Iquitos, where the Kukama population has a significant presence. These initiatives started with the formation of identity-based Kukama organizations. Such organizations arose in the aftermath of the implementation of the 1970s “Law of Native Communities” (Ley de Comunidades Nativas), whereby the Peruvian state started to recognize land rights and offer financial resources to Indigenous communities (Mora 1995; Castro 2015, 2022). The process of Kukama “ethnic affirmation” started in 1980, when the Kukamiria communities of the Lower Huallaga region publicly acknowledged their indigeneity through the creation of FEDECOCA (in Spanish “Federación de Comunidades Cocamilla,” in English “Cocamilla Communities Federation”) (Castro 2015; Pau 2021). According to Castro (2015), although this externalization of Kukama identity was based on the desire to gain land titles and have access to financial resources, the new Kukama organizations were driven by historical identitarian concerns. The Kukama federations were crucial to nurture Indigenous pride. Many of the riverine population who did not make visible their Indigenous identities started to reclaim their Indigenousness, especially the Kukama population from the Lower Ucayali and Marañón rivers.²⁷ However, these processes of Indigenous revitalization were (and still are) highly contested by local population resisting the adoption of Kukama identity.

²⁷ In the 1980s and 1990s, anthropologists, artists, and religious actors were key allies in the process of Kukama ethnic revitalization. Meredith Castro (2015) mentions the strong influence of Catholic priests, specifically the members of the Augustinian order. Catholic missionaries provided social and material resources useful to support the teaching of Kukama and the promotion of ethnic pride. The Catholic “Instituto de Promoción Social Amazónico” (created in 1973) was used to push forward Kukama revitalization, which often included the use of radio.

In the city of Iquitos, the process of Kukama ethnic reaffirmation started between the late 1990s and early 2000s (Castro 2015). These efforts were advanced by cultural activists dedicated to songwriting and video production to promote Kukama identity. In the 2000s and 2010s, a collectivity from the outskirts of Iquitos called Association Cultural Yrapakatun (“all pretty” in Kukama language) emerged as one of the key actors involved in the process of Kukama contra-invisibility (Pau 2021). Since February of 2010, this group have been organizing the Yrapakatun festival in the community of Santo Tomás, a yearly event dedicated to the promotion and transmission of Kukama practices. The Yrapakatun association has been also involved in the creation of novel symbols of Kukama identity. In 2013, they designed a Kukama flag. This flag, made of red colors with white lines, includes the figure of a person sailing in a canoe, a symbol of the riverine identity associated with the Kukama. The design of a Kukama flag symbolically echoes nation-state imagery. During the 2021 edition of the Yrapakatun festival, the association hoisted both the Kukama and the Peruvian national flag next to each other as a statement of the coexistence of Indigenous and national identity. On social media, the Yrapakatun Association posted pictures of the two flags framed with a text that said: “Fly the Kukama flag and the national flag. We resist losing our roots.” For Kukama agents seeking cultural revival, Indigenous and Peruvian pride are not antagonistic but equally relevant in their modes of self-representation. This symbolic action encapsulates a significant interplay between indigeneity and nationalism taking place in contemporary Peruvian Amazonia.²⁸

²⁸ This flag is also a transnational Indigenous symbol. It is used by Kukama organizations in Manaus, Brazil such as the “Assoc indígena Kokama Uka Nuam.” In a Facebook post from April 27, 2021, the Yrapakatun Association shared pictures of the flag and textually framed them this way: “The Kukamas from Peru and Brazil raise the same flag as a sign of unity in the effort to revitalize our culture and our language!! W+ka ritamaka!!”

Plans for linguistic revitalization have been a central concern in the Kukama anti-assimilation efforts. In recent years, one of the most significant endeavors in this field has been the creation of an alphabet for the Kukama-Kukamiria language. Given its variants in both writing and speech, the uniformization of the Kukama-Kukamiria language was considered a tool to avoid linguistic loss. With the participation of the Peruvian State, in 2014 a potential consensus for a Kukama alphabet was discussed in meetings and workshops with Indigenous communities from the four Amazonian basins where there is presence of Kukama communities (Huallaga, Marañón, Nanay y Ucayali) (Castro 2015; Pau 2021). The Kukama alphabet was finally presented on August 14 and 15 of 2014 in the city of Requena in the Loreto region (Castro 2015). Castro argues that activities such as the normalization of the Kukama alphabet brought together Kukama people engaged in similar work, which led to fostering social cohesion between individuals and collectivities interested in revitalizing the language. Similarly, social media made possible the virtual interaction of Kukamas from Peru, Brazil, and Colombia and has encouraged the speaking of Kukama language. The Yrapakatun Cultural Association offers virtual courses of Kukama language and relies on social media to stimulate its use.²⁹ During the Yrapakatun festival, Kukama cultural activists create digital images of Kukama words (known as the “word of the day”) and share them through social media to stimulate interest in the language (Digital Fieldnotes. February 11, 2021).

The multiple efforts to promote Kukama revitalization have been faced with racist backlash from White and Mestizo sectors who oppose to the persistence of Indigenous worlds

²⁹ During its 11th edition (February-March 2021), in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the association organized a virtual version of the Yrapakatun festival. As part of the festival’s activities, they offered virtual classes of Kukama. In this edition, I had the opportunity to sing up for those online classes from Austin, Texas, and start learning the basics of Kukama-Kukamiria.

and identities in Peruvian Amazonia (Castro 2015; Mora 1995). Nevertheless, Yrapakatun and other organizations have been successful in fueling local and national interest in Kukama language and culture (Castro 2015). Amidst the still ongoing revitalization efforts, Kukama cultural activists are seeking to change the negative ideologies associated with being Kukama and speaking Kukama. In challenging essentialist stereotypes about Indigenous peoples and fostering ethnic pride, Kukama organizations have encouraged younger individuals to embrace Kukama indigeneity as one of the multiple identities people can carry and express, something unprecedented in Amazonian recent history.³⁰ In alliance with the Catholic church, they have been running projects of linguistic transmission as a mechanism to highlight the Kukama presence in the Amazonian ethnic landscape. Since the early 2000s, Indigenous media has had a crucial role in the process of Kukama revitalization and anti-assimilationist efforts. Radio Ucamara has been one of the main protagonists in this story.

Radio Ucamara's Politics of Identity

In the last decade, media and digital technologies have been fundamental resources in the multiple recalibrations of Kukama identity. Nowadays, it is common to find abundant media content produced by Kukama groups and individuals proudly sharing Kukama practices or teaching Kukama in the digital space. Amidst this collective effort, Radio Ucamara is the Indigenous media outlet most invested in making content to confront ethnic discrimination in the Loreto region. Since their activist turn from *La Voz de la Selva* to its transformation into Radio Ucamara, the topics of linguistic revitalization and Indigenous identity have had a central place

³⁰ Rosa Vallejo, virtual talk, Yrapakatun festival. March 25, 2021.

in their political agenda. In their public interventions, Radio Ucamara media-makers often make discursively explicit the Indigenous character of the radio station. For example, in a virtual event in 2021, Marilez Tello, a member of the Radio Ucamara team, used the expression “Indigenous Radio Waves” to refer to the identitarian orientation of their work and the subaltern positionality attached to it. This positionality is also highlighted when Kukama broadcasters define Ucamara as a radio that “operates at the margins” of Peruvian society and mainstream media. This articulation between indigeneity and subalternity is discursively built in their own media production, where reflexive statements about experiences of ethnic discrimination are made. In a documentary video produced in 2013 about Radio Ucamara’s work, we can hear Kukama media-makers expressing this point:

Our Radio station has assumed a peripheral approach to politics, society, and culture as a priority. We address issues from places where many politicians consider that nothing interesting is happening. And those are the Indigenous communities [Leonardo Tello, Radio Ucamara 2013].

Our radio station has decided to start from the margins, from the communities of rural areas, towards the center. We consider it important to work with the voices that are not heard, the voices that are out there in the corners and are not usually heard on the main radio stations, so that the authorities can take them into account [Rita Muñoz, Radio Ucamara 2013].

Yet, Indigeneity is but one of the multiple social identities conveyed in Radio Ucamara’s media politics. Although their Indigenous positionality is the most prominent, Kukama identity

coexists with the Peruvian national, regional, Amazonian, and even Catholic identities. Radio Ucamara members and Indigenous collaborators constantly display their Peruvianess³¹. In their journalistic work, they dedicate significant efforts to covering the main national events and issues. For example, during a set of nationwide pro-democracy protests in November of 2020, Radio Ucamara not only provided information about the protests but also had a significant role in leading political mobilizations in Nauta. This involvement with major political events taking place in Lima is situated within a specific epistemic place where national politics is seen through Amazonian regional perspectives that often highlights Indigenous voices and problems.

Radio Ucamara has also been dedicated to the building of a strong Amazonian identity. Kukama activists have established an important set of alliances with other Indigenous media-making collectivities in Amazonia, such as *Lancers Digitales* from Ecuador (created in 2017). Such alliances reveal the existence of a Pan-Amazonian movement of Indigenous media activists that support each other's work (Digital fieldnotes. August 10, 2021; August 16, 2021). Beyond the work of media production, Radio Ucamara has had a fundamental politico-organizational role in building transnational and transregional networks among Kukama communities throughout Amazonia. This radio station has cultivated connections with Kukama organizations from Brazil, Colombia, and Peru by putting together in-person meetings where meaningful exchanges to discuss issues of identity and activism take place. Social media interaction shows Kukama individuals from Brazil visiting the Radio Ucamara headquarters and Radio Ucamara crew members visiting Kukama collectivities in Brazil (Digital fieldnotes, July 13, 2021). For

³¹ As Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin explain: "Although many people consider themselves to belong to subnational or transnational communities, the nation is the primary context for the everyday lives and imaginations of most of the people who produce media and constitute its audiences" (Ginsburg et al 2002, 11).

example, from June 1 to 3 of 2022, Radio Ucamara organized a transnational Kukama meeting in the city of Iquitos. This meeting was conceived as one of the many efforts in the long-term agenda of cultural revitalization and it was focused on the discussion of common cultural and territorial demands. The meeting had the title of “*Kukamkana Katupi*”, which means “the Kukama appear,” a name that echoes anti-invisibility discourses promoted from Radio Ucamara activism (Fieldnotes. June 1, 2022).

This set of Kukama transnational networks also manifests on social media.³² Alliances between Radio Ucamara and Kukama organizations from Brazil, such as *Consejo Indígena Kokama de la Amazonía – YTKA*, can be noticed in their interactions in the digital space. Kukama activists congratulate, tag each other, and share pictures in Facebook posts when celebrating important dates. In these virtual spheres of interaction, the digital space is used as an arena to re-imagine the Kukama worlds and notions of being Kukama (Fieldnotes. April 19, 2021). For example, Brazilian Kukamas share news about their problems and tag Radio Ucamara members in their Facebook posts in order to build solidarity and ethnic relatedness. Likewise, posts about Kukama culinary events in Brazil are shared on social media with Peruvian Kukamas to elicit feelings of cultural revival (Digital fieldnotes. August 22, 2021). In all these interactions, Kukama media spaces (digital and material) function as a mechanism to nurture Kukama transnationalism and reimagine Kukama indigeneity as a Pan-Amazonian subjectivity.

³² Social media is an excellent window to see the transnational and interethnic networks in which Radio Ucamara is immersed. Their social media activity reveals an intense interaction with Indigenous artists, poets, hip-hop musicians, and scholars (Digital Fieldnotes, December 27, 2020; August 27, 2020; March 9, 2021; June 7, 2021). Radio Ucamara members share the work of other Indigenous artist and activists from Latin America like the Mapuche, which shows how the digital space is used to empower other Indigenous figures facing common struggles.

As previously discussed, within the process of Kukama cultural revitalization, unwanted images of invisibility are still evoked in political discourse. For example, Marillez Tello, sub-director of Radio Ucamara brought this point in a 2021 virtual event about journalism and memory: “Not so long ago, the Kukama were considered ‘invisible natives,’ but a few years ago, our radio began to work alongside with the [Catholic] church on the revitalization of the Kukama language.”³³ Although Anthony Stocks came up with this concept (1981) with the intention of empowering the Kukama and highlight their persisting Indigenous-ness, the category of “invisible natives” has turned into a stigma among some Kukama activists. As a result, confronting the trope of invisibility has been a driving force for Radio Ucamara media-makers. One of the main strategies to accomplish this task has been to engage in the revitalization of the Kukama-Kukamiria language. Among these efforts, Radio Ucamara has created radio shows spoken in Indigenous languages and a communitarian school for the teaching of the Kukama-Kukamiria. In such activities, narrativity and musicality have been two of the main aesthetic forces involved in revitalization practices.

Transmissions: Broadcasting and Teaching Kukama-Kukamiria

Since the beginning of Radio Ucamara’s activist turn, Kukama journalists have developed a series of actions dedicated to change local linguistic ideologies and revitalize their language, a central element in their politics of indigeneity. Acting with the support of anthropologists and progressive Catholic priests, one of the earliest efforts in accomplishing this

³³ Virtual conference entitled “Conversatorio Virtual Memoria amazónica. Comunicación para la preservación de la memoria Amazónica.” October 29, 2021. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

task was the creation in 2007 of a radio program conducted exclusively in Kukama. This radio show was called “*Kukamakana katupi*” (the Kukama appear), a name directly responding to images of invisibility. In pursuing this goal, Radio Ucamara recruited a team of native Kukama speakers (all of them elderly) to conduct a radio show.³⁴ Apart from the teaching of basic vocabulary, the radio show content focused on singing and storytelling. Kukama elders did not have previous experience with radio broadcasting or recording. In a highly discriminatory context, they were nervous and hesitant, since they had to deal with racist backlash for speaking in Kukama on the radio. Nevertheless, the radio show had a positive impact on Kukama audiences. Putting the Kukama-Kukamiria in the airwaves fueled interest in the language and inspired further exchanges among Kukama speakers (Castro 2015). Most importantly, it contributed to challenging dominant linguistic ideologies shaping media aurality in Loreto, where Indigenous languages have a marginal presence. Radio Ucamara director Leonardo Tello has framed their linguistic efforts as a strategy not only to make visible the Kukama but also to restore social worlds. On social media, he said: “With the name of *Kukamakana katupi*: ‘the Kukama appear,’ the journey of revitalization and reconstruction of broken social ties among the Kukama begins” (Digital fieldnotes. October 3, 2021). This is reflected in people’s responses to the show. Members of the Kukama audience referred to the presence of Kukama on the airwaves as a significant step towards consolidating ethnic pride:

I think it is great. Because [Radio Ucamara] is the only radio station that interviews people who are from our Kukama group and I feel proud for them

³⁴ The group of Kukama elders started with a 15-minute-long program that was later extended to one hour. This experience led to the formation of a team of media specialists that would eventually run the Radio station, including Leonardo Tello, its current director (Castro 2015, 48).

having valued the culture we had. A lot of people sometimes get embarrassed and don't want to be Kukama. But I am not ashamed. On the contrary, I feel happy because we are recognized worldwide. And we are not ashamed. We can sing in our Kukama language, we can talk, we can dress however we want, and we are not ashamed now. That is why I am grateful for Radio Ucamara, for showing interest in us, so we can keep going, and to be recognized, just the way we are (Anonymous Kukama woman in Gonzalo Rodriguez 2016).

Likewise, the radio shows in Kukama language encouraged people in Nauta to share their experiences of severe marginalization as Kukama speakers:

I understand the ladies who speak Kukama on the radio. I understand everything. But I speak very little because in the past that language was taken from us. When I was little, they didn't let us talk. They scolded my mother when she wanted to talk about something speaking in her language. One of my nephews who was already more literate, told her: "Well, granny, stop that now." That is why I don't speak Kukama that much. I just know a few words, but I do understand it well. Anything you want to talk about I understand. Men and women [Anonymous Kukama woman in Gonzalo Rodriguez 2016].

Although Radio Ucamara concentrates on the revitalization of their language and the visibility of the Kukama people, their efforts go beyond their own group to include other Indigenous communities in the area. Recently, Ucamara has been diversifying the linguistic

repertoire of their media production to include radio shows in other Indigenous languages. On October 3, 2021, Ucamara Radio announced the launching of a radio show spoken in the Urarina language, one of the main Indigenous groups in the Loreto region. The show was conducted by two Urarina youngsters every Saturday from 8 to 9 am. On social media, Radio Ucamara has also manifested the intentions of having a radio show in Achuar (Digital fieldnotes. October 3, 2021). These efforts in building a multilingual radio seek to open a more inclusive politics of indigeneity in Radio Ucamara media activism.

But Radio Ucamara's linguistic revitalization actions transcend broadcasting practices. Drawing on the experience of the *Kukamakana katupi* radio show, in 2012 Radio Ucamara proposed the creation of a center for the teaching of Kukama called "Ikuari school" (*Ikuari* is the Kukama word for school) (Castro 2015). This school operated outside the public education system in Peru, and it was conceived as a communitarian initiative. While the teachers of the Ikuari school were selected from the group of elders working on the radio, the students were mostly children and teenagers. One of the main pedagogical strategies of the Ikuari school was the use of narrativity and musicality as their main vehicle of linguistic transmission. The Ikuari schoolteachers taught chants, songs, and stories to children, both in the classroom and in daily contexts such as gardening activities or fishing trips (Radio Ucamara 2013)³⁵. During my fieldwork in Nauta, I was able to attend one of the Ikuari school sessions and see how the elders taught Kukama. In this particular session, the teacher's main goal was to guide the children on how to speak and properly pronounce Kukama words. Although the teaching is mostly done

³⁵ Radio Ucamara practices of language preservation resonate with Bernard Perley's (2012) concept of "emergent vitalities." Through this concept, Perley advocates for complementing the documentation of endangered languages (the code) with a focus on the creation of new social contexts for language use as well as innovative ways of using languages.

orally, the words learned that day were written on big pieces of paper posted on a wall. Interestingly, the house used for the Ikuari school was also a space to teach Catechism on Sundays.

Radio Ucamara media-makers usually frame their linguistic revitalization agenda as anti-racist politics. On March 3, 2022, the Radio Ucamara Facebook page posted a picture of the Ikuari School teachers holding a flag that included the name of their radio show and the symbols of Kukama life (a machete, a vessel, and an oar) framed with this text: “Guardians of the language, reproducers of culture, who in the midst of discrimination and racism, raise their word and their song” (Digital Field notes. March 3, 2022). Radio Ucamara understanding of linguistic transmission as part of the fight against anti-Indigenous racism has been pushing forward local reflections of discrimination in Peruvian Amazonia. Radio Ucamara’s political discourse makes explicit the racialization of indigeneity in the region, a taboo subject in Peru that is not usually addressed in conversations about cultural diversity or intercultural politics (Back and Zavala 2019). It also points out to how the racialization of the Indigenous population has fostered not only assimilationist policies but has justified the installation of predatory political economies. In confronting racism with linguistic revitalization, Radio Ucamara is opening new spaces where pride and acceptance can be built. As Marillez Tello explains in one the video documentaries about Radio Ucamara’s work: “Spaces like the Ikuari School are allowing us to meet again, accept ourselves, and feel proud of belonging to a community that contributes and can give a lot to this society” (Radio Ucamara 2018). These efforts in building ethnic pride through the transmission of the Kukama language have also influenced audiovisual production. The Ikuari school musical pedagogy helped Kukama rappers to write lyrics in Kukama for the songs included in the videoclips (Radio Ucamara 2017). The Ikuari school was also responsible for

providing the melodic base of three music videos about linguistic/cultural revitalization and environmental issues: Kumbarikira (Radio Ucamara 2013), Upupurika (Radio Ucamara 2014) and Parana (Radio Ucamara 2015). The Kukama teachers taught the songs that gave birth to these bilingual hip-hop videoclips.

Audiovisual media has also created additional layers of meaning and reflexive discourses around in-presence linguistic transmission. Video documentaries about the Ikuari school project and the biography of their teachers have operated as aesthetic devices to reveal Kukama histories of violence and forced assimilation. Radio Ucamara has produced videos dedicated to highlighting experiences of linguistic discrimination from the voices of Kukama elders. As these videos show, all Kukama teachers went through common experiences of marginalization where Kukama was stigmatized by white-mestizo society and the Peruvian state. In interviews made for the Radio Ucamara documentaries, Ikuari school teachers expressed how the Peruvian school system forbade them to speak Kukama-Kukamiria because it was considered “*lengua de indios*” (“Language of Indians”). Videomaking practices were strategically used to situate linguistic transmission in a political field. By making visible the biographies of Kukama elders and their experiences of forced assimilation, Radio Ucamara posed a solid argument in which teaching Kukama was considered ultimate anti-racist politics. Media was used to make racism and dehumanization noticeable, thus turning linguistic transmission into a form of empowerment. For example, in a video documentary entitled “*La Escuela Ikuari*,” three of the Kukama teachers remembered how the school system suppressed their language through the use of physical punishment:

In the past, [Kukama people] did not speak Spanish. They spoke only Kukama. When the teachers arrived to teach in the schools, that's when they have told everyone not to speak their language. They have prohibited the Kukama language (Julia Ipushima Manihuari). I have seen how some students were forced to kneel. The lady teachers prohibit them from speaking Kukama (Victor Canayo Pacaya). Sometimes, the teachers threw their rulers at the students when they heard them speaking in their language (Julia Ipushima Manihuari) [Radio Ucamara 2017].

Although the description of these discriminatory practices took place in the early phase of their lives, the Kukama teachers appear in the documentaries explaining how discrimination persists in the present and eventually emerged around the time when they were making the Kukama radio program. Doña Ilda Ahuanari Tamani, narrates in dialogical speech the events of discrimination coming from her own significant other:

My husband scolded me: “Are you going back there again?” -“Yes, I'm going” -“If I had known, I wouldn't have loved you. You are a Kukama Indian, that's what you are” -“But what am I going to do if I was born like this. They made me like this, so I am able to speak this language. If that's how I grew up, how can I put that language aside?” Now I'm not ashamed anymore. I can talk to anyone. Anyone I meet, I speak Kukama with them. The same way my mom and dad spoke. That's how they called me: “Tsañuri wawakira. Tsañuri” (come, little daughter. Come). And I will never forget it and I will do more. I'm going to talk

to everyone. Even if they are white people. Just like I'm talking with these youngsters [Radio Ucamara 2013].

On other occasions, the videos reveal how linguistic discrimination emerges in the reluctance of some parents to send their children to the Ikuari school. Teacher Julia Ipushima Manihuari explains this on video:

For example, here in Nauta there are many people who speak Kukama, but they do not want to speak. They are ashamed. For example, over there, there is a man who says that he does not want to send his son to the [Ikuari school], but the boy wants to study. He says “Why do you want to study that. It's Indian's language [Radio Ucamara 2017].

As with other Radio Ucamara audiovisual productions, videos portraying Kukama elders' experiences with forced assimilation are expressed through a polyphonic aesthetics (Bakhtin 1981) in which elders' voices interact with the voices of media-makers. The voice of elders has the role of placing firsthand testimonies of violent anti-Indigenous structures operating in Amazonia in front of larger audiences. Sometimes, biographic videos were produced after the passing of some of the Kukama elders. In those cases, video-making turned indigeneity into mourning aesthetics and politics of remembrance. The video entitled “Mama Ilda: Memoria y Sabiduría” (Radio Ucamara 2020) is an example of this. Radio Ucamara produced a video homage to Ilda Ahuanari, one of the Ikuari school teachers, after her death in 2020. This is a video charged with the deep emotionality involved in losing a Kukama speaker. The video starts

with a riverine landscape and a voiceless text that says: “Mrs. Ilda was forbidden to speak Kukama at school.” The next segment shows Mrs. Ilda narrating her personal experiences with the Peruvian school system and her involvement with Radio Ucamara. In the video, testimonies of severe discrimination are significant because they situate her life in a specific political arena. Her life/death is positioned within histories of power, Indigenous politics, and colonial linguistic ideologies that are not addressed in mainstream media. But also, her death becomes meaningful in terms of the recent efforts of linguistic revitalization and anti-discrimination actions that Indigenous media activists have been pushing forward. Videomaking here becomes a method to recognize the efforts of a valuable protagonist in the battlefield of language politics. The video ends with a voiceover in which Kukama media-makers thank her for her role in the revitalization efforts. The final segment shows footage of Ilda seating next to a river and singing in Kukama. Then, the video changes from color image to black and white as a way of building a visuality of grief. Radio Ucamara, thus, understands linguistic loss (a parallel image of death) as a process that can be addressed with aesthetic resources.



Figure 4. “Mamá Ilda: Memoria y Sabiduría.” Video by Radio Ucamara, 2020.

Mediatizing Linguistic Ideologies

One of Radio Ucamarca's main political goals has been to shift the discriminatory linguistic ideologies built around Indigenous languages in Peruvian Amazonia. In a historical context in which Peruvian elites' anti-Indigenous policies have been dominant, discourses and counter-discourses of cultural and linguistic loss have been extensive. As in many other regions in world, metaphors of linguistic death (Perley 2012) are common in the area and have been shaping the notion that Kukama-Kukamiria is disappearing. In Loreto, narratives of linguistic extinction around Kukama-Kukamiria are expressed by cultural activists who are conscious of the fragility of its transmission. For example, Pablo Taricuarima, a teacher in charge of the Kukama language course offered by the Yrapakatun Association, expressed that: "Kukama-Kukamiria is a language in extinction. UNESCO has declared Kukama endangered. It is going through its penultimate phase of definitive extinction" (Digital Fieldnotes. September 9, 2021). For Radio Ucamarca media-makers, Kukama linguistic loss is connected to major political-economic processes in the Loreto region. In the textual description of a YouTube videoclip, the rubber boom is considered the starting point of the Kukama language loss: "As indigenous communities were enslaved, forcibly relocated, and exterminated by rubber barons in the first decades of the last century, the Kukama people of the Marañón River adapted, learning the Spanish language in an effort to reduce harsh discrimination and mistreatment..." (Radio Ucamarca 2021). In Radio Ucamarca media activism, such discourses of linguistic loss are usually situated in contrast with statements of linguistic recovery. In one of the videos about the Ikuari School, teacher Ilda Ahuanari Tamani expresses with pride how they have faced the imminent extinction of Kukama by highlighting its beauty: "This Kukama language was being lost, but now it is alive. We have already made it rise. And that is what we want. That is why we want the

children to learn. It is not capricious. How nice it sounds when they speak in Kukama language” (Radio Ucamara 2017).

In the process of fighting against linguistic loss, Ucamara media-makers have been striving to change collective views on the Kukama language, especially within Kukama communities. Apart from the radio shows, anti-discrimination videos are produced to confront Indigenous marginalization from the contemporary school system. Actors playing scenes where they show how Kukama pronunciations of Spanish words are not wrong but expressions of cultural differences that must be respected, are part of their media strategies (Radio Ucamara 2018). Radio Ucamara media has also been producing reflexive discourses of linguistic loss/recovery in their efforts for changing linguistic ideologies. In a video documentary about the Ikuari School, Ucamara’s director Leonardo Tello shares his thoughts on the political value of the linguistic revitalization process. Tello explains how learning Kukama can change not only the perception of the language itself, but also the perception of the world:

The term Kukama was used to diminish someone. To make them feel bad. To make them feel that they are Indians, that they are different, that they are not much. But then the children begin to hear, for the first time, that Kukama is a wonderful language, that it is facing extinction, that the Kukama culture is wonderful, like the culture of any other people [...]. We have [...] a little over 90 children, with 10 teachers, divided in 5 groups. If those 90 children learn to speak Kukama, they can be a privileged Kukama generation who will look at the world in a different way [Radio Ucamara 2017].

These reflexive statements are evidence of how Radio Ucamarca politics of indigeneity is guided by their own notions of linguistic relativity (Sapir 1931; Whorf 1952). The idea of adopting a different worldview as the effect of second language acquisition has been part of other processes of linguistic revival around the globe (see Zenker 2014). For Radio Ucamarca activists, learning Kukama can help to build new linguistic ideologies and political subjectivities among the Spanish speaking Indigenous population, especially children.

Social media has been another important space in which Kukama media activists enact their anti-racist agenda and condemn linguistic discrimination. Through social media communication (e.g., Facebook posts), Radio Ucamarca media-makers enter in direct confrontation with Peruvian national media when they spread anti-Indigenous messages. For example, when mainstream media downplays Indigenous accents of public figures when speaking Spanish, but praise European accents doing the same, Kukama media activists rightfully identify those discourses as forms of racism tied to long-term structural violence still operating in Peruvian society (digital field notes. July 26, 2021; August 11, 2021). Just like videos and radio shows, social media posts unveil power relations and the positionalities of Amazonian actors within the Peruvian national society. To confront linguistic discrimination, Kukama media-makers from Radio Ucamarca share information of workshop designed to learn the Kukama-Kukamiara language imparted by other Kukama organizations from Peru and Brazil (Digital Field notes. December 22, 2020). During my digital research phase I could see how Radio Ucamarca members shared information about Kukama language courses imparted via Zoom (Digital Field notes. December 11, 2020), virtual contests of Kukama language singing,

Kukama festivals,³⁶ or videos of people teaching the basics of Kukama. Likewise, Radio Ucamara broadcasters have also shared the work of other Kukama radio stations doing similar work, for example the radio program *Rana KukamaMukikana Kumitsari* from Radio 10, 104.5. Social media reveals how Radio Ucamara is well connected with other Kukama organizations embedded in solidarity networks. This off-line/online coordination and the collaborative dynamics between different Kukama leaders is a key feature of the overall Kukama linguistic revitalization process (Digital Fieldnotes. March 23, 2021).

Mythological discourse has also been an important vector in Radio Ucamara's linguistic revitalization efforts. In 2016, in alliance with foreign activists and filmmakers, the Radio Ucamara team published a book entitled *Karuara: people of the river* (Tello and Boyd 2016), dedicated to capture in printed media some of the main mythological narratives about the Kukama aquatic cosmological worlds. The book contains a sequence of eleven narratives illustrated by children. Most of them are myths of origin of the Kukama people, the rivers, the underwater cities, underwater people, and stories about human and non-human relationships. The book became part of Ucamara's environmentalist strategy of using narrative discourse to defend Amazonian rivers from predatory capitalism. Like many other Radio Ucamara productions, this book has an important linguistic feature: it is bilingual. The orally transmitted mythologies became textualized in three majoritarian languages (Spanish, English, and French) but also in Kukama-Kukamiria.³⁷

³⁶ The Yrapakatun festival is a major event in the Kukama world. I participated in its 2021 virtual edition by taking the Kukama language course and by attending a virtual talk with linguist and Kukama-Kukamiria expert Rosa Vallejos (Digital fieldnotes. January 26, 2021).

³⁷ In the *Karuara* book, the translation of mythological narratives into Kukama includes separated versions for female and male speech. This is because the Kukama-Kukamiria language

Leonardo Tello, director of Radio Ucamara, explained the reason behind this strategy in a virtual conference in 2021. According to Tello, the main goal in translating local Kukama mythology (originally documented in Spanish) into Kukama language was to challenge colonial linguistic ideologies. Ucamara media-makers wanted to level up Kukama to place it in the same space as dominant European languages. In his own words:

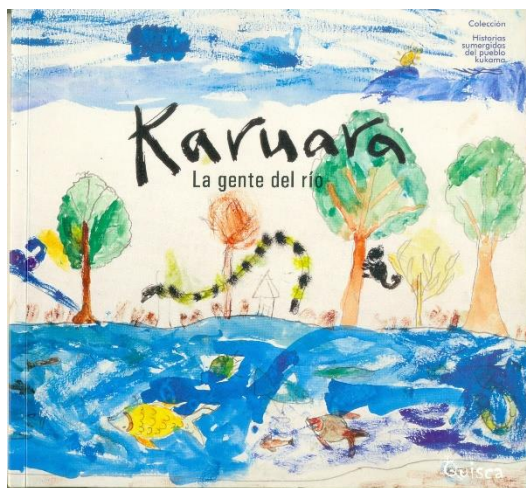


Figure 5. Cover of the book “Karuará.”

In order to make [the book] more attractive, and to be able to reach other audiences, so they know the history of the Kukama people, we decided to translate it into a language that many countries in the world speak, the English language. We want to reach those readers too. Those who might be interested in the stories of the Kukama people and their struggle. We also decided to publish it

possess genderlects. Gender indexicality is one of the most salient features of the Kukama-Kukamiria language and can be expressed in different grammatical domains (Vallejos 2015, 2016).

in French, because it is another audience that could also be interested in the Kukama language. The idea was to place Kukama on the same level as English and French to make it more appealing inwards.³⁸

While a printed collection of Kukama mythologies sought to elicit global interest in the spiritual value of Amazonian rivers and Indigenous environmental struggles, locally, the translation of these narratives into Kukama-Kukamiria sought to increase the appeal toward this language among the communities in Nauta. Situating marginalized Kukama-Kukamiria at the same level of European languages to stimulate its learning was an explicit move toward fighting discriminatory linguistic ideologies. The *Karuara* book encapsulates the interplay between language and mythology operating at the core of Radio Ucamara efforts to make visible their indigeneity. Even though anti-Indigenous discourses persist in Amazonia, the symbolic politics and aesthetics displayed through mediatized myth and language has allowed the Kukama activists to gain some battles in the field of linguistic ideologies. Part of the effects of decades of linguistic revitalization efforts is the unprecedented presence of Kukama in the aural spaces of cities like Nauta and Iquitos. For example, in 2022, Dana Tello, the daughter of Radio Ucamara's director Leonardo Tello and main vocalist in several Radio Ucamara musical productions, sang the Peruvian national anthem in Kukama language during a festival in Iquitos. The video of this performance, published on March 20, 2022, was shared on social media by local YouTubers and by Radio Ucamara media makers, receiving more than 2000 likes (Digital

³⁸ Leonardo Tello's virtual conference "*Narrativas, memorias e identidades desde Radio Ucamara*" at *XI Congreso de Literatura Infantil y Juvenil*, Peru, August 13, 2021.

field notes. March 20, 2022). Like many other Indigenous communities in Latin America using their own languages to perform national anthems, Kukama activists translating the lyrics of Peruvian national songs to Indigenous languages is an unequivocal statement of national identity but also of Indigenous persistence. The musicality of indigeneity has been a particularly powerful aesthetic resource in Ucamara Radio media activism, and pop music is now a crucial part of the contemporary processes of musicalization taking place in the region.

Musicalizing the Self: The Sounds of Indigeneity

One of the most effective Radio Ucamara strategies in the field of language politics is the making of music videos. The seminal idea for writing a song and making a music video about Kukama linguistic revitalization came from the Ikuari school experiences of musical pedagogies. Kukama teachers always included singing practices as one of the methods used for teaching children how to speak the Kukama-Kukamiria language. In 2013, the Radio Ucamara team and the Kukama teachers decided to use one of the songs taught in the context of the Ikuari school as the melodic base for a new bilingual pop song (in Kukama-Kukamiria and Spanish) that highlighted the value of Kukama. This song-videoclip was named *Kumbarikira* and became an unexpected musical hit in Nauta and Iquitos.³⁹ The *Kumbarikira* music video has been the most important generative event in Radio Ucamara history. The song/music video had a tremendous and unforeseen impact in the region. During my fieldwork phase in Nauta, the song was often played loudly at people's houses. Almost ten years after its YouTube release on July 26, 2013,

³⁹ The *Kumbarikira* music video was created in collaboration with a German production company called "Create Your Voice." According to Stefano Pau (2021), songs and music videos have been the most powerful cultural production in the process of Kukama cultural revitalization.

Kukama media-makers still refer to it as an event that provided high visibility to their Radio station and gave the Kukama significant national and international attention. Kumbarikira is often remembered (both online and offline) among Radio Ucamara media-makers as a major political accomplishment and as a foundational creation that sedimented Radio Ucamara's incursion into audiovisual media (Digital Fieldnotes. June 1, 2022).⁴⁰



Figure 6. “Kumbarikira.” Video by Radio Ucamara, 2013

Kumbarikira is a song about discrimination. Its main goal is to strengthen positive linguistic ideologies around the Kukama-Kukamiria language and promote its transmission. The word Kumbarikira means “little godfather,” a character who is described as a vulture. In local Amazonian ontologies, vultures, like other animals, used to be people in the past and their humanness is implied in the song. But vultures are also animals that occupy a marginal place in local systems of classification. In the music video, the vulture image is thus used as a metaphor

⁴⁰ During the 2022 encounter in Iquitos of Kukama cultural activists from Brazil, Colombia, and Peru, the Facebook live transmission of the meeting showed Leonardo Tello recalling the transformative effect of the Kumbarikira video. The success of the videoclip and how songs and narratives became key political forces is now part of Radio Ucamara's memory (Digital Fieldnotes. June 1, 2022).

of the Kukama subaltern positionality. The YouTube textual description of the video makes explicit the metaphorical link between the vulture and the Kukama language:

“Kumbarikira” in Spanish means *Compadrito* (little godfather): The vulture “was a person,” his name was Juan. The vulture is an image of rejection and exclusion. Nobody wants a vulture. The video clip is about that. Nobody wants to speak Kukama because it is an Indigenous language. The school (teachers) and the Peruvian government regard it as a language of savages and opponents of progress. The children appear with their mouths covered due to the prohibition to speak their language. They are ashamed and then they force their grandfathers and grandmothers to not speak it. They pressure them. This has happened since schools and the so-called progress arrived in Amazonia. This way, people are more vulnerable and manipulable by the economic powers that plunder our lands [Radio Ucamara 2013].

Kumbarikira is a hip-hop song performed by children. It was the outcome of a songwriting style that became common in many other Radio Ucamara musical productions. The songs were built around chants taught by elders in the language school. These chants usually formed the choruses of the songs and were complemented with rap verses written by the children and youngsters that appear in the videos. Kumbarikira also possesses a song structure that would repeat in most Kukama musical work: intro-chorus-three verses-chorus-three verses-chorus-bridge-three verses-outro. The chorus is sung in Kukama-Kukamiria and repeats throughout the song:

Kumbarikira. Chorus

Kumbarikira urupukira
 tsa kumbari utsu ukaima
 Kurachi wiri tima tsa katupi
 tsa kumbarikira urupukira

Godfather vulture
 My godfather is missing
 During the day he does not show up
 My godfather the vulture

As a form of audiovisual artistry, Kumbarikira opens a musical communicative space within their own Kukama communities. Unlike Radio Ucamara's environmentalist music videos, in which the communicative focus was directed toward outsiders (allies and enemies), Kumbarikira is targeting Kukama ethnic consciousness. Just as Amazonian communities use musical sounds to manage relations with alterity (Hill 2002, 2018), I argue that musicalizations can also be directed internally to manage contested issues in intra-ethnic relations; in this case, contested linguistic ideologies. Radio Ucamara uses musical sounds and musicalized speech to establish a dialogue with Kukama communities. Their main purpose is to musically stimulate the use of Kukama and foster Indigenous pride. The lyrics of Kumbarikira are a mixture of messages about the value and beauty of the Kukama language as well as children's individual goals and desires. In the song, images of linguistic loss repeatedly interact with messages about the need of revitalization. In a multivocal aesthetic strategy where the verses are performed by different children, these messages are directed in second person toward Kukama audiences, not outsiders. In the first and last verses of the song, we can hear examples of this lyrical content rapped through couplets and monorhyme patterns:

First verse

A Yo soy de Nauta y me gusta rapear
 A Pero cantar en Kukama me gusta más
 B Dicen que el Kukama no vale la pena
 B Yo digo qué tontos, ¿por qué no se esmeran?
 C Oye deja de tonteras y tráeme un tamal
 C Que el hambre me mata de intriga total

A I am from Nauta, and I like to rap
 A But I prefer to sing in Kukama
 B They say Kukama is not worth it
 B I say fools, why don't you try?
 C Stop playing around and bring me a tamal
 C I am starving and totally intrigued

- | | | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| D | Por eso te digo, ven y canta conmigo | D | That is why I say come and sing with me |
| D | Canta en Kukama, atrévete, amigo | D | Sing in Kukama, come on my friend! |

Last verse

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| A | Me levanto muy temprano para estudiar | A | I wake up early to study |
| A | A mí me gusta cantar y también soñar | A | I like to sing and to dream |
| A | Yo sueño convertirme en un gran profesional | A | I dream with becoming a great professional |
| A | A toda la gente yo quiero impresionar | A | I want to impress everybody |
| A | Yo vengo del Kukama que es mi lengua natal | A | I come from Kukama, my native language |
| A | Que ya casi nadie lo habla y yo lo encuentro muy mal | A | It is not spoken by many, and I think this is bad |
| B | A los chicos y las chicas yo les digo también | B | I also tell all the boys and girls |
| C | ¡Que nuestra voz alcemos y nuestra cultura levantemos ya! | C | That we should raise our voices and revive our culture! |
| D | ¡Somos Kukama! | D | We are Kukama! |

The Kumbarikira lyrics also include poetic statements of Kukama identity. Unlike the previous verses, some lines are written in first person. These lines seek to make visible and audible the voices of Kukama pride with the intention of replication. This can be better appreciated in the bridge of the song, where the lyrics are sung instead of rapped. In this fragment of the song, the singer refers to Kukama identity (not the language) as a form of art:

Bridge

- | | |
|---|---|
| Ser Kukama es un arte, un arte ancestral | To be Kukama is an art. An ancestral art |
| Que nos identifica de nuestro origen maternal | Which identify us from our maternal origin |
| Mi orgullo es ser Kukama y no tenerle a nada nada | I am proud of being Kukama and not being afraid of anything |
| Hacer más conocida nuestra lengua original | To make well known our native language |

In terms of its sound, Kumbarikira possesses a hip-hop musicality combined with a reggaeton beat, a highly popular music genera in Latin America since the early 2000s. The beat was made using digital audio software, and it follows a regular rhythmic pattern with minimal arrangements throughout the whole song except during the bridge section. While the beat is

musically uniform, the voices add variation, dynamics, and melodic force. Choosing hip-hop as the musicality of a song about the Kukama language had the twofold purpose of connecting with younger audiences and making language politics travel faster. In recent years, hip-hop has become part of the sonic fields of urban Amazonia youth. Overall, rap music is becoming a widespread musical expression in Indigenous Latin America. In Brazil, for example, acts like Brô Mc's produce rap music with lyrics in Portuguese and Guarani about land rights and environmental struggles (Brô Mc's Oficial, 2020). Mapuche rappers in Chile such as Catezi (Catezi 2021) and Motilonas Rap (Motilonas Rap 2018) in Colombia, write highly political verses in Indigenous languages and Spanish. In Peru, Quechua rappers like Liberato Kani (Liberato Kani 2021), who is also invested in linguistic revitalization efforts, are now common in the Lima hip hop scene. Similarly, Kukama rappers in Nauta seek to encourage Indigenous pride by singing in Kukama language. Hip-hop has become one of the global artistic expressions that has captured the attention of Indigenous youth in Amazonia. In reinterpreting sounds originated in the African American musicalities of New York City, Indigenous youth in urbanized Amazonia have found a way to produce powerful musicalized discourses of Indigeneity.⁴¹

The Kumbarikira music video also features a set of visual and performative elements that bolster the political message of the song.⁴² The Kumbarikira video starts with an image of a group of vultures seated by a river. The next scene shows an elderly woman washing her clothes

⁴¹ The use of hip-hop music is a contested topic within some Indigenous communities in Latin America. Some Indigenous actors reject the use of pop sounds to convey notions of Indigeneity. In Colombia, for example, the performance of hip-hop groups must be negotiated in local Indigenous events (Digital field notes, March 2, 2021).

⁴² Radio Ucamarca media-makers invest equal efforts to both the quality of the video production and the message. In order to attain the desired levels of formal quality, the videoclips are produced in collaborative dynamics and alliances with Indigenous and non-Indigenous partnerships. NGOs are of particular importance in this process (Radio Ucamarca 2018).

while singing the chorus of the Kumbarikira song in Kukama. A girl then approaches to the woman with her mouth taped. In the tape, we can read the word “Kukama” crossed with an X, which symbolizes the historical silencing of Kukama speakers. The woman removes the tape off the girl’s mouth and makes her sing in Kukama, this time with the reggaeton beat as musical background. The rest of the video sequence shows different children replicating the initial scene: releasing Kukama voices after removing the tapes that signify linguistic loss and discrimination. As a performative act of revitalization, the children go around Nauta walking, dancing, and removing the tape from the mouth of other children. What starts as a one-to-one process of linguistic transmission from elders to children, quickly turns into a wider act of dissemination, where children also increasingly transmit the language among themselves (tearing off 4 of the tapes at once). Their now audible voices encourage Kukama communities to learn Kukama-Kukamiria. While this happens, some of the performers are holding a transistor radio, reminiscent of the classic hip-hop image of portable boomboxes. In the final segment, an intergenerational scene takes place when elders and children sing the Kumbarikira chorus while navigating a river together in a canoe. In this audiovisual performance of indigeneity, Indigenous language becomes musical language. The Kumbarikira videoclip enacts a moment of linguistic transmission in which Kukama speech turns into musicalized speech. This muscialization occurs with the introduction of innovative elements: the Kukama language is amplified by the modern sounds of hip-hop music, which are also the sounds that identify the young Kukama population.

Kumbarikira has been one of the most transformative aesthetic creations in the history of Radio Ucamara. This music video, more than any other media product so far, gave them unprecedented notoriety and visibility. Linguist Rosa Vallejo has defined Kumbarikira as a “phenomenon” within the context of the Kukama revitalization efforts in Loreto. This videoclip

launched Radio Ucamara consistent presence in the digital space and made Kukama activists conscious of the power of media and music in local politics. After the success of Kumbarikira, music videos became a staple in Radio Ucamara media creations. Songs and music videos granted Radio Ucamara public recognition and invitations to international events. In 2016, the Peruvian Ministry of Culture awarded Radio Ucamara for their work in the revitalization of Kukama (Pau 2021). Likewise, in 2015 Radio Ucamara members traveled to Washington DC to participate in the Smithsonian Folklife Festival where they shared their views on media practices and performed their musical productions. The Kumbarikira song has also become a symbol of Kukama-ness and indigeneity in Loreto. Many people use fragments of the song and video on social media to express Kukama pride. The song has helped to change forms of self-perception and ethnic ideologies. According to Kukama media-makers, the song helped the children who performed in the video to navigate experiences with racism and discrimination. Radio Ucamara media-makers call this phenomenon “the Kumbarikira effect,” when they refer to the expansive force the song had in the public imagination.

One of the major achievements of the Kumbarikira music video was to bring attention to Amazonian realities on a national scale. Peruvian national media covered the local impact of the song. In this news coverage, White journalists from Lima referred to Kumbarikira as the most popular song in Iquitos, merging rap with Indigenous chants to have a greater reach among the young population. Their reportage even included the intervention of Radio Ucamara director Leonardo Tello explaining the purpose of the video: to rescue the Kukama language (currently at risk) and strengthen Kukama identity. Significantly, Lima journalists highlight the fact that the Kukama people were labeled as “Invisible Natives” (Radio Ucamara 2013). Radio Ucamara media-makers considered the attention of national television as one of the major achievements of

the Kumbarikira video and saw the potential of musicalized political discourses in gaining wide visibility.

The generative effects of the Kumbarikira song have had long-lasting impacts in the region. One of the main characteristics of this effect is the mutability and expansion of its musicality. Kumbarikira has transcended its original form within the sphere of Radio Ucamara to be covered multiple times by different artists. Iquitos musicians have creatively re-contextualized the song, adding more layers of meaning to it and expanding its presence to other spaces. For example, Kumbarikira has been remixed by DJs and entered electronic music circles (BMTP: Tema 2022). Female singer from Iquitos, Ysabel Sevillano sings the Kumbarikira chorus (in Kukama language) amidst her set of traditional folk songs written in Spanish to imbue her performance with indigeneity. One of her shows, recorded and shared on social media, took place in bar called “*La Taberna del Cauchero*” (The Rubber Tapper Tavern). In the video of her presentation, we can see neo-colonial symbols such as pictures of the rubber era colliding with contemporary sounds of emancipation and linguistic revitalization (Digital Fieldnotes. August 13, 2020; February 24, 2021).

In a more compelling example, the Choir of Loreto covered the Kumbarikira chorus (the fragment sung in Kukama-Kukamiria) by writing orchestral arrangements and adapting it to the Western classical musical canon. In the footage of this performance circulating on social media, we can see the director of the Loreto choir conducting a group of approximately 20 singers. During an entire minute, the choir sang the Kumbarikira chorus several times. In the original textual description of the video, Kumbarikira is even described as an Amazonian anthem: “Kumbarikira! The anthem of the boys, girls, youth, adults, elders, riverine people, of the communities, of the city... the Kukama anthem, by the Choir of Loreto.” Radio Ucamara media

makers use the digital space to share with pride the audiovisual registry of this and other versions of the Kumbarikira song to highlight the way it has been embraced and amplified by the public. For them, the “Kumbarikira effect” represents the confirmation of the power of music and media in the political realm. When these audiovisual registers are shared, social media activity gets filled with comments showing Kukama pride, many of them written in Kukama language. Nevertheless, these achievements seem to be contested by other people in the region (Kukama or not) who deny that Kumbarikira can be representative of Kukama identity (Digital fieldnotes. September 12, 2021).

Although the Kumbarikira music video was politically successful, it was also a contested event. The contentiousness of the Kumbarikira song emerged in the responses of anti-Indigenous White-Mestizo sectors and the tensions produced by the still prevalent colonial linguistic ideologies. Since its inception, the making of this videoclip was challenging. According to Radio Ucamara media makers, when they asked children from the communities of Nauta to participate in the video, their parents refused since they wanted to protect their children from further discrimination. Other parents were simply uninterested in the idea of revitalizing the language. The children who ended up singing in the video were Radio Ucamara activists’ daughters, sons, and nephews. But the most violent responses to the “Kumbarikira effect” came from the White-Mestizo society. Radio Ucamara experienced serious backlash, as some anti-Indigenous sectors were opposed to the concept of the video. During my fieldwork, Radio Ucamara activists mentioned that members of other radio stations accused them of using the image of the Kukama to exploit them and making a profit. The song was also mocked in a YouTube video made by Peruvian mestizo comedians. In this video, Kukama performers were portrayed through offensive primitivist tropes (Variendo Canal51 2013).

Moreover, in the context of violent anti-government protests that took place in Nauta between October and November of 2013, one police officer was caught verbally attacking the Indigenous protesters and screaming: “¡¡Lárguense de aquí hijos de puta, kumbarikiras!! ¡¡Lárguense de aquí hijos de puta nautinos cocamas!!¡¡Lárguense pedazo de indios!! (“Get out of here, damn Kumbarikiras!! Get out of here damn Kukama Nautians!! Get out stupid Indians!!”). In a clear association of the Kumbarikira song with Kukama indigeneity, anti-Indigenous sectors turned Kumbarikira into a derogatory term. Radio Ucamara wrote an entry on their blog reflecting with irony on the racist “homage” that Nauta police paid to one of their most significant artistic creations.⁴³ The multiple levels of hostility against the Kumbarikira music video shows how efforts of linguistic revitalization are situated in larger fields of power imbalances. While intergenerational linguist transmission is already a complex and demanding task, Kukama revitalization must also navigate highly discriminatory discourses and the violence of racist state forces in Peru. Yet, the invocation of Kumbarikira as an insult from anti-Indigenous sectors also shows the power of Indigenous media in penetrating the public imagination and unveiling enduring structures of exclusion in Loreto.

The Kumbarikira video also opened reflexive spaces about Indigenous identities in Loreto. In June of 2021, Iquitos social media figure Gianmarco Moreno shared on Facebook the video of an interview with Pedro Garces and Dana Tello, two of the Kukama rappers performing in Radio Ucamara musical productions. The interview was about the Kumbarikira music video. Almost ten years after its release, media personalities are still interested in the story of the Kumbarikira phenomenon. The original post is framed with the text: “Let's get to know the Kumbarikira and the importance of the Amazonian languages” (complemented with emojis of

⁴³ <https://radio-ucamara.blogspot.com/2013/11/hacia-donde-enfilan-las-baterias-de-la.html>

the Peruvian national flag). The video shows Gianmarco Moreno talking with the two Kukama artists in Nauta. Moreno shared his personal memories of the song Kumbarikira and described how it became highly popular in Iquitos in 2013, especially among children and teenagers. When he was in school, he and his classmates used to watch the Kumbarikira video and sing the song during recess. Gianmarco says that he used to sing Kumabrikira in his own way, but never knew the meaning of the Kukama lyrics. After the Kukama artists did a short performance of the chorus of the song (the part sung in Kukama), they described the notion of the vulture as a metaphor of the stigmatization of Kukama identity and language. Then, they explained that Kumbarikira was intended to send a message to young people to reevaluate the Kukama language. At the end of the video, Gianmarco says that Pedro is going to clarify something that he was confused about: the issue of clothing for Indigenous people. The interview then becomes an opportunity for Kukama artists to debunk essentialist notions of indigeneity and primitivist tropes. Pedro explains that: “the issue with identity is that it goes beyond our traditional outfit. Just because we are not using Kukama traditional clothes does not mean we stop being Indigenous or that we stop being Kukama. We are very clear about our customs and our cultural identity. We are Indigenous, no matter how we are dressed” (Digital Fieldnotes, July 13, 2021). Gianmarco ends his video reflecting on learning about the value Amazonian Indigenous expressions and asks not to discriminate against a friend who is Indigenous. This video shows how the “Kumbarikira effect” has had extensive presence in public discourse. Pop music has not only contributed to making visible Indigenous positionalities within historical process of exclusion, but it has also opened spaces to address essentialist and primitivist images circulating in Amazonia.

After the empowering experience of the Kumbarikira video, in the following years Radio Ucamara dedicated a significant amount of work to replicate this kind of impact with the making of more music videos. Videoclips such as Upupurika, released in 2015, gave continuity to the creation of bilingual songs focused on cultural and linguistic revitalization. After producing a series of music videos centered around environmental politics (between 2015 and 2017), in 2018 Radio Ucamara started to conceptualize videoclips outside the Kukama sphere to include other Indigenous groups of the same region. While some of these music videos referred to the revitalization of single Amazonian groups such as Omagua and Bora, others included youngsters from different ethnic groups performing together in a single production.⁴⁴ Videos such as “Babel” (2018), “Kamatia” (2019), “Con el Río” (2020), and “Libres” (2020) are examples of multilingual and multiethnic creations encompassing several Amazonian identities (some of them centered around Indigenous women’s experiences). In these videos, portrayals of indigeneity are indexed in linguistic practices, musicalities, mythological discourse, and the subaltern experience in urban spaces. In their mediatization of images of indigeneity, Radio Ucamara created videos about Indigenous self-representations that entailed the participation of youngsters from different Amazonian Indigenous groups such as Urarina, Achuar, Huitoto, and Awajun.⁴⁵ The songs written for these videos use hip-hop as their principal music genre. Thus, rapping has a strong presence as a form of verbal art. The main feature of these songs is that they

⁴⁴ In 2021, Radio Ucamara made another video about Kukama linguistic revitalization named “Mauta,” the first videoclip completely sung in Kukama. This video was about the community of *Padre Cocha* and focused on images of well-being and the vitality of Indigeneity in a Kukama village.

⁴⁵ These are students who belong to *Organización de Estudiantes de Pueblos Indígenas de la Amazonía Peruana* (Peruvian Amazonian Indigenous Students Organization). In this case, videomaking had the collaboration of Instituto Chaikuni, and the financial support of the Peruvian Ministry of Culture.

are multilingual and sometimes multi-mythical creations. Many of the lyrics of the videos derive from mythological narratives from different Indigenous groups. Just as Kukama media-makers use linguistic forms as symbols of Indigenous identity, mythological discourse transformed into hip-hop verses embodies another form of indigeneity performance. The musicalization of mythological discourses, common in Amazonian ritual practices (Hill 1993, 2019), now mobilized through media, provides new performative dimensions of indigeneity. The videos also represent a shift from a strictly Kukama politics of identity to a Pan-Amazonian approach in Radio Ucamara media-making. Maybe the most important example of this is the 2018 video entitled “Babel.”

The “Babel” videoclip (2018) was the first Radio Ucamara musical project that included the collaboration of other Amazonian Indigenous performers. Its title clearly refers to the Tower of Babel narrative, a biblical myth of origin of human linguistic diversity. Following its Catholic background, Radio Ucamara used this Judeo-Christian image of multilingualism to encapsulate an audiovisual production that includes various Amazonian languages. In a more ambitious take on language politics, Indigeneity is expressed in this video as Amazonianness. In Babel, nine young students from the Indigenous groups Kukama, Wampis, Kandozi, Awajún, Kichwa, Ticuna, and Shawi, all participate. The videomaking process was conceived as a collaborative space in which students could support each other’s struggles. In the song, the Indigenous artists rap and sing fragments of mythic narratives from their own oral traditions and performed in their own languages. Musically speaking, the song follows a chord progression of four notes (Am/F/C/G), forming a basic melody that repeats throughout the whole song. Over this pop melody, singing and hip-hop style rapping alternates with percussion and flute music. The song is also polyrhythmic, with each verse combining hip-hop beats and Indigenous musicalities.

Visually speaking, the video shows the artists collectively performing the song during the choruses and a sequence of them performing individually their assigned verses in different locations of Iquitos and Nauta. The Babel video was also multilingual on a visual level. In an attempt to reach global audiences, Radio Ucamarca created three different version of the videoclip with translated captions in Spanish, Portuguese, and English. The video has had a significant impact among international audiences. By the time of writing these lines, the Portuguese version of Babel had more than 23,000 plays on YouTube.

Radio Ucamarca videoclips represent novel expressions of the interaction between myth and music in Amazonia (Hill 2019). The most prominent feature of Babel's lyrics is that they all come from myths. Babel is a multilingual and multi-mythical song that encapsulates several narrative traditions. Like other Radio Ucamarca videoclips, this song illustrates the new forms of mediatization and musicalization of mythological discourses taking place in Amazonia. In this case, we can appreciate the occurrence of a regional patten already observed by Hill as "the use of mythic narratives as texts, either in whole or in part, for chanted and sung speeches..." (Hill 2019, 164). Moreover, Babel incorporates poetic innovations of mythological narratives through the implementation of different rapping and rhyming patterns that are also amplified with hip-hop sounds. The Babel song starts with the lead vocalist (Dana Tello) singing the chorus in Spanish. The chorus is a short version of the Kukama myth of origin of the Marañón river, in which snake metaphors are prominent.



Figure 7. “Babel.” Video by Radio Ucamara, 2018

Babel. Chorus

Hace muchas lunas no había ríos
Brazos fuertes, arco, y flecha, una fusión
Crearon miles de tamaños y formas
Y apareció el río la gran serpiente

Many moons ago, there were no rivers
Strong arms, bow and arrow, a fusion
Created thousands of sizes and shapes
And so appeared the river, the big snake

As a common pattern in Radio Ucamara songwriting style (and this also applies to the hip-hop genre in general), the choruses are delivered through sung vocals and the verses are rapped. While melodic singing is the preferred vocal style for the choruses, rapping is the verbal pattern for the verses. In the case of the Babel song, the verses build as rap vocals of mythical narratives delivered in Indigenous languages. The seventh verse is an example of how mythological discourse in Kukama language gets musicalized through hip-hop. The performer here refers to the mythical origin of the rivers after the falling of a sacred tree and then turns the lyrics into a poetic statement of vitality:

Babel. Seventh verse (Kukama)

Cae el árbol de lupuna, se origina la vida
Se extienden sus ramas formando los ríos
Esencia del papatúa, gotas mágicas, parana
Vida que da vida para otras vidas, tu vida, mi

The lupuna tree (ceiba) falls and life emerges
Its branches spread out, forming the rivers
Grandfather’s essence, magical drops, river
Life that gives life for other lives, your life, my

vida.

life.

The first verse, performed in Wampis language, offers an example of the musicalization of myths, but this time complemented with cosmological discourses. This verse possesses a double structure in which the first part narrates a mythological event (the origin of birds), and the second part narrates a fragment of a story about the vitality of cosmological beings (a snake).

The two parts are delivered in different vocal styles and musicalities.

Babel. First verse (Wampis)

Rap vocals

Y sol recogió sus plumas
Las introdujo en su pucuna
Que practicó desde su cuna
Y con un soplo aves salen de su pucuna

Melodic vocals

Boa siempre sale y sale
A Boa le cortaron el corazón
Pero el corazón de Boa se mueve
Mientras Boa viva en el río, tú vives, yo vivo

Rap vocals

And Sun gathered the feathers
An put them in his blowgun
Which he has used since he was born
And with one breath, birds flew from his blowgun

Melodic vocals

Boa always comes out, comes out
They cut Boa's heart,
But Boa's heart moves
As long as boa lives in the river, you live, I live

The mediatization of myth and language displayed in videoclips such as “Kumbarikira” and “Babel” shows how processes of musicalization operate not only in interactions with alterity but also in fields of sameness. Just as musical sounds can be used to manage relations with multiple kinds of others (Hill 2002, 2018), musicalities can also help to negotiate tensions and political dynamics within the Indigenous world. Radio Ucamara sound and image production has been able to rearticulate notions of indigeneity (indexed in language and mythology) to global soundscapes. Through pop music, Ucamara media-makers have contributed to changing perceptions of the Kukama language within their own communities and amplifying mythological narratives with novel aesthetic forms. Although the Babel video works as a space of interaction

between Kukama activists and multiple Indigenous others, this song draws on a notion of Pan-Amazonian indigeneity that creates a sense of sameness. The music videos have also become novel mechanisms of digitization and transmission of mythological discourses and Indigenous languages. New forms of narrating myths and new artistic ways of verbalizing Indigenous languages are encapsulated in the videoclips. By reshaping Indigenous myth and languages through hip-hop music, Radio Ucamara is not only defying primitivist images of Amazonian indigeneity but is also helping to consolidate a sense of Pan-Amazonian unity.

Final Remarks: De-Invisibilizing the Kukama

In this chapter I have analyzed how the aesthetic forms emerging from Kukama media activism have been working as powerful forces in Peruvian Amazonia's contemporary politics of identity. In a neo-colonial context shaped by decades of severe discrimination against the Indigenous population, Kukama media-makers from Radio Ucamara have relied on highly artistic digital and non-digital creations to counteract still ongoing anti-Indigenous racism in the Loreto region. Radio Ucamara's multimodal aesthetics has contributed to creatively defying Eurocentric linguistic ideologies and reimagining Kukama identities through mediatized performances of indigeneity. In Radio Ucamara politics of indigeneity, language and myth constitute the two main features of a differentiated Indigenous space. Linguistic, meta-linguistic, and mythological discourses have underpinned Radio Ucamara's approach to their mediatic struggle. While radio shows, language lessons, and beautifully illustrated books contribute to promote the transmission of the Kukama-Kukamiria language; audiovisual productions and social media activity have helped to situate linguistic revitalization efforts in histories of violence and present-day practices of discrimination. On the other hand, processes of musicalization

enacted through hip-hop sounds not only contribute to linguistic revival but also help to bring indigeneity into potential generative futures. Through the modernity indexed in global pop sounds, younger generations are redefining what it means to be Indigenous in Amazonia.

My analysis of Kukama media is thus grounded on the premise that indigeneity is a politico-aesthetic category. I have approached “aesthetics” here as a relational process (Cant 2016) that helps to shed light on the affective and sensory dimensions of Radio Ucamara politics of identity. Kukama media activists’ conceptions of indigeneity are articulated to common socio-political categories like subalternity, but also inhabit multiple artistic realms embodied in musical sound and visual creations. As in other cases around the world, Ucamara notions of indigeneity are relational and defined in contrast with the non-Indigenous world (Canessa 2018; De la Cadena and Starn 2007; Postero 2013). Kukama media creations rely on Indigenous myth and language to socially produce a specific politics of difference that situates themselves within the Amazonian ethnic landscape. In these relational spaces of self-representation and alterity, Radio Ucamara production of indigeneity is fueled by artistic and performative actions. As in other ethnographic settings (Bodunrin 2019, 2021; Leza 2019; Woloshyn 2021), Kukama activists have articulated Indigenous identities with the musical sounds and poetic forms of hip-hop culture to amplify discriminated voices to larger audiences. As I have argued, the affective and sensory features of Indigenous media aesthetics have the capacity of building political power in Peruvian Amazonia. When reworked through media aesthetics, Indigeneity acquires a replicating effect (e.g., the “Kumbarikira effect”) that makes it visible and audible.

As I have shown in this chapter, one of the main goals of Radio Ucamara media activism is to defy tropes of cultural “invisibility.” Although invisibility is a generalized condition of marginalized subjects, among the Kukama this image has become closely associated with their

identity and experiences of “acculturation.” Kukama media-makers have re-interpreted and shifted the originally empowering notion of “invisible natives” (Stocks 1981) into a contested semiotic field to reflect on their indigeneity. Through acts of mediatization, media aesthetics has become the ultimate tool for “de-invisibilization” and a weapon against anti-Indigenous power. As subaltern subjects, the Radio Ucamara team see media-making as anti-racist praxis and as a vehicle to reverse their “invisibility.” It represents one of the most compelling projects in the recent history of Kukama revitalization process. In this process, performative practices and musical sounds have generated a form “indigeneity aesthetics” highly effective in challenging Eurocentric linguistic ideologies and primitivist tropes in Peruvian Amazonia. Radio, audiovisual media, and pop music have created a space where Kukama indigeneity can be restructured. By articulating Indigenusness with the modernity and subalternity indexed in hip-hop music, Kukama (and sometimes Pan-Amazonian) indigeneity is updated. The aesthetic layers built with digital media and global soundscapes are creating modern versions (not in the Western sense) of Kukama indigeneity that permit younger generations to navigate contemporary power imbalances. Kukama media can be considered part of the novel dynamics of Amazonian Indigenous modernities, where both the “indigenization of modernity” (Sahlins 1999) and the “modernization of indigeneity” (Halbmayer 2018) takes place through beauty.

CHAPTER 3

ENACTIVE NARRATIVITIES: RUBBER-TIMES HISTORICITY AND INDIGENOUS MEDIA

Introduction

One bright June afternoon in 2017, while conducting preliminary fieldwork research in the Amazonian town of Nauta (Northeastern Peru), I was allowed to participate in a meeting with Indigenous Kukama media-makers from a Catholic-owned local radio station called Radio Ucamara. The station team, which had just recently met me, kindly accepted my request of joining them in their everyday activities. Conceived as a collaborative effort, my participation consisted not only in advancing my own research but helping Radio Ucamara with some daily tasks and exchanging ideas about how to improve their own media creation. In the middle of the meeting, we talked about the way public symbols of the rubber-economy era (1870s-1960s) were highly visible in the urban landscape of both Nauta and the city of Iquitos. We discussed how the name of nineteenth century rubber baron Carlos Fitzcarrald was used to identify streets, restaurants, and hotels, or how some local businesses used rubber-times imagery as part of their decor. Even though the purpose of this conversation was to think of ways to defy these neo-colonial images of history, we did not come up with anything clear. At least I did not.

A few months later, after returning to the United States, I started to see on social media that Radio Ucamara was announcing the beginning of an artistic project consisting of the

painting of six rubber-times-themed murals. Organized by local Kukama artists, the mural project was based on Kukama mytho-historical narratives that expressed the Indigenous perspective on the history of the rubber violence. They were painted on the walls of a well-located building close to Nauta's main square, and their elaboration was documented and shared through Facebook posts. The murals were non-digital expressions that complemented the audiovisual work (especially videos) that Radio Ucamara had been creating and sharing in the digital space to make visible Indigenous histories linked the rubber-times violence. The mural-making process was framed in social media texts and public interviews as an explicit political activity in which visual artistry was used to shed light on Indigenous marginalized histories. Moreover, this mode of remembering embodied in the murals was framed by Radio Ucamara media-makers as a form of "memory action." The artistic intervention was conceptualized as an activity seeking to generate an effect on contemporary political realities that, in essence, are driven by the same external forces that unleashed the violence of the rubber times. Whether the murals were a project already in process or an idea crystallized in that June meeting, from these offline and online events two things were clear: 1) the murals were more than just art, and 2) the rubber times were far from being over.

This chapter analyzes the intersection between historicity (understood here as modes of mytho-historical consciousness)⁴⁶ and politics, as expressed in Kukama media-making. The chapter examines the political and enactive dimensions of historical narrative discourse found in multiple expressions of Indigenous digital and non-digital media. I specifically analyze the way Indigenous actors instrumentalize rubber-times narratives through media as semiotic weapons to

⁴⁶ I also follow anthropologist Charles Stewart (2016) notion of historicity, who understands it as cultural perceptions of the past and constructed notions of temporality.

fight ethnic discrimination and “mnemonic hegemonies” (Molden 2016) in Amazonia. I focus on the case of Radio Ucamara, a Catholic-owned Indigenous station from the Peruvian town of Nauta and their strategies in confronting state and private powers operating in the region. As it has been discussed in the literature on Amerindian myth and history, mytho-historical consciousness often acts as an interpretive framework to understand the past, the present, and to orient political action (Hill 1988a, 2000; Hill and Wright 1988; Turner 1988; Wright and Hill 1986). More recently, Amazonian narrativity and storytelling have also been examined as forms of social action highly valued in contexts of political struggles (Uzendoski 2020). Building on these premises, I sustain that, when transformed into media, Kukama historicity (embodied in audiovisuals forms and art that can be observed in the digital space), gets amplified and becomes a force capable to intervene in contemporary political realities in Amazonia. Kukama narrativity in the realm of media not only grows into a tool for political advocacy but also as a socially productive activity that fuels agency. Drawing on the concepts of “embedded aesthetics” by Faye Ginsburg (1994) and “enactive aesthetics” by Patience Epps and Danilo Paiva Ramos (2020) I make the case for a notion of “enactive narrativity” operating in Radio Ucamara media practices. As these practices show, Kukama media-making is not only entrenched within the political struggles of Amazonian Indigenous peoples but is also turning narrative discourses into effective “memory actions” through artistic means.

Radio Ucamara mediatization of Kukama historicity is, thus, politically placed. Memory discourses are used to seek justice from past violence and counteract Indigenous marginalization from the national body. In the process, the mediatization of Indigenous historicity it is creatively updated and fueled with new aesthetic and poetic features expressed in sound and vision that add meaning to their long-term experiences with extractivism. Through digital and non-digital media,

Radio Ucamarca is amplifying Amazonian modes of social consciousness and reaching new global audiences. In doing so, media technologies and the indigenization of the digital space are not only reformulating local historicity but also creatively diversifying the formal expressions of Kukama narrativity. Radio Ucamarca digitality is also creating novel forms of transmission and storage of mytho-historical discourse where the digital space becomes a new repository in the diffusion of myth and history for future generations. In this chapter, I explore the different aesthetic devices that Radio Ucamarca uses to re-make and re-signify Kukama historicity. Likewise, I analyze the reflexive discourses coming from Kukama broadcasters, where they make explicit the enactive power of narrativity in the highly asymmetrical context of the Loreto region.

Ultimately, I argue that the main goal of the Kukama mediatization of the past is to counter “invisibility.” The reworking of Kukama historicity in video, murals, and other media forms, aims to make visible (and audible) local histories of violence and genocide that were silenced by hegemonic version of the past attached to Peruvian national imaginings. As in other cases in Latin America, Radio Ucamarca’s media work must be situated within larger political contexts of invisibilization of Indigenous worlds and histories from national imaginings (see Gordillo and Hirsch 2008). As I will further discuss, historicity has become another crucial front in the advocacy against invisibilization in Radio Ucamarca media-making. Indigenous media activists tend to conceptualize mytho-historical narratives as repositories of a Kukama “invisible” or “occult” history, and therefore, a cornerstone of Kukama identity. Documenting and transmitting Kukama historical narratives through media became part of actions to counter the invisibilization of their past, especially the rubber-times past.

The Rubber Boom keeps haunting Amazonia. A still loud historical trope, in Nauta the rubber past continues to emerge in everyday conversations, narrative and political discourse, different forms of artistic expression, and Indigenous media. Charged with great semiotic power, the rubber times tend to be evoked to historically situate contemporary political phenomena such as environmental destruction or economic exploitation. Significantly, these past events have not just been mythologized in Kukama narrativity but are considered an active force in contemporary Indigenous life, cosmological worlds, and political experience. In Nauta, the Rubber Boom is conceptualized as an ongoing force that has outlasted the materiality of its economic systems to be transubstantiated into spiritual beings and present-day governmental/corporate powers. The Peruvian state, oil companies, and other external agents associated to extractivism and neoliberal projects in Amazonia are considered direct extensions of the rubber-times violence and economic exploitation. Moreover, the rubber past continues to be part of people's life as a spectral reality. Rubber-times phantasmagoria manifests when locals have encounters with ghostly entities, such as ghost ships, or visions of rubber bosses embodied in cosmological figures such as jaguars and dolphins. Thus, Kukama rubber-times narrativity represents another example of the interpenetrability of time (Reeve 1988), where past and present realities intertwine in a non-linear way. Most importantly, politically speaking, the rubber times are a matter of pending justice. Many organizations and individuals in Amazonia are still demanding official recognition from Latin American states for the rubber-boom genocide. Indigenous media such as Radio Ucamara are part of these broader pan-Amazonian justice claims for the benefit of the Indigenous population. The political, spectral, and judicial dimensions of rubber-times discourses are all expressions of Kukama historical consciousness that are encapsulated in Radio Ucamara media production found in the digital space.

Enactive Narrativities: Indigenous Amazonian Historicities and Media

My analysis of Kukama media is situated within the anthropological studies of historical consciousness. Historically informed ethnographies and the ethnographic study of historicities, memory, and temporalities provided some of the major theoretical and methodological contributions in anthropology since the 1980s and 1990s (Cohn 1980; Sahlins 1981, 1983, 1985; Hill 1988; Trouillot 1995). In tension with objectivist approaches to “history,” anthropologists started to examine modes of making history (including Western professional historiography) as culturally positioned practices closely related to mythical constructions (Friedman 1992; Hirsch and Stewart 2005; Sahlins 1981). Within these new spaces of inquiry, ethnographies of cultural modes of understanding history and the way “the past” emerged in observable present-day practices became highly insightful (e.g., Palmié and Stewart 2019; McCall 2000; Rappaport 1990; Sutton 1998, 2001). From this robust corpus of literature, I draw on recent anthropological works centered on the analytical concept of historicity. I follow scholars Eric Hirsch and Charles Stewart’s (Hirsch and Stewart 2005; Hirsch 2007; Stewart 2016; see also Palmié and Stewart 2016) conceptualization of historicity as cultural perceptions, representations, constructions of pasts and futures driven by specific temporalities (Stewart 2016). Under this notion of historicity, past, present, and future are mutually implicated. Historicity refers to time as a subjective experience that produces socially situated modes of making sense of the past and anticipating the future (Hirsch and Stewart 2005; Palmié and Stewart 2016). Historicity is therefore socially dynamic and open to ethnographic research. Hirsch and Stewart’s proposition of “ethnographies of historicity” is based on studying how multiple notions and accounts of the past and future take form in present-day realities, shaped by politics and emotional dispositions. Under this notion of historicity, dream practices, songs, dramatic performances, rituals, and landscapes can be

considered “histories.” These histories can, thus, be studied as another form of expressive culture, alongside myth and ritual, that let people build their own regimes of historicity (Hirsch and Steward 2005). As Palmié and Stewart (2019) argue, historical experience can emerge in practices such as reenactments, historical fiction, biographies, pictorial media, film, or music.⁴⁷

Scholarly interest in the study of myth/history, historicities, memory, and temporalities has been paramount in the anthropology of Indigenous Amazonia. Since the mid-twentieth century, the intellectual examination of Amazonian conceptualizations of time has fostered some of the major theoretical contributions and debates in the discipline. Claude Levi-Strauss’s classic analysis of Amazonian mythological systems in the 1960s (Levi-Strauss 1969, 1973, 1978, 1981), and Joana Overing Kaplan’s (1977) interest in native Amazonian representation of social time and space in the 1970s, represent seminal efforts in this field of inquiry. By the 1980s, in the context of intense debates over the disciplinary engagement between history and anthropology, a radical shift took place in the studies of Amerindian notions of history. The 1988 ethnographic book *Rethinking History and Myth* edited by Jonathan Hill opened a new set of highly influential debates in the study of Amerindian representations of the past (both in Amazonia and the Andes). This collaborative effort constituted a critical departure from synchronic structuralist approaches and ahistorical portrayal of Amazonian Indigenous peoples. The major contribution of the volume was to shed light on the dynamism and complementarity of Indigenous modes of mythic and historical consciousness, encapsulated in a single analytical

⁴⁷ In the 2000s and 2010s decades, ethnographic research on historicities has been prolific. Anthropologists have explored issues of memory and historical consciousness within multiple phenomena, among them: prophetic movements (Blanes 2011), rituals for ancestors (Geană 2005), spaces of terror (Gordillo 2002), emotional organization of the past (Hermann 2005), periodizations in rural communities (Hodges 2010), or spirit possessions (Lambek 2016), to name a few.

unit (Hill 1988a; Turner 1988). Amerindian modes of historical consciousness were examined in the multiple ways Indigenous people interpreted their historical experiences with colonial and national states, including violent historical periods in Amazonia such as the Rubber Boom (Chernela 1988; Hill and Wright 1988; Reeve 1988). The volume expanded on crucial theoretical discussions still relevant today regarding issues of agency, narrativity, alterity, expressive forms, Indigenous politics, and social action (Hill 1988a, Turner 1988).

Amazonian Indigenous myth and history became an important feature of ethnographic and ethnohistorical production in the following decades. Amazonianist anthropology explored the way historicity was inscribed in narrative discourses, oratory, ritual, and Indigenous geographies (e.g., Basso 1995; Cormier 2003; Dean 1994; Espinosa 2012, 2016; Espinosa et al 2021; Gow 1991, 2001; Graham 1995; Hill 1989, 2000; Oakdale 2001; Santos-Granero 1998; Severi 1993; Tylor 1993; Vidal 2003). A series of ethnographic edited volumes also continued examining native Amazonian historical constructions, such as Bruce Albert and Alcida Ramos *Pacificando o Branco* (2000), dedicated to Indigenous cosmologies of white/mestizo relations; and, from a more ethnohistorical perspective, Neil Whitehead's *Histories and Historicities in Amazonia* (2003). In 2007, Carlos Fausto and Michael Heckenberger revisited some of the theoretical points pushed forward in the *Rethinking History and Myth* volume (1988), also engaging in the discussions of history, agency, identity, alterity, and social action⁴⁸. Fausto and

⁴⁸ Fausto and Heckenberger dedicated some passages of their introduction to discussing the different interpretations of Claude Levi-Strauss's famous distinction between "hot" and "cold" societies and the degree of historical dynamism and awareness allowed in his model (Fausto and Heckenberger 2007; cf. Gow 2001). These passages were delivered as a direct critique to the *Rethinking History and Myth* volume in what they considered to be a misleading scrutiny on structuralism. Yet, such exegesis of Levi-Strauss's texts downplayed the crucial role of the 1988 volume in rightly confronting static metaphors fostered by structuralism and other anthropological schools where (whether intentional or not) Indigenous peoples were represented

Heckenberger frame their analysis by focusing on the way temporalities are conceptualized in Amazonia and how “regimes of historicity” are expressed in Indigenous discourses and practices.

A still neglected dimension of the history/myth debate is the way Indigenous media is reshaping Amazonian historicities and inscribing them in new political and aesthetic arenas. In the last few decades, alongside narrative, ritual, music, painting, and other forms of expressive culture, media technologies have become one of the major vehicles for the re-making and re-telling of mytho-historical discourses in Amazonia. Indigenous mythical and historical narratives have become a central topic in the making of videos, films, radio shows, podcasts, and other forms of media communication (see Bermúdez and Uzendoski 2018; Uzendoski 2020). Through media practices, Amazonian mytho-histories have begun to transcend their conventional spheres of circulation by reaching out the digital space and creating new spaces for political engagement and artistic creativity. Nevertheless, there are still limited scholarly efforts in understanding in the way media is reshaping Indigenous modes of historical consciousness. What are the political and aesthetic implications of turning mytho-historical narrative discourses into media? What happens when myth and history are expressed in binary codes circulating in the digital space? What kind of social and cultural mediations are taking place in the making of these new modes of self-representation and self-creation attached to temporalities? How are myth and history emerging in Facebook posts or YouTube videos in the current political landscapes of Amazonia?

The study of media-making in Indigenous Amazonia had a promising start in the 1990s with the work of Terence Turner and the Kayapo Video Project (Turner 1991, 1992, 1995, 2002a, 2002b). Turner analyzed the sociopolitical and aesthetics dimensions of Kayapo media-

as societies denying time or living too far from history (Hill 2009, 2020; Hill and Wright 1988; see also Fabian 1983).

making practices by paying attention to the social and textual configurations of Kayapo video. But despite Tuner's influence, Amazonian Indigenous media had been mostly neglected (notable exceptions are Espinosa 1998; Dean 2004). Only until recent years, after the rapid expansion of the internet and access to digital communication, media started to be a topic of inquiry by some Amazonianists (Graham 2016; Leite 2014; Oyarce-Cruz et al 2019; Pace 2018; Virtanen 2015). Patricia Bermúdez and Michael Uzendoski's (2018) work on the polyphonic aesthetics of Indigenous cinema in Ecuador, represents a significant contribution in the study of Amazonian media, politics, and the re-shaping of mythic narratives. Similar studies from other disciplines have recently been focusing on the links between media and memory, such as the work of Andrea Cabel and her analysis of Kukama narrative videos through the politico-aesthetic concept of "*voz memoriosa*" (memory voice) (Cabel 2022).

Although examinations of the interplay between media and historicity are not copious in Amazonian anthropology, anthropologists interested in the social dimensions of media (especially Indigenous media) in other parts of the world have been concerned with the mediatization of memory and representations of the past. Faye Ginsburg concept of "screen memories" (2003), defined as "the capacity to narrate stories and retell histories from an Indigenous point of view [...] through media forms that can circulate beyond the local" (Ginsburg et al, 2002, 10), represents a major attempt to understand the way Indigenous media can re-shape (both politically and aesthetically) Indigenous historicities. The mediatization of Indigenous histories and historicities is part of larger approach that Ginsburg has conceptualized as "embedded aesthetics" (1994), namely, the impossibility of Indigenous media creations of detaching from social relations, collective political concerns, and social action. The work of Radio Ucamara exemplifies the concept of "embedded aesthetics" in Amazonia (see also

Bermudez and Uzendoski 2018, Cabel 2022), since its reworkings of rubber-times narratives through media is “embedded” in broader sociopolitical relations and longer attempts to gain official recognition and justice for past atrocities as well as to re-position Indigenous histories in the national imagination.

In this chapter, I use the Radio Ucamara case to expand on the myth/history debate in Amazonia by arguing that Indigenous mediatization of their own historicities constitutes a process of agency amplification. According to Hill (1988a) and Turner (1988), the distinction between myth and history is closely tied to the degree of awareness of social agency in historical processes. While mythic consciousness privileges structure and social orderings, historical consciousness gives priority to agency and social action (Hill 1988a, 6). Fausto and Heckenberger (2007) problematized this analytical distinction between myth and history by bringing attention to the way Amazonian Indigenous peoples tend to conceptualize agency (i.e., consciousness and social action) as a both human and non-human capacity. Nevertheless, instead of evaluating the commensurability of Indigenous and anthropological theories of agency in the analysis of mytho-histories, I situate agency (both as universal potency and a culturally placed notion) in the acts of mediatized narrative speech. Following Hill, I understand the formal intensification of Indigenous historicities developed in media practices as an instance of “social creation of meaning” (i.e., agency) (Hill 1988a, 6). This notion of agency becomes explicit when Kukama media-makers reflexively frame their use of historicity as a political action, making the mediatization of narrative discourses an act of empowerment and agentivity.

Thus, the mediatization of myth and history exceeds its meaning-making purposes to foster effective transformations. As Tuner and Hill have discussed, mythic and historical consciousness are forces that can orient political action (Hill 1988a; Turner 1988; see also Hill

and Wright 1988; Wright and Hill 1986). Moreover, as Uzendoski has argued, narrativity and storytelling constitute forms of social action (Uzendoski 2020). Building on these ideas, I argue that Radio Ucamara’s work with myth and history is both socially embedded and enactive. In combining Faye Ginsburg’s concept of “embedded aesthetics” (1994), and Patience Epps and Danilo Paiva Ramos (2020) concept of “enactive aesthetics,” (cf. Hill 1990; 1992; 1993). I sustain that Indigenous media can be politically embedded and explicitly enactive⁴⁹. The coexistence of artistic and utilitarian features found in highly poetic genera such as Indigenous shamanic incantation, can be also present when narrative discourses are reshaped by virtue of Indigenous media. As with the case of Hup incantation, mediatized mytho-historical narratives seek for action, not just merely to convey information (Epps and Paiva Ramos 2020, 11). Kukama media is therefore creating a sort of “enactive narrativity” that is “both highly artistic and maximally enactive” (Epps and Paiva Ramos 2020, 1) for they seek to materialize political claims through aesthetic agendas. While Hup shamanic poetics seeks to enact action in the cosmological space, narrative media seeks to do the same in a political-economic sphere. As I will discuss further below, through specific modes of expressions and digital production, Kukama media not only amplifies native historicities but also gives the power of generating transformative and solidary action. Here, the efficacy of the political message relies extensively in its aesthetic value (see Epps and Paiva Ramos 2020, 19). This, I argue, is an instance of the amplification of social agency.

⁴⁹ The basic premises of the enactive power of aesthetic devices can be found in Jonathan Hill’s studies of Wuakuenai shamanic curing practices in the Río Negro region of Venezuela (Hill 1990; 1992; 1993) or Ellen Basso’s studies or ritual performance among the Kalapalo of Brazil (Basso 1985). Wakuena curing rituals are based on what Hill calls “musical aesthetic of ritual efficacy” (Hill 1992, 178) that combines artistic conceptions with practical logics of curing.

Effective political action driven by the mediatization of Indigenous historicities can be seen in real politics. One of the main social outcomes of this process is the re-positioning and visibilization of Indigenous media-makers in spaces of national discussion and political participation. Through media, Indigenous voices are capable of challenging dominant national narratives by reaching national and global audiences. Through Radio Ucamara's work, Kukama mytho-historical narratives have been repositioned in the digital space in open contestation to national historical imagination in Peru. Indigenous histories move from a highly marginalized space to a place of justice seeking. Additionally, the mediatization of Indigenous narrative discourse has proven to be socially productive by amplifying shared experiences of violence in Amazonia that create awareness of common positionalities and dispositions for political engagement. While Kukama media has helped to challenge the univocality of national narratives, it has also changed the status of Indigenous versions of the past. Aesthetically speaking, Indigenous media has given historicity, mostly expressed through orality, a new aural and visual dimension. Historical images that previously had a restricted circulation have become highly public when expressed in a whole new iconography. In other words, historicity becomes visible through beauty.

The Rubber Boom: An Unfinished Business in Amazonia

Radio Ucamara's political enactment of historicity needs to be situated within the political-economy and (neo)colonial history of the Loreto region in the Peruvian Amazonia. Some of the main events from the historical period that starts in 1851 with the incorporation of the Loreto region to national and global economies (Santos-Granero and Barclay 2000), have been integrated to the mytho-historical narrative repertoire in Nauta. Due to its disruptive

character, the Rubber Boom is one of those episodes of Amazonian history that strongly resonates in current representations of the past. Overall, the peak of the rubber-economy period in Amazonia extends from 1875 to 1920 (Hill 1998, 1999). Although this cycle marks the boom and bust of rubber extraction in Amazonia, this economy had specific geographical and chronological variations. In some of these regions, rubber activities extended up until the 1960s (Santos-Granero and Barclay 2000). As it has been extensively analyzed by both historians and anthropologists, the Indigenous population became the main source of labor within the Amazonian rubber economies. Many of them were trapped in a culture of terror that included systematic use of physical punishment, enslavement/indebtedness, severe exploitation, forced displacement, disease transmission, sexual abuse, and genocide (in anthropology see Brown and Fernández 1991; Chirif and Cornejo Chaparro 2009; Hill 1998, 1999; Muratorio 1991; Nugent 2018, Pineda Camacho 2000; Santos-Granero and Barclay 2000; Taussig 1987. In history, see Córdoba et al 2015; Dean 1987; Salazar Paiva 2019; Stanfield 1998; Weinstein 1983). Some scholars have rightly criticized the general reduction of the rubber enterprise to an “economy of terror” by shedding light on the complexity of social relations and forms of voluntary work involved in its extraction (Muratorio 1991; Santos-Granero and Barclay 2000; Wasserstrom 2014). Nevertheless, there is a consensus in characterizing the Rubber Boom as a violent process that caused a significant demographic collapse and long-lasting trauma among the surviving Indigenous population. In the early twentieth century, the extreme forms of violence reported in the Putumayo region, became a matter of investigation and a topic of discussion in the emerging political field of “human rights.” The most conspicuous example of these denounces at the peak of the rubber activities in Amazonia was Roger Casement’s report on the atrocities against the Huitoto and other Indigenous population (Casement 1988). Reports such as the one by

Casement, but also Benjamín Saldaña Rocca (Varela Tafur 2017) and W.E. Hardenburg (1913) pushed forward never solved investigations against the Peruvian rubber baron Julio César Arana and the Peruvian Amazon Company (Casa Arana) that still resonate in the rubber-boom historical imagination (Chirif y Cornejo Chaparro 2009; Goodman 2010; Valcárcel [1915] 2004).

In the Loreto region of Peru, Fernando Santos-Granero and Federica Barclay (2000) have established a periodization of the rubber era that goes from 1870 to 1914. In this era, the extraction and export of rubber was Peru's most important Amazonian economy, which declined after the market was penetrated by the rubber coming from the British colonies in Southeast Asia. Contrary to previous historiographic approaches, Santos-Granero and Barclay argue that the Peruvian state had a crucial role in integrating the Loreto region to the international market, making it the most dynamic frontier economy of the nineteenth century. Santos-Granero and Barclay also question the common assumption that the rubber economy in Loreto was an "economy of terror" similar to the case of the Putumayo basin. They argue that the *habilitación* system (debt-peonage) and slave raids were not the only methods of labor recruitment since both persuasion and coercion were part of the multiple modes of coopting, controlling, and retaining workers (Santos-Granero and Barclay 2000, 34). This assumption was widely accepted due in part to the publicity that the Casa Arana scandals had during the early twentieth century and the widespread news of Indigenous laborers being "killed, flogged, put into stocks, hanged, or even burned alive" (Santos-Granero and Barclay 2000, 50). Santos-Granero and Barclay define the subsequent period, which extends from 1915 to 1962, as a transitional phase in the Loreto region, characterized by the consolidation of the agro-extractive export economy. In these decades, the rubber economy and debt-peonage relations persisted, and although Loreto was still a violent

frontier economy, most of the worst exploitative traits had attenuated (Santos-Granero and Barclay 2000).

The violence of rubber times continues to be an unsolved moral problem in Amazonia. In contemporary political discourse, Indigenous activists and non-Indigenous allies (among them lawyers and anthropologist) are constantly demanding official state recognition for the atrocities perpetrated against the Indigenous population in the context of rubber extraction. In Peru, Indigenous and non-Indigenous voices have been pushing forward the judicialization of rubber-times' crimes. As an example of this, on June 3, 2021, anthropologist Alberto Chirif and lawyer Juan Carlos Ruiz Molleda (2021), published an article in which they requested the creation of a "Commission of truth for the rubber-times crimes." This demand for a formal investigation emulates the one created in 2001 for the armed conflict that took place in Peru during the 1980s and 1990s. According to the authors, this potential commission would seek to determine the institutional responsibilities in the genocide and identify accountable actors for the crimes, not as a case based on formal prosecution but on recognition. This Commission of Truth could also have key moral implications for contemporary extractivist policies in Amazonia and the national historical imagination in Peru. Chirif and Ruiz Molleda sustain that the survivors of the rubber violence in Amazonia have the right to know about these atrocities, especially considering that extractivism continues to be a threat against current Indigenous population. The authors also argue that the Rubber Boom is part of Peruvian national history and should be acknowledged as such. The commission of truth, thus, would be a legal mechanism that invites us to reimagine historical narratives in Peru that have excluded Amazonia and portrayed rubber barons as civilizers and patriotic heroes. Under this perspective, the Rubber Boom is reframed today as a

contemporary human rights problem, and the seeking justice practices associated with it as a mechanism to make visible “invisible histories” (Chirif and Ruiz Molleda 2021).

Although the Rubber Boom trope still occupies a marginal status in national historical constructions, some Latin American states have been making attempts to address Indigenous peoples’ demands. In 2012 (from October 6 to 12), a series of commemorative events took place in the Putumayo region in Colombia to remember the rubber-times atrocities. These events were led by the Colombian state with the participation of British and Peruvian authorities, surviving Indigenous communities from Brazil, Colombia, and Peru (Uitotos, Boras, Okainas, and Muinanes), anthropologists, and representative of the Catholic Church. The events took place in the site of La Chorrera, a former estate and rubber station owned by Julio Cesar Arana. The dates coincided with Indigenous people’s day (October 12), but also with the centennial anniversary of the publication of Roger Casement’s report on the abuses of the Peruvian Amazon Company in the Putumayo region (at the time under Peruvian control) (BBC News 2012a; BBC News 2012b; Chirif and Cornejo 2012, El Tiempo 2012). La Chorrera has become a special place of memory for the Indigenous communities that survived the rubber-times genocide, and one of the most well-known places in Amazonia linked to the rubber imaginary of terror. The fact that the Casement report was taken as a historical landmark is interesting, for the report represents a seminal narrative event of visibilization of the silenced atrocities taking place in Amazonia (Casement 1988).⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Roger Casement’s use of photography in his Putumayo report can be considered an early example of the mediatization of Indigenous perspectives on the rubber-boom experience. According to Carolina Sá Carvalho, Casement’s photographs not only showed proof of the Peruvian Amazon Company’s crimes but were also based on a “pedagogy of the gaze.” Casement relied on a concept of visual evidence that required teaching the public how to see the scars on Indigenous bodies and thus make the crimes “visible” (Sá Carvalho 2018).

The events of la Chorrera showed how the rubber-boom past entered, at least for a few days, in transnational discourses of human rights and national re-imaginings. Representatives of the Colombia government, United Nations human rights commissioner, Catholic authorities, and the UK ambassador in Colombia were present. Colombian president at the time, Juan Manuel Santos, and members of the Peruvian state (although not the president) sent letters of apologies to be read at the event (Chirif and Cornejo 2012; Tello and Fraser 2016). Likewise, Raul Teteye, a local Indigenous leader, gave a speech for the governments of Colombia, Peru, Brazil, and UK asking them to teach their younger generations to treat other human beings fairly (BBC News 2012b). Alongside state events, Indigenous peoples performed their own rituals while remembering the rubber times. Indigenous leaders saw the events as an act of transitional times, a way of closing a painful era and create a new one (BBC News 2012b). According to Alberto Chirif and Manuel Cornejo Chaparro (2012), Indigenous communities conceptualized the events of La Chorrera with a symbology of vitality, knowledge, and abundance, where different expressive practices of transition took place, such as performances of dancing/singing and mural painting. The events of La Chorrera sheds light on how the rubber history is still part of the contemporary politics of the past in the realm of Indigenous-state relations in Amazonia.

While still marginal, the cultural politics of the rubber times in Peru is also slowly gaining more notoriety in national spheres. On March 29, 2017, the LUM museum (Place of Memory, Tolerance and Social Inclusion) inaugurated a showcase dedicated to this historical period. The temporary exhibition (active from March 30 to July 30, 2017) was called: “Memories of Rubber: Revelations of the Human Forest.” I had the opportunity to see the exhibition during my first visit to Peru in 2017. It narrated the chronological history of the rubber times (with a focus on the Putumayo region), the violence endured by the Indigenous population,

its subsequent formal denunciations, and issues of recovery for the future. The exhibition also included samples of contemporary Amazonian art that encapsulated Indigenous voices and memories of the rubber times. Since the LUM museum was conceived as a space to reflect on sensitive chapters of Peruvian history, the inclusion of Indigenous peoples' history of genocide aimed to change its marginal status by positioning it side by side with other major national events, such as the armed conflict that occurred during the 1980s and 1990s. In their webpage, LUM framed the Rubber Boom as an invisible portion of national history: "a little-known chapter of Peruvian history, forgotten and even ignored by the public and official history" (LUM 2017). The museumification of the Amazonian past, thus, can be considered part of the national and local efforts in using the rubber times to re-imagine Peruvian national history.

Rubber as the Substance of Memories

During my ethnographic research in the Loreto region, rubber-times imagery came up as a powerful historical trope inscribed in materiality and local discourses. In the Amazonian city of Iquitos, public symbols of the rubber era were noticeable in the monumental architecture built from the wealth of the latex industry and in the current names of some streets and local business. Streets named after nineteenth century rubber baron Carlos Fitzcarrald and restaurants named "*El Cauchero*" (the rubber merchant/tapper) are part of the urban landscape. Rubber-times images are an important piece of the city's identity and the way its past is constructed. In Nauta, whether as narratives transmitted through orality or accounts based on personal experience, the rubber past is very much part of the present and debt is a key feature in the way people evoke this history. During my ethnographic research, rubber times and experiences with debt-peonage system would easily emerge as a topic of everyday conversation. In Nauta and the lower

Marañón in general, a big part of the elderly Kukama population worked as rubber tappers during the late period of the rubber economy (between the 1950s and 1960s). The rubber workers in the lower Marañón were mostly indebted peons working for *patrones* (bosses and landholders) (Tello and Fraser 2016). Thus, many of my interlocutors in Nauta had older relatives that worked in rubber extraction tasks and had experiences with rural indebtedness under the *habilitación* system.⁵¹ Among this population, the memories around their direct experience with agro-extractives economies and the debt-peonage system tend to be morally ambivalent. Descriptions of the rubber activities and the debt-peonage system fluctuate from total rejection to positive experiences with bosses. In Nauta, many people are still haunted by memories of bosses (*patrones*), seen as hostile but sometimes also protective figures. In my conversations with interlocutors, some people depicted their *patrones* as predatory figures. *Patrones* were characterized as thieves that robbed and enslaved workers by advancing them overpriced goods (as one man told me: “The *patrones* robbed you!”). Nevertheless, a lesser proportion of the people I talked to in Nauta remembered their relations with bosses in good terms. Some locals referred to their *patrones* as “good people” who covered medicine expenses every time illness emerged.⁵²

⁵¹ In Nauta, memories of rubber times and memories of the debt-peonage system sometimes overlapped. It is worth clarifying that although the Amazonian rubber extraction was structured around the debt-peonage system, this mode of labor relation exceeded the rubber economy and included a myriad of other agro-extractive activities. Debt peonage system predated and outlasted the Rubber boom, continuing ruling many other economic activities and structuring asymmetrical relations decades after the end of the Rubber Boom (see Gow 1991; Killick 2008; Walker 2012).

⁵² In my conversations with Radio Ucayali journalists, they mentioned encountering this same ambivalence while doing their research about rubber times narratives. Some of them manifested their perplexity in finding positive memories about the rubber era. For them, it was only natural to see rubber bosses as evil entities.

Most importantly, the rubber/debt-peonage history tended to operate in Nauta as a conceptual and comparative framework to understand present-day politico-economic realities. The premise that the Rubber Boom and its main features (violence, exploitation, indebtedness) is not an event from the past, but a polyvalent force that continues to regulate Indigenous-white/mestizo relations, is prevalent in local discourses. Some of my collaborators in Nauta expressed that although there are no more *patrones*, their nature is still embodied in new external forces such as state institutions or banks. For example, José Olortegui, a local inhabitant of Nauta said that the Peruvian government is replicating what *patrones* did in the past by selling overpriced commodities to local workers: “The *patrones* are gone, but today we have the *patrones* of the government” (*José Olortegui. Nauta, 6/7/2017*). Such statement seems to be more than a rhetoric strategy. Similar references to the rubber past sometimes emerge in contemporary political discourse in Indigenous Amazonia. In a YouTube video posted by the Instituto de Defensa Legal (Instituto de Defensa Legal IDL 2019), a Peruvian organization dedicated to protecting and assisting local communities, four members of the Kukama women’s organization *Huaynakana Kamatahuara Kana* (“Women Workers” in Kukama language) from the Loreto Province appear discussing their current efforts in confronting the state and oil companies. While referring to the oil companies in the Marañón river and other contentious topics, one of the representatives, Isabel Murayari Pushima, invoked the rubber past to denounce the unfair distribution of oil wealth:

They are treating us like in the rubber times. Because within the [Pacaya Samiria] reserve, there are organized management groups, but they are also mistreated as in the time they worked [rubber]. I want to speak like this because I

am Indigenous. I want to speak like this because they continue to be mistreated. Because in the rubber times the *patrones* exploited them, now it remains the same [Instituto de Defensa legal IDL 2019].

These ethnographic registers (both offline and online) not only denote the way Indigenous actors understand contemporary oppression in Loreto through discursive parallelisms but point out to the influence of more complex Indigenous modes of historical consciousness shaping Indigenous politics. According to this vision, the Peruvian state and oil companies embody the same structures of inequality and exploitation established since the rubber times. In other words, the Rubber Boom and the Peruvian neoliberal state share the same dangerous essence and are part of the same historical process of predatory violence against Indigenous peoples⁵³. Moreover, past debt-peonage imagery still serves as an interpretive framework to read contemporary Indigenous-state relations, whether in the realm of environmental struggles or asymmetrical economies. Rather than an old distant memory, rubber times are constantly emerging in political, economic, and narrative discourse, and rubber bosses' subjectivities are considered to persist in contemporary neoliberal state and private powers. Nevertheless, rubber past imagery acquires its more elaborate forms in mytho-historical discourse. Although the elderly population in Nauta did not directly experience the peak of the Rubber Boom, they remember and narrate the stories of violence told by their parents and grandparents. In these oral narratives, moral ambivalences are not present. In Nauta and surrounding areas, stories such as

⁵³ Similar historical interpretations shape the way the Awajún remember the violent events of El Baguazo, when the Peruvian national police brutally crushed an Indigenous strike in June of 2009. According to Silvia Romio (2021), Indigenous narrations of the Bagua violence situate those events in continuity with the long-term history of hostility between the Awajún and the White-Mestizo society throughout the twentieth century.

that of a supernatural black jaguar killing rubber workers (a metaphor of a rubber boss) exemplifies the way rubber-times experiences persist in local historical imagination (see Pau 2019a, 2019b). Even today, when locals hear and narrate stories of violence, rape, and torture, they experience deep emotional pain (Tello and Fraser 2016; see also Pau 2019a).

Indigenous people's rubber-times narratives have been circulating for decades in Amazonia (Foletti Castegnaro 1985; Hill and Wright 1988; Pau 2019a; Reeve 1988; Wright and Hill 1986) always in tension with hegemonic national (white/mestizo) histories (Chirif 2009; Cornejo Chaparro 2019). The ideologies and policies of assimilation implemented from the Peruvian state towards Amazonia not only aimed to erase Indigenous language, identities, and other cultural forms, but also Indigenous histories (Dean 2002, 2015). Anti-Indigenous educational policies reproduced narratives of progress when constructing the (neo)colonial history of the lowland regions. Meanwhile, Indigenous forms of historical consciousness and versions of the past have been silenced (Trouillot 2015) or reduced to an invisible status. Nonetheless, since the 1990s, some Amazonian Indigenous peoples have been relying on media technologies and different forms of expressive culture to engage in the contested space of Amazonian politics of the past (Espinosa 1998). Radio has been a powerful political tool for Indigenous population to revitalize their memory. Such strategies have also exceeded the airwaves to enter digital fields. In the last two decades, digital media, especially the internet and social media platforms, have opened new avenues for Indigenous peoples to make visible and loud their own histories, always situated in tension with contemporary political circumstances⁵⁴.

⁵⁴ One contemporary example is the case of *Lanceros Digitales* from Ecuador. *Lanceros Digitales* is the digital media outlet of the COFENIAE (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon), dedicated to communicating the main political issues affecting the Indigenous peoples from the Ecuadorian Amazon. Their media-making work has

The digital space has been used to communicate different forms of art and audiovisual culture in Amazonia that encapsulate Indigenous modes of historical consciousness. In Peru, Radio Ucamara has been one of the most prominent media outlets effectively using memory discourses as a building block for political action.

Radio Ucamara and Kukama Historicity

Media production based on Kukama narrative discourse is one of Radio Ucamara's main fields of action. Narrativity and storytelling are expressed in radio shows, podcasts, documentaries, videos, books, mural artistry, and events of narrative performances. Ucamara has created radio programs in which Kukama elders narrate myths and other type of stories that are performed and broadcasted through the airwaves for a local audience. The Radio building itself sometimes transforms into a space of narrative exchange and performance of narrative speech through events where elders and children tell stories to an audience. Some of them are also posted on social media. For example, on December 18, 2014, a narrative event took place to celebrate the centennial anniversary of the arrival of Augustinian order to Nauta. A description of the event was posted on Facebook and included a group of photographs showing children and elders reciting narrations on a stage. In the post, Radio Ucamara director Leonardo Tello added a written description of the event: "Yesterday was a night of narrators and oral narrations at the Ucamara theater of Nauta, for the hundred years of the Augustinian presence in Nauta. Once again, two generations, children and grandfathers, tell us the Kukama history kept in the stories

been conceptualized as mode of "creating memory," this is, a historical register that can be used by local population engaged in political struggles (Palacios 2021). *Lanceros digitales* is an ally of Radio Ucamara.

of our people...” While these performative events show the value of narrativity within Radio Ucamara efforts for ethnic revitalization, the reflexive framings shared on social media point to orality as the main repository of a hidden Kukama history that is revealed through performative events and digital activity.

Additionally, the Radio Ucamara team of communicators have been conducting historical research to be incorporated in their own media creation. Apart from their usual journalistic work, their fieldwork activities have had a strong emphasis on the collection of Kukama oral histories, narratives, and biographies (mostly about the rubber times) in audiovisual formats. Radio Ucamara’s oral history project started in August 2012. It was created simultaneously with the Kukama linguistic revitalization project as a direct response to the severe anti-Indigenous racism and social exclusion that the Kukama people keeps enduring in Nauta and other urban centers in Peru (Tello 2014). This research seeks to register testimonies of experiences of violence and to create awareness of the (neo)colonial history in the region. According to the Ucamara crew, oral history research serves both to the process of media production and the design of a political agenda. Historical consciousness, explicitly becomes an interpretive tool for orienting political action and shape local “media ideologies” (Gershon 2010)⁵⁵:

The memory of our people, their stories and biographies, become important topics for doing radio, and they are the most prominent topics in our research work. We register themes such as their lives, historical processes, violence, and abundance. Each group of narratives raises political, cultural, and

⁵⁵ This concept refers to culturally specific understandings of media communication and “what kinds of utterances are most appropriately stated through which media” (Gershon 2010, 290).

social issues that our peoples have experienced over the last 500 years. This is a matter of reflection helpful to think about radio programs [...] This leads us to identify in the memory of our people, a powerful tool to think about radio, to think about society, the power relations that exist in Amazonia and how to propose different alternatives [Leonardo Tello interviewed by Cubías 2019].

This political and effective approach toward historicity in media production is usually framed in the context of an “occult” Indigenous history absent from national imaginaries. Radio Ucámara memory-media stands in open contestation with the Peruvian state hegemonic versions of history and the silencing of Amazonian subaltern versions of the past. Media therefore is envisioned as a technology with the power to make visible occult histories of violence. Radio Ucámara director Leonardo Tello (2014) referred to this notion in an article published in 2014: “How can we tell the history of our people on the radio without listening to these testimonies? How can we get the people to make these stories known, which are the stories of our country, of our Amazon, the one that was hidden from us for hundreds of years?” (Tello 2014). For Kukama media-makers, the documenting of both historical testimonies and current political events that are eventually transformed into media also seeks to create an archive that constitutes part of a memory-making process. Radio Ucámara mediatization of historical accounts does not just document but promotes and stores narratives of the past. It further creates memory by registering current events. According to Radio Ucámara journalist Rita Muñoz, it is important to document local narratives so they can return to the communities in the form of videos, documentaries, or reportages (Radio Ucámara 2018). Through an act of political transmutation, digital media

technologies become memory-making machines and the Internet becomes a field of storage and access to this memory.

Apart from this clear political stance, Radio Ucámara research practices are driven by a specific notion of history. According to Leonardo Tello and Barbara Fraser (2016), for Radio Ucámara journalists it is important that both facts and mythical elaborations reach the younger generations through media, so they gain a deeper understanding of the Kukama people's perspectives on discrimination. This valorization of mythical thinking alongside "factuality" speaks to the way history and myth are understood as single narrative units in Radio Ucámara media creations (cf. Hill 1988b). Evidential, narrative, and poetic elements are considered equally important features in the transmission of historical information, since expressive language can embody emotions that are considered key parts of the process of narrating the past. The mediatization of mytho-histories is thus sustained by the idea that younger generations need to learn history beyond facts and dates. They must learn about how violence deeply affected, and still affects, people in the area, including their relatives and themselves (Tello and Fraser 2016). Additionally, Ucámara conceptualization of history admit its multivocality and dynamism. In virtual events attended during my research, Leonardo Tello has stated how the multiple versions of the narratives they register are rooted in the interactive history of the Kukama people and Tupi-Guaranian groups in general. For him, this multivocality should not be understood as sign of historical inaccuracy but of narrative richness where all versions are valid.⁵⁶

Like other activist voices in Indigenous Amazonia, one of the main goals of Radio Ucámara's work with mytho-historical narratives is to demand justice for the rubber-times

⁵⁶ Leonardo Tello's intervention in "Narrativas, memorias e identidades desde Radio Ucámara" transmitted by the Facebook page of *Casa de la Literatura Peruana*. August 13, 2021.

atrocities against the Indigenous population. This is evident in their documentary videos, podcasts, and radio shows but also in social media activity. On multiple occasions, Radio Ucamara members have used Facebook to express their support to the creation of a formal commission to investigate the crimes committed during the rubber times. This concern is also replicated in Radio Ucamara's online written contributions. On July 16, 2016, Radio Ucamara director Leonardo Tello and journalist Barbara Fraser published an article about the persistence of memories of rubber violence in Kukama contemporary life and the way it is expressed in mythological narratives. The article entitled "Rubber Baron's Abuses Live on in Memory and Myth," explores how elders (witnesses and survivors) who experienced the last decades of Peruvian Amazon rubber era, merge historical events with myth to transmit memories of violence to the new generations (Tello and Fraser 2016). Moreover, Tello and Fraser emphasize the fact that similar situations of abuse and exploitation continue in the area. Therefore, when Indigenous media-makers re-signify these narratives, they seek to have a tangible impact on contemporary realities. Part of Radio Ucamara video-making is focused on rubber-times narrativity. In what follows, I will analyze the content of these videos in terms of their aesthetic dimensions, enactive power, and meta-discourses.

Videos: Rubber-era Narratives and the Polyphonic Aesthetics of Violence

Videomaking has been one of the most effective strategies in Radio Ucamara's engagement with Amazonian politics of the past. As it has been stated by Radio Ucamara members (both in face-to-face conversations and in different online registers), Kukama "memory," especially rubber-era memories, is one of the central topics of their media production. Rubber-times narratives have become objects of mediatization that seek to reach a

local, national, and global audience. The rubber-times stories have been narrated live in radio shows, recorded in podcasts, painted in murals, and registered in videos shared in the digital space. Radio Ucámara YouTube channel contains, so far, three videos directly related to the rubber-era narratives from in the Lower Marañón region. The videos are the product of ten years of research and interviews that Radio Ucámara members have conducted with individuals of the different Kukama communities situated in Nauta and its surroundings. Among the body of oral histories circulating in the area, rubber-times narrative discourse has constituted one of the main repertoires of stories collected by Radio Ucámara that are transformed into media content. The mediatization of rubber-times narrativity reveals how this segment of the past (and the pain that entails) is still part of people's present-day concerns in Nauta. The mediatic re-working of Kukama rubber-extraction historicity (conceived as a specific narrative genre) through video recording, editing, and sound attests to the desire to prevent the silencing of Indigenous histories and acts as a demand for still unserved justice. Video aesthetics, thus, adds enactive power to narrative discourse. For Radio Ucámara journalists, rubber-times videomaking is a statement against hegemonic Peruvian history. Videos are semiotic units that encapsulate local historical consciousness and serve as devices for the visibilization of the Indigenous experience with global capitalism.

For Radio Ucámara media-makers, the formal and technical dimension of video production is a key element in gaining political effectiveness. When discussing the nature of the videomaking process, both in person and in their own media creations, Radio Ucámara workers tend to highlight the importance of the quality of their products. Pedro Pinedo, a Radio Ucámara cameraperson I met in Nauta, appears in one of the videos (Radio Ucámara 2018) explaining that the technical quality of videos (color, lights, sound) is as important as the stories when it comes

to transmit the message and to be understood by the audience. The fact that they are not working with actors but with real people experiencing real problems makes issues of script and narrative structure flexible devices that adapt to the filming circumstances and its political contexts. For Pinedo, the main purpose of making documentaries and videoclips is that they return to the people so they can use it as they please. The other main reason is to put to circulate all their media production in the digital space so a wider audience (national and global) can be aware of the problems and aspirations of people in Amazonia. In reaching these multiple audiences, the formal qualities of the videos are carefully considered.

In the making of the rubber-times videos, Radio Ucayali has chosen to tell some of these narratives through the voices of Kukama elders by capturing moments of narrative performance. In the video edition process, these excerpts of Indigenous narrative speech are recorded and assembled with texts, images, sounds, and metanarrative discourses. Metanarrative layers are of particular importance since they pose a multivocal or “polyphonic” approach (Bakhtin 1981, 1984; Bermúdez and Uzendoski 2018; Cabel 2022; Turner 2002b) and a “multimodal aesthetics” (Uzendoski 2020) that seek to strengthen the effectiveness of the videos. While Kukama elder’s voices narrate culturally significant events, the voices of media-makers aim to reveal the underlying political meanings behind the narrations, making explicit its relevance for present times. Moreover, one of the most important features of the narratives told by Kukama elders in video is that they are situated both in the past and the present. Some of the rubber-era stories told in the Lower Marañón are part of the body of narratives that have been transmitted through generations. But some other accounts are told in first person, as autobiographical narratives of the contact with spiritual forces that have existed since the rubber times. These forces can be still witnessed today by locals, since they materialize in ghostly forms or specters of the rubber-

economy past that roam throughout the Marañón River and other spaces.⁵⁷ Radio Ucamara videos are focused on three of these narratives: Ghost ships, the Pink Dolphin, and the Black Jaguar.

Ghost ship

The videos engaged with the rubber-times narrative universe echo what Faye Ginsburg has called the “Indigenous Uncanny,” a concept developed in the context of Australian Aboriginal media production to address the way Indigenous artists represent encounters with ghosts (Ginsburg 2018). As in the case of Aboriginal media, Radio Ucamara videomaking creates an aesthetics that acknowledges the history of colonial violence, where spectral encounters become a mode of “political haunting” (Ginsburg 2018, 67). The Kukama narrative of the Ghost Ship exemplifies the kind of “rubber-times haunting” taking place in Amazonia. According to the textual description included in one of Radio Ucamara YouTube videos (Radio Ucamara 2016),⁵⁸ the Ghost Ship narrative is widespread in Peruvian Amazonia (see Flores 2016; Gow 2001; in Colombia: Marín and Becerra 2006). In most of its multiple versions, these ships are seen sailing the rivers at night when people are engaged in fishing activities⁵⁹. Radio Ucamara media-makers and Kukama mural painters explain that this is a narrative usually told

⁵⁷ Amazonian rubber times have their own uncanny worlds. In a 2012 online news article by the Colombian diary *El Tiempo*, Huitoto Indigenous leaders describe how, during some stormy nights, screams and crying can be heard in the forest surrounding La Chorrera site in the Putumayo region (*El Tiempo* 2012).

⁵⁸ YouTube and other video platforms allow users to add textual descriptions to the audiovisual content. In the context of Indigenous media, those texts functions as repositories of different forms of political discourse.

⁵⁹ For an excellent analysis of Ghost Ships narratives and Kukama subaquatic worlds, see Ramírez Colombier (2015).

by Kukama fishermen, who describe the emergence of big boats where luxurious parties are taking place (see Figure 1). In these ships the crockery is made of silver and gold and there are banquets with the finest foods and drinks, which are clearly images of rubber-times opulence. Yet, when a fisher or someone gets closer to the ship, it vanishes or sinks in the Marañón River. Ghost ships are witnessed in places where rubber commercial activity took place in the past, when steamboats used to navigate the Amazonian rivers. The ships can also appear in shamanic cosmic travels made during healing rituals and dreaming practices (SIGNIS-ALC 2017). Tello and Fraser (2016) describe the Ghost Ship story as tales of “brightly lit boats with lavish parties on board that Kukama fishermen see on the river at night but that disappear without a trace” (Tello and Fraser 2016). For them, this story clearly evokes the times when rubber merchants traveled in sumptuous boats through Amazonian rivers, enjoying a luxurious lifestyle built after the exploitation of the Indigenous population.

Ghost Ships stories are mainly covered in two Radio Ucayali videos: one entitled “Barco Fantasma original” (Radio Ucayali 2016) and other entitled “Mitos Kukama (Radio Ucayali 2020).” The videos show multiple fishermen telling stories about their encounters with the Ghost Ships. These are not stories they heard and learned, but testimonies narrated in first person. Visually speaking, the videos capture acts of narrative speech (told in Spanish from the Loreto region) in juxtaposition with visual footage of modern-day ships in the dark and images of rivers. The video entitled “Mitos Kukama” incorporates an utterance of the Ghost Ship narrative in a compilation of myths about the rubber times. Although this video was posted on the YouTube channel on February 3, 2020, it has been circulating online in other video platforms such as Vimeo since 2016. The video has also been part of online multimodal publications (Tello and Fraser 2016). This is a three-minute-long video, with no textual description, structured as a

sequence of acts of narration of three different stories. It was made for a global audience since the textual transitions are written in English and the whole video has been translated by using English subtitles. Formally speaking, one of the most prominent features in Radio Ucamara's narrative videos is the use of a multivocal strategy to convey their stories. Usually, we can hear the voices of Kukama locals vis-à-vis the voice of the Kukama media-makers (whether orally or textually). In the videos, the storytellers' voices are foregrounded. For example, in the Radio Ucamara YouTube video entitled "Mitos Kukama," a man wearing a Radio Ucamara T-shirt is shown telling a story about his own experience sighting a ghost ship:

I went to the lake at 2 in the morning. I was on the river. And when I headed home, I saw a well-lit ship, full of passengers. There was music, and they were dancing on the bow and inside. I was afraid, but I had to get closer, because my boat was full of the fish I'd caught. I had to get close to the riverbank to avoid the ship's wake. It amazed me. I looked away to the right, and when I looked to the left again the ship was gone. [Radio Ucamara 2020; translation by Radio Ucamara].



Figure 8. "Mitos Kukama." Video by Radio Ucamara, 2016.

The Ghost Ship story, narrated here in first person to a camera, exemplifies a common feature of Amerindian historical consciousness: the interpenetrability of time (Reeve 1988). Although the events narrated occurred in the present (or the recent past), they describe encounters with entities from a more distant past. This spectral image of opulence is reminiscent of the rubber-times transportation systems, large steamboats that have been navigating the Amazonian rivers since their annexation to global commerce in 1851 (Santos Granero and Barclay 2000). Like in other haunted spaces (Gordillo 2009), the Ghost Ships encapsulate the interplay between different temporalities, where images of the past intervene in present-day interactions between the Kukama people and non-human entities. Interestingly, in another version of this narrative registered in video, one Kukama man describes the Ghost Ship as an “animal” that “looks like” a boat (Radio Ucamara 2016). This recognition of the Ghost Ship as a (spiritual) animal shows how rubber-times narrativity is also grounded in local cosmological systems, where other-than-human agents have the power of transforming into animals, people, or, in this case, objects. Tello and Fraser (2016), highlight this issue of temporal overlapping by explaining that the Kukama past is mythologized in narrative but also connected with present times. In local narratives, historical events and figures from the rubber-boom-era merge with Kukama spiritual worlds, therefore making them active forces in the present.

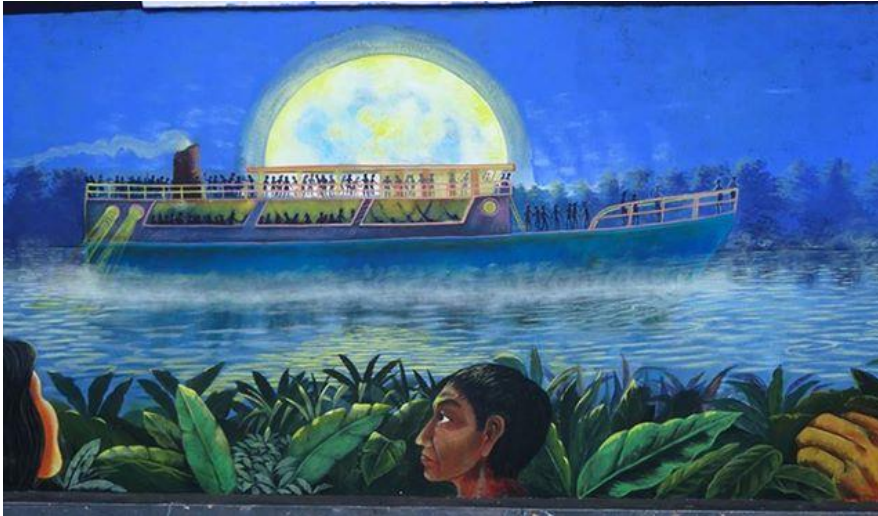


Figure 9. “Ghost Ship” mural located in Nauta, Peru. Source: <http://almainconstante2.blogspot.com/2017/09/dibujos-de-la-epoca-del-caucho-en-nauta.html>

Radio Ucamarca media adds yet another level of past-present connections by highlighting the political dimensions of storytelling. Kukama media producers make explicit the links between these images of the past with the current political events in the Marañón River in textual and audiovisual registers. Radio Ucamarca polyphonic strategy mixes Kukama fishermen voices with media-makers voices to make visible the fields of power where mytho-historical narratives are situated. Political discourse is usually expressed in the reflexive language of the media-making process. For example, the textual description of the YouTube video “Barco Fantasma original” makes explicit the enactive power of the Ghost Ship narrativity:

In almost all of the Amazon, stories of the “Ghost Ship” are heard, at one time more than in others. It is heard loudly. They appear to people while they go fishing. They produce a chain of oral communication that makes visible a strong component of the Indigenous identity, using stories, in this case, to give us a message. Which one? Many. The political situation in which we live. Depending

on the place where they are related, background themes appear. Depending on what is happening in a place and with a people. Depending on the historical processes of each place, the myth of the “Ghost Ship” comes to life, incorporates more things in its content, and it returns from the past with strong information on events that have happened. In the Marañón, clearly, one of the strongest images when listening to these stories has to do with the rubber era, a painful time for many Indigenous peoples, as well as for the Kukama, permanently attacked until today by the Peruvian State and by the companies. “The ghost ship” is the materialization of the processes of violence against Indigenous peoples from the rubber era to the present day. [Radio Ucamara 2016].

In the process of mediatization of Kukama historicity, Radio Ucamara journalists understand the Ghost Ship narrative as a politico-symbolic framework to evaluate present times. The narrative is reflexively conceptualized as a source of interpretation of current realities. This textual description also shows awareness of the dynamisms and changing nature of these mytho-historical narratives. For Radio Ucamara members, the Ghost Ship story carry underlying messages that can adapt to multiple politico-historical situations. With the accumulation of historical experience, people in Peruvian Amazonia add layers of meaning and update the narratives in order to navigate currently living realities. In the specific context of the Lower Marañón region, the Ghost Ship stories are interpretive devices of past violence that also shed light on the perpetuation of the rubber-boom predation through other agents. For example, the Ghost Ships stories are re-emerging in recent years with the intensification of boat navigation related to oil and tourism industries in the area (Tello and Fraser 2016).

Pink dolphin

Another rubber-times narrative turned into digital video is the “myth” of the Pink Dolphin (in local Spanish “Bufe Colorado”). Shapeshifting dolphins narratives are widespread in Amazonia and are rooted in the supernatural attributions of a species of dolphin (*Inia geoffrensis*) that inhabits Amazonian rivers. In most of these stories, the Pink Dolphins have the capacity to transform into human beings (usually white males) and are driven by a strong sexual energy (Ramírez Colombier 2015; Uzendoski 2010). During my fieldwork in Nauta in 2017, I could collect some versions of these stories. In all of them, the Pink Dolphin was described as a powerful animal that can transform into a *gringo* (a category locally used to describe a white or mestizo outsider, not necessarily a person from the United States). The Pink Dolphin was depicted as an animal that disguises itself as a human in order to rape, seduce, or steal women while they are taking a bath in the river. According to my interlocutors, it was dangerous for women to be by themselves in the rivers, for they could be victims of this sexually predatory being. Radio Ucamara members asserted that shamans could communicate with the Pink Dolphin when it assumes its human form. As Ramírez Colombier (2015) has discussed, the Pink Dolphin’s human form is very much described by its rubber-boss-type of outfit: wearing hats, boots, shirts, and pants. In more recent versions, the Pink Dolphin is also portrayed as wearing helmets from oil companies such as PetroPerú (Ramírez Colombier 2015, 63). As in the case of the Ghost Ship stories, the Pink Dolphin is an example of how temporalities overlap in narrativity. Although tied to strong images of a violent past, the Pink Dolphin is very much a present-day actor.

Other interlocutors in Nauta described the Pink Dolphin as a powerful spiritual force that can travel back and forth between cosmological spaces: the underwater world of the Karwara (the water people) and the earth world of the humans. In these versions, Pink Dolphins were described as “underwater doctors” living in cities beneath the rivers. In one of the narratives I collected in Nauta, told by two different interlocutors, a fisherman was arrested by the police for having committed a crime. The police took him into the depths of the river and arrived at one of the hospitals located in the cities underwater. In one of the beds of the hospital there was a white man, wounded by a harpoon. The police accused the fisherman of hurting the white man. The story ended with the fisherman in perplexity after realizing that by trying to catch a dolphin he was actually hurting a person and consequently had to be held accountable for their actions. On both registers, people emphasized the absolute veracity of those events. This narrative (grounded on the prestige associated with white people in local social hierarchies) is an example of the spiritual power of Pink Dolphins in Indigenous cosmologies, as well as the semiotic management of dangerous alterity that has emerged in the region after centuries of colonialism (see Santos-Granero and Barclay 2011).

This semiotic reworking has also taken a new configuration in local Indigenous media. Radio Ucamara videos have helped to spread and amplify these mytho-historical accounts by recording Kukama elders narrating them in their own voices. In a section of the video called “Mitos Kukama” (2020), a woman appears talking about the Pink Dolphin as an agent that participates in local human and non-human interactions (although not as a phenomenon she

personally experienced, like in the case of the Ghost Ship narratives)⁶⁰. She does not describe the Pink Dolphin through its animal-like features but through its human attributes: “The Pink Dolphin does exist. It’s a big, white man. It becomes a person when it wants to steal a woman. When it falls in love, it’s really shameless” (Radio Ucamara 2020, translation by Radio Ucamara). Tello and Fraser (2016), explain that locals represent the Pink Dolphin as an animal that “takes the form of a light-skinned man wearing boots and a broad-brimmed hat who appears in communities, courting the women and impregnating them.” These authors state that dolphin narratives, although predating rubber times, served to deal with violent situations in which rubber *patrones* would use the absence of male peons to abuse their wives and daughters. Pregnancy resulting from rape events were usually attributed to Pink Dolphins (Tello and Fraser 2016). This interpretation is another instance of the insertion of Kukama media-makers’ voices next to the narratives captured in audiovisual creation. In the “Mitos Kukama” video, there is a fragment where we can see and hear Radio Ucamara director making explicit the political connotations of the Pink Dolphin story by adding an interpretive level of analysis and reflexivity:

The myth of the pink dolphin is the one that specifically reflects on the sexual violence against women. The myths reveal the importance for us today of discovering the cruelty that people experienced during the rubber era. People still narrate these myths. But we have to be able to discover the message that they are trying to transmit through these stories. The great task for Indigenous and non-

⁶⁰ In other versions of the Pink Dolphin story registered on video, some women narrate events of sexual abuse and pregnancy as experiences that happened to close relatives (see WCS Perú 2018).

Indigenous societies is to convey this information, which is not clear elsewhere, but appear clearly in myths [Leonardo Tello in Radio Ucamara 2020].

In this meta-narrative statement, Kukama media producers shed light on the political significance and present-day relevance of the rubber-times narratives. In pointing to how these stories keep circulating as a code to express the pain of decades of violence, they show how narratives elicit interpretive actions: they must be decodified to unveil their hidden content. For Leonardo Tello, mytho-historical narratives transmit important information that cannot be seen in other spaces of the Kukama historical experience, and it is important to make that information explicit through media. Through video, Kukama media activists reach high levels of reflexivity on their own cultural expressions. Thus, the mediatization of rubber-era narrativity becomes a meta-narrative discourse where we can appreciate the explicit political purpose of videomaking in a context where Indigenous historicity occupies a marginal place. Such meta-narrative level in media reinforces the politization and agentivity of Kukama historicity.

Black jaguar

Another major mytho-historical narrative mediatized by Radio Ucamara audiovisual production is the story of the *Tigre Negro* (Black Jaguar). The Black Jaguar narrative is one of the darkest and most violent rubber-era stories documented and shared in the digital space by Radio Ucamara. In my conversations with Kukama elders from Nauta, the Black Jaguar was clearly depicted as a peasant-killing supernatural figure, a dangerous cosmological animal who only murdered the “*sangre*” (Indigenous peoples) and could not be killed with regular ammunition. As in the case of the Pink Dolphin, the Black Jaguar narratives constitute a semiotic

strategy of identification of dangerous others with cosmological animals that have transformative capacities. In Radio Ucamara media creation, we can see again the use of narrative and meta-narrative language to refer to the Black Jaguar story. In the YouTube video called “Mitos Kukama” (2020), a Kukama woman appears at her house telling the story of the Black Jaguar as an event experienced by her husband. By using a narrative style based on quoted speech, she speaks of a Black Jaguar appearance one night at the basecamp where her husband was working as a rubber tapper. The Black Jaguar killed all the workers, but her husband could escape by climbing up a tree:

“The black jaguar will eat us,” my husband told [the other peons]. ‘That is just nonsense’ [the other peons said]. He [her husband] didn’t sleep that night. He heard his companions snoring. He heard the black tiger getting closer and closer. It reached their beds. He had climbed up a palm tree with his machete. [The black jaguar] killed all of them. He heard the twenty workers screaming. It killed them all. It cut holes in their throats and sucked their blood [Radio Ucamara 2020].⁶¹

Although there are no explicit mentions to *patrones* in the Black Jaguar narratives, Radio Ucamara media producers argue that the myth of the Black Jaguar is a metaphor of the rubber bosses’ violent behavior (Tello and Fraser 2016). In public interviews, Kukama artists who painted the rubber-era murals explained that the viciousness of the Black Jaguar massacres is akin to that of the rubber bosses. For them, the Black Jaguar narratives reveal the cruelty their grandparents had to endure and that carries on today with impunity (SIGNIS-ALC 2017). The

⁶¹ As Michael Uzendoski (2020) has explained, in Indigenous Amazonia the memories of colonialism are imbued with bodily experiences of pain.

black jaguar is thus the ghostly embodiment of rubber-times *patrones*. This black jaguar/rubber boss metaphor is also mentioned in one of Radio Ucamara's YouTube videos entitled "Spot MEMORIA Radio Ucamara" (2017). In this video, media workers' voices add meta-narrative meanings not in the form of reflexive statements but in re-narrations recorded during the videomaking process. Radio Ucamara's director Leonardo Tello narrates a fragment of the story of the Black jaguar in this way:

At night, unexpectedly, the Black Jaguar appeared silently while peons slept. It killed the peons. Cutting their throats and sucking their blood. The coldness in these acts of killing could only be compared to that of the rubber *patrón*. The Black Jaguar was the *patrón* [Radio Ucamara 2017].



Figure 10. "Spot Memoria Radio Ucamara." Video by Radio Ucamara, 2017.

In this audiovisual narrative re-enactment, the analogy of the rubber boss and the black jaguar becomes unequivocal. Both entities share the same subjectivity because they are essentially the same force. This new narration in media fields has the purpose of making visible and audible the hidden meanings of the local versions. By shedding light on the colonial

historicity behind Kukama mythological discourses, media-makers enlarge the political dimension of the Black Jaguar narrative. In this re-narration, the narrator's voice is also different to that of everyday speech. Through changes in intonation when telling the story, Tello's voice adds a novel poetic level that is absent from local narrative styles. This type of speech is used for emotional impact and shapes affective responses in the audiovisual production of narrative discourse. Visually speaking, the video is also supported by images of the mural painting that capture the rubber-times bloody scenes caused by the Black Jaguar slaughters (see Figure 2). Through media, thus, narrativity acquires multiple aesthetic dimensions that nurture its main political purpose: to change social realities in Amazonia.

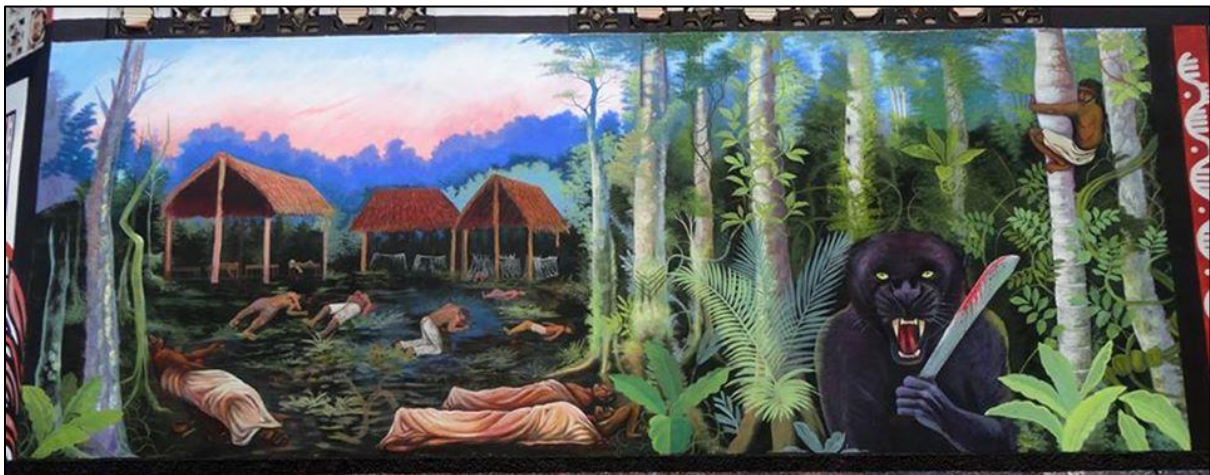


Figure 11. "Black Jaguar" mural painted by Purawa Art School in Nauta. Source: <http://lacandeladelojo.blogspot.com/2017/09/sobre-el-dominio-un-breve-comentario.html>

The Black Jaguar narrative carries a special significance in the history of Radio Ucumara's media activism. The story was particularly influential for fueling political action, as it has been made explicit by Radio Ucumara media-makers in different online registers. Radio Ucumara's director Leonardo Tello has written how, as a child, he learned the story of the Black

Jaguar from his father (who suffered the last years of the rubber era), before documenting it himself multiple times while working in media production:

I heard that story from my father when I was a boy, sitting on the palm wood floor of our house on the island of Sarapanga in the Marañón River in northeastern Peru. With smoke from my father's pipe wafting around us and the river flowing by just meters away, the tale of the *tigre negro* (literally black tiger, a reference to the black jaguar) capped his late-afternoon storytelling, after which he'd send us off to bed [Tello and Fraser 2016].

As an adult, Leonardo realized that the Black Jaguar narratives were a crude metaphor of the rubber-times violence. This interpretation was particularly important for orienting his own political consciousness and action. Tello says that this story was the first that called his attention to keep exploring the Kukama rubber-era memories and turn them into media. In a virtual event that I attended through the Facebook platform, Tello explained that he considered the Black Jaguar narrative part of Kukama history (“the history of our people, our parents, our grandparents”), and therefore needs to be known by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences.⁶² The influential effect of the Black Jaguar narrative in inspiring practices of media activism, represents another configuration of the enactive potential of Kukama mytho-historical orality. Narrativity has both the capacity of shaping “media ideologies” (Gershon 2010) and of becoming an aesthetic resource in seeking political changes.

⁶² Leonardo Tello's intervention in “Narrativas, memorias e identidades desde Radio Ucamara” transmitted by the Facebook page of *Casa de la Literatura Peruana*. August 13, 2021.

Some of the historical narratives used in Radio Ucamarca media-making are not about the Kukama being passive victims of rubber-times ghostly forces but about their own agency. Aware of the impact of their videos, Radio Ucamarca staff selected a group of stories that also conveyed the effective strategies Indigenous peoples deployed to endure rubber *patrones'* brutality. The Radio Ucamarca YouTube video entitled “Spot MEMORIA Radio Ucamarca” (2017), includes a narrative about the Kukama people using mimetic strategies to avoid violence. According to this narrative (connected once more to jaguar imagery), some Indigenous rubber peons painted themselves with the colors of some species of jaguar (known in Peru as *tigre otorongo*) to flee from their oppression. In the same video, another narrative called “Taming the *Patrón*,” deals with a different way to confront the cruelty of the rubber bosses. According to this narrative, during the rubber times, the Kukama peons washed their genitals in their bosses’ drinks so he

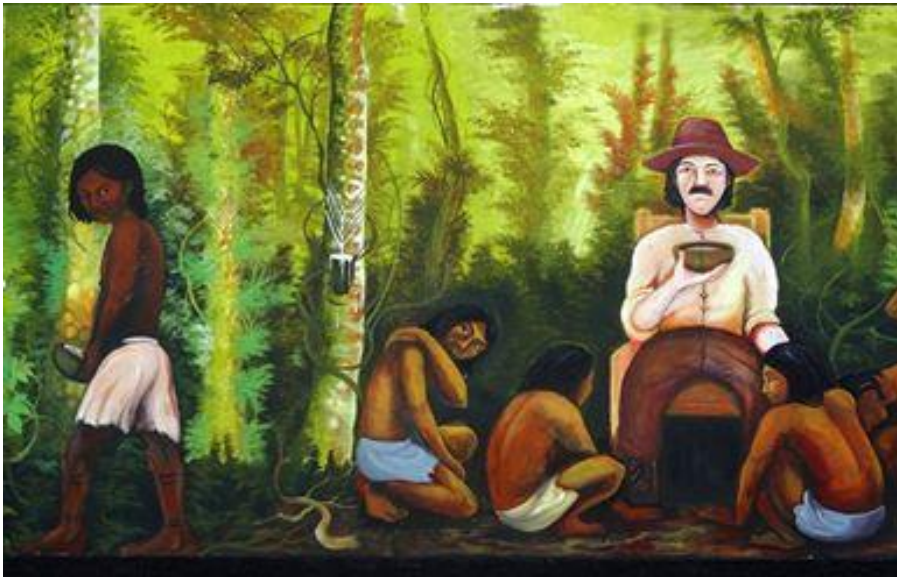


Figure 12. “Taming the Patrón” Mural. Source:
<http://lacandeladelojo.blogspot.com/2017/09/sobre-el-dominio-un-breve-comentario.html>

could be calmed. The action consisted in socializing the violent *patrón* and bringing him to

healthy social relations through acts of commensality. In this case, the strategy was not the use of evasive tactics, but the implementation of magical actions on a powerful other.⁶³

While the videos showing the violence of the rubber stories seek to visibilize Indigenous colonial histories, the stories about the Kukama people challenging the rubber *patrones*' through mimesis and magic seek to highlight and inspire political action. In a virtual event transmitted through Facebook, Leonardo Tello made this point explicit when he explained how they wanted to create, alongside the narratives of violence, audiovisual materials based on Kukama responses to domination. For him, these narratives constitute examples of resilience and positive actions.⁶⁴ In the Amazonian contexts of mnemonic violence, highlighting Indigenous agency in media becomes a symbolic statement against narratives of defeat. Such meta-narrative registers about the historicity of Indigenous resilience also make explicit their present-day relevance in the contentious field of Indigenous-state/corporate relations. The stories of resistance against rubber bosses circulating on the digital space have the purpose of evoking analogous responses among contemporary Indigenous audiences.

Formally speaking, the audiovisual strategies deployed in narratives of Kukama resilience assume a different form. For the video “Spot MEMORIA Radio Ucamarca” (2017), instead of relying on acts of storytelling from Kukama elders, Kukama media-makers narrate the

⁶³ This narrative echoes the aesthetic of political resistance found in Napo Runa storytelling on cannibal conquerors vs. ancestor shamans (Uzendoski 2020).

⁶⁴ Leonardo Tello's intervention in “Narrativas, memorias e identidades desde Radio Ucamarca” transmitted by the Facebook page of *Casa de la Literatura Peruana*. August 13, 2021.

stories themselves.⁶⁵ Unlike the previous videos, the polyphonic strategy here is not centered on the interplay between different voices, but on the interplay between voices and visuals: the video shows recorded images of the rubber-era murals painted in Nauta while a narrator's voice is on. For example, in one of the fragments of this video we can see a mural depicting a white rubber boss seated and surrounded by Indigenous peons in a forest landscape. As a chronological marker, the painting also includes a tapped rubber tree with a little bowl attached where the latex is being collected (see Figure 3). Simultaneously, we can hear the following narration:

Facing so much violence, the Kukama people sought a way of reducing the *patrón's* cruelty. They tried to tame him, domesticate him. In order to accomplish this, they prepared the drinks the *patrón* ordered, but before, they washed their testicles in the drink and then gave it to him [Radio Ucámara 2017].

This narration encapsulates an act of magical agency. It is a story about Indigenous peoples overpowering colonial agents not by direct confrontation but through a spell that requires the ingestion of bodily substances. The story acquires oral, visual, and audiovisual (digital) forms that are entangled in media. Radio Ucámara videos and murals are examples of the multiple modalities (or multimodal aesthetics) of digital and non-digital media used as expressions of Indigenous historicity. Moreover, digital and non-digital creations, rather than existing in separated arenas, are often intertwined. Non-digital expressions such as mural painting enter the digital realm when they are captured by a camera and inserted as supporting

⁶⁵ It is worth clarifying that in this same video, Radio Ucámara voices also re-narrate stories like the Ghost Ship. This communicative resource does not seem to be based on the type of story (oppression/resistance) but on the experimentation with different forms of storytelling.

images for some of the videos. Within such processes, expressions of historical consciousness suffer multiple transformations. From a verbal origin, narrativity becomes visual art in murals, and both sound and vision in video. Thus, when murals become digital, the videomaking process works as an act of re-verbalization of mytho-historical visual expression. In some videos, Radio Ucamara media-makers re-tell the stories visually expressed in the murals and take the historical imagery out of the walls of Nauta to make them accessible to a global audience.

Murals: Memory Actions on the Walls of Nauta

Mural artistry has been another important dimension of the mediatization of historicity in Nauta. The murals constitute graphic representations of Indigenous narrative discourse that move historicity out of the realm of verbal expression to be communicated through paintings. Radio Ucamara has employed expressive visual resources that go beyond telecommunications and digital technologies by transforming urban physical structures into repositories of narrativity. By virtue of muralization practices, Kukama narrative worlds (mythic, cosmological, and historical) have gone through a process of objectification via painting. In the translation of mytho-historical orality into visual art, murals have become an analog medium for the interplay between storytelling and visibility, thus becoming an additional arena for narrating the past in Nauta. The transmutation of oral histories into bidimensional images on walls captures some of the major events told in local narrativity. While some murals “narrate” myths of origin of the Kukama people and portray other-than-human worlds (Radio Ucamara 2018), rubber-times murals (the ones analyzed here) narrate violent events and strategies of resistance, depicting spectral beings.

Murals, thus, become semiotic units of visual narrativity that encapsulate Indigenous mythic and historical consciousness.⁶⁶

Mural-making is not an exclusive activity of Radio Ucamara. During my visit to Nauta in 2017, I could see other kinds of murals that were part of the visual landscape of the city. These murals were an earlier creation of the local government and, similarly, touched on some of the cosmological figures present in local narratives. Although they were not exclusively about the rubber times, they included some of themes later re-worked in Radio Ucamara's media creation, such as the Ghost Ships, the Pink Dolphin, and the Karwaras. These paintings also included written texts of the narratives associated with the figures visually represented. Some of them, had been referred in my conversations with interlocutors in Nauta. Unlike these visual narrations, Radio Ucamara murals did not have any kind of texts. They were not self-contained but highly intertextual. Radio Ucamara mural art, although purely graphic, was verbally and textually framed in other media creations such as videos, articles, and radio shows. The "silences in the paintings" came to the fore reflexively (Johnson 2018). Most importantly, unlike the municipality murals, Radio Ucamara's rubber-era murals were always framed as overtly political.

During my preliminary fieldwork in Nauta in the Summer of 2017, the importance of mural art became evident: the Radio Ucamara building was painted with beautiful murals

⁶⁶ Painting has been an expressive resource used by different Amazonian Indigenous artists to provide visibility to their cultural practices, identities, and struggles. Groups like the Arakbut from Madre de Dios in Peru have produced paintings about aspects of their lives they considered to be disappearing. Artistic exhibitions are also part of these semiotic strategies. They are usually framed as vehicles for the visibilization and transmission of Indigenous knowledge, historicity, and "unknown" Indigenous worlds. Sometimes paintings are conceived as "anti-oblivion" devices used to promote Indigenous culture among "modern societies" (CAAAP 2021).

derived from Kukama mythologies.⁶⁷ These murals exemplified the multiple modes of artistic expression Indigenous media activists have been using in collaboration with local and foreign artists. But when I was there, the rubber-era murals did not exist yet. In one of my meetings with the Radio Ucamara crew, the possibility of making visible the violence or the rubber times in public spaces came up. We were discussing how the symbols of past oppression (such as the name of rubber baron Carlos Fitzcarrald) were present in the name of streets, bars, and hotels in Iquitos. We talked about how to counterbalance the romanticization of rubber past by bringing the historical perspective of the Indigenous population. After I left Nauta, in August of 2017, I could see through social media how the Radio Ucamara team came up with the idea of using rubber-times mytho-historical narratives to materialize an artistic intervention of the city of Nauta. Based on their previous experience with mural painting, they started a process of muralization of public spaces.

Such murals were one of the outcomes of Radio Ucamara long-term research process on Kukama memory. Since 2009, the station team has been documenting narratives and testimonies from Kukama elders who lived through the late period of the rubber era. The murals added up to the audiovisual creations and radio broadcasts produced as part of the actions taken in the field of memory politics (SIGNIS-ALC 2017). In a public interview with Catholic media (SIGNIS-ALC 2017), Leonardo Tello explained that the mural project was an initiative of Radio Ucamara in alliance with the Purawa⁶⁸ Art School from Nauta and the Nyi Art School,⁶⁹ which includes

⁶⁷ The mural inside Radio Ucamara building is 18 meters long and 3 meters tall. It deals with the significance of the river and is based on three Kukama myths (La Region 2016).

⁶⁸ Purahua or Purawa means “mother of the river.” It is the name of a cosmological snake considered the master of the rivers.

artists and students mostly of Kukama identity. The artistic project was the product of a collective effort where the artists painted the narratives coming from Radio Ucamara’s research (members of the station also helped with the painting). Four Kukama artists worked on the murals with the collaboration of a French artist that had previously participated in other mural projects in Nauta (see Figure 4). The murals are situated in the old church of Nauta, and it took three weeks to complete them (SIGNIS-ALC 2017).



Figure 13. Kukama artists during the mural painting intervention. Picture posted on Leonardo Tello’s Facebook account on August 27, 2017.

The digital space became one of the main arenas of political framing for this activity. On August 17, 2017, Radio Ucamara director Leonardo Tello, made the first online announcement of the rubber-times mural-making process through a post on his personal Facebook page. He defined this activity as an “artistic intervention”, materialized with the painting of six murals about the rubber times. The process was explicitly conceptualized as both aesthetic and political.

⁶⁹ The Nyi Art School is located in the community of Puerto Miguel, in the reserve Pacaya-Samiria. It teaches art embedded in Amazonian themes. They aim to use aesthetics linked to memory, culture, identity, ecology and promotion of mythological traditions (La Region 2016).

In this announcement, Tello listed the themes of each mural, posted pictures of the mural-making process (showing the artists working on the sketches of the mural intervention), and included a public invitation to engage on “memory travel”:

We have started the intervention of Nauta with murals from the rubber era.

A week of memory, art, and politics. Six murals, six stories: 1. The mother of epidemics, 2. The black jaguar, 3. Displacements and escapes, 4. Painting yourself to escape death⁷⁰, 5. Taming the boss, 6. Ghost ships [...]. We invite you to take a memory tour on the walls of Nauta, its people, its history, to understand, respect and admire. [Leonardo Tello, Facebook post August 17, 2017].

The six murals were painted as discrete narrative units positioned next to each other in a single graphic sequence. The paintings cover two perpendicular walls at the corner of a downtown Nauta building (Nauta’s old church) (see Figure 5). From left to right, the first three murals deal with riverine haunting scenes. The “Mother of Epidemics” mural is related with rubber-times memories of diseases and depicts a spectral figure wearing a white tunic that represents the smallpox’s spirit master⁷¹. This being is seen traveling on a canoe with their offspring and arriving at an Indigenous settlement while the population tries to flee in panic. The “Displacements...” mural shows local inhabitants taking their boats to sail the rivers as they

⁷⁰ In an interview with Catholic media, Leonardo Tello called this mural “Painting yourself to escape from the *patrón*” (SIGNIS-ALC 2017).

⁷¹ The spirit “mother” or “owner” is a pan-Amazonian figure that is prominent in Kukama cosmological worlds. Despite its feminine connotations, it is a gender-neutral category that conveys protective and nurturing qualities (Walker 2012). As the Kukama of Nauta tend to say: “everything has a mother.”

escape ghostly entities that represent the white men. The third riverine scene portrays a luminous and crowded Ghost Ship navigating the Marañón river at night while a group of Indigenous locals watch it from the distance. The next three murals deal with rubber *patrones* narratives. The one entitled “Taming the boss” recreates a scene in which a rubber *patrón* is drinking from a cup while surrounded by five kneeled Indigenous men. To their left, a sixth Indigenous person is secretly washing his testicles in one of the drinks the boss will eventually drink. The “Black Jaguar” mural (maybe the most violent one) depicts an anthropomorphic feline holding a bloody machete in his hand. Behind him, several dead human bodies remain lying on a rubber camp where the trees have tapping marks. Lastly, the “Painting Yourself...” mural shows a rubber boss holding a whip in a forest landscape. On each side, there are two Indigenous men disguised as jaguars about to escape from the *patrón*.



Figure 14. Rubber-era murals located in downtown Nauta. Source: Facebook account of Purawa Escuela De ARTE. Picture posted on December 21, 2021.

The mural-painting process was defined as an inclusive activity. In his Facebook post, Tello invited the local population to interact and initiate a dialogue with the artists during their creative development at the Radio Ucamara building. In answering someone’s comments on this Facebook post, Tello characterized these activities as *acciones memoriosas* (“memory

actions”)⁷², built on Kukama elders’ narrative repertoire. The murals were explicitly conceived as the instrumentalization of historical consciousness through visual art; specifically, a visual aesthetics of oppressive experiences. The enactive potential of this form of narrativity became explicit in Tello’s notion of “memory action”. Radio Ucamara mural painting was conceived as a socially productive activity that sought to stimulate community interaction amidst an artistic event, and a form of politico-aesthetic action that fostered collective awareness on a silenced (and still ongoing) history of violence.

The rubber-times murals were discursively imbued with different political purposes. Overall, the murals were painted to strengthen the role of historicity as a building block of Radio Ucamara’s media activism. In the same spirit of the efforts to seek justice for the atrocities of the rubber times (e.g., the truth commission), the murals were explicitly made to avoid the repetition of similar events. Radio Ucamara director Leonardo Tello stated that the goal of the murals is to create historical awareness of rubber violence and to prevent this violence from happening again (SIGNIS-ALC 2017). In his view, to preserve these rubber-times memories and transmit the pain of the elders condensed in these stories, serves as a symbolic framework to understand the local history, the present politico-economic realities, and avoid future situations of violence (Radio Ucamara 2018). Rubber-Boom memories expressed in mural art help to interpret and deal with the problems derived from current extractivist predation (especially oil extraction). Most of all, art functions as a healing process and a lesson for the future. In a public interview with Catholic media, the Kukama mural painters referred to their work as a mechanism to foster respect and most importantly, to remember to live better:

⁷² In other registers Leonardo Tello called this process “memory muralization” (*muralización memoriosa*), referring to the action of painting the memories of the Kukama people (SIGNIS-ALC 2017).

We were determined to collaborate with this project after Radio Ucamara presented us with the idea of muralizing to remember these hard times. It was worth participating. The message is clear, remember to live better [...]. For there to be respect and equal rights, memory is important. You can't get out of the abyss if you don't know how you got there. You can end up thinking that you were always in the abyss if you don't remember and end up submissively validating unfair attitudes of this time. We must reflect that today's inequalities are due, among other things, to that way of looking at Indigenous people as savages and uncivilized. That must change [SIGNIS-ALC 2017].

These reflexive registers highlight the enactive politics behind narrative art. The Radio Ucamara murals reaffirm relevance of the rubber past in contemporary life in Nauta and its status as unresolved historical issue. The murals, therefore, are inscribed in broader Amazonian claims of justice for the rubber-times atrocities. In discussing the meaning and purposes of the murals with Catholic media, Radio Ucamara director, Leonardo Tello, refers to the rubber times as a painful “open wound” and as an ongoing social force embodied in present day political realities. For him, the times of violence have not ended, and they directly affect people’s lives today: “Many of the negative things that happen today have their origin in that [the rubber times]” (SIGNIS-ALC 2017). Private companies and the Peruvian state still reproduce the patron-peon dynamics in the middle of extractive activities supported by national laws. For Leonardo, to appreciate the mural art entails:

To take a memory journey through an era that is not over yet and continues to shape people's lives [...] through a *patrón-peon* political attitude. Exploiting the wealth where the people live is now backed by unjust laws. These power relations are still in force, as well as the exclusion and hatred towards Indigenous peoples. (Tello in SIGNIS-ALC 2017).

According to this view, the rubber-boom murals are situated in this long history of violation of Indigenous people's rights that continues today. For Tello, in both rubber times and present times, Indigenous rights have been subordinated to national economic interests. For the Radio Ucamara activists, the same notions of exclusion of the past exist today (death comes through pollution and land dispossession) and it must stop. Mural art, then, becomes a vehicle to make visible the pain, grievances, and demands of the people affected.

The rubber-boom murals were also discursively framed as aesthetic devices designed to amplify Indigenous historicity. The conversion of oral narratives into visual art was intended to expand narratives of the past to other artistic fields as well as to a wider local audience. In a 2017 article published on the news portal *Servindi*, Radio Ucamara director Leonardo Tello explained that the murals represented another way to amplify Kukama voices and versions of the past. He highlighted the fact that both the oral accounts and visual expressions of the rubber times represent their own way to narrate what happened. Moreover, these versions of the past are validated by the factuality of first-hand experiences coming from living victims of the rubber terror. By sharing the rubber-times mural-making process on the digital space, Tello made explicit Radio Ucamara's political intentions of spreading Kukama narrativity by using multiple modes, voices, and fluid temporalities in storytelling:

The cruelty of the rubber era affected the lives of thousands of families in the Amazon. The stories tell it, it is our own way of telling what happened. Many of us can still hear these stories in the first person. But even more, we will continue telling it in many other ways, with many peoples, until there is no space left where these stories have not been heard. But above all, we will tell it with hope, with wisdom, with indignation, making a memory journey from today, forwards and backwards. Thanks to the Kukama artists, these murals that recount the rubber era and the way it continues to harm us today, are possible. [Tello 2017].

Making the murals became an important element of Nauta landscape but also an artistic memory artifact needing maintenance. Indeed, the murals became an objective metaphor of the process of updating cultural representations of the past. Mural maintenance has been physically accomplished in terms of the restoration of the paintings, but also discursively, in terms of its promotion in the digital space. As a form of anti-oblivion practice, Radio Ucamara media-makers keep sharing pictures of the murals on social media years after they were made as a reminder of their existence and the significance of the rubber past. Three years after the murals were painted, on August 29, 2020, Leonardo Tello shared a Facebook memory of the rubber-times murals, referring to their preservation, and how they are now conceived as part of the “memory heritage” of the Kukama people. In Tello’s words: “Since then, we take care of the murals as part of the Kukama memory heritage.” Through this new conceptualization as “heritage”, the murals became a potentially enduring form of media for the transmission and revealing of painful experiences from the past. The murals, as material and artistic repositories of

Indigenous narrative “voices,” acquire multiple conceptual layers that keep updating their narrative and meta-narrative universes as the political circumstances change.

Such dynamics can be seen in virtual arenas. While the murals have an objective existence in the walls of Nauta, they also occupy an important place in the digital space. Although created for local consumption, the murals’ materiality is complemented with an extensive presence in the form of digital images circulating throughout social media, whether in Facebook posts or more complex creations, such as videos and cultural maps. The digital images of the murals make them easily replicable, and attest to the dynamic interplay between digital and analog media. Through acts of “re-mediation” (i.e., a change of medium) (Stalcup 2016), they intervene in different forms of intertextuality that are usually accompanied by reflexive and political statements. On social media, pictures of murals are used as illustrations to celebrate Kukama artists, to talk about the Covid-19 pandemic, or to make historical parallelisms with present times. For example, on September 21, 2021, the day of the Artist in Peru, Leonardo Tello shared a Facebook post with images of the rubber-times murals where he described the Kukama artists as responsible for revealing the occult history of the Kukama through paintings:

Happy Artist's Day to our Kukama artists [...], who tell us the hidden history of the Amazon and our peoples. Their work inspires and confronts a regime of concealment and lies, making us part of history, of our own history. Thanks to you, a large part of the world has meaning, color, memory, joy, and struggle. [Leonardo Tello. Facebook post September 21, 2021].

In this online utterance, the rubber-era paintings are framed under Radio Ucamara's overarching idea of struggling against the invisibility of Indigenous historicities. Both analog and digitized images of the murals are considered unveiling mechanisms of a hidden history that take part in the current efforts against national hegemonic versions of the past. Another closely related overarching notion in Radio Ucamara media production focused on narrativity is that they are imbued with transformative power. When Indigenous narratives are reworked through digital and non-digital media, they acquire a communicative and enactive dimension that was previously absent or restrained. Radio Ucamara media-makers are fully conscious of this power and make it verbally explicit.

Enactive Historicity: Narratives as Political Action

Certain narrative acts are deeply emotional. Radio Ucamara director, Leonardo Tello writes how he experienced the affective dimension of rubber-times violent stories in his own research and the way it shaped his political consciousness. This happened when he was documenting narratives from his own father:

When I sat down, audio recorder in hand, to ask my father to tell me about his life during those years, he looked me in the eye and began by telling me that everything was good back then. Then his voice broke, his hands trembled, he bowed his head, and he began to cry. As I listened, my heart ached. I became angry. I wanted revenge. That afternoon changed my life [Tello and Fraser 2016].

This powerful testimony reveals how narrative discourse can operate as a force with a transformative potential and a fuel for political action. Acts of narration can provide the emotional and symbolic background for exerting multiple forms of agency. Radio Ucamara members were not only moved by Kukama storytelling but also became fully aware of this enactive quality of narrativity, which has become a central premise behind their own media-making practices. Kukama media producers have made explicit this link between storytelling and action in multiple registers, such as public interviews, their own media creations, and their participation in public virtual events. For instance, in a public interview with Vatican News, Leonardo Tello expressed that Radio Ucamara seeks to use mytho-historical narratives in media production to promote respect from outsiders. Ucamara “uses the histories and stories coming from the local communities with symbolic force to generate changes in attitude and promote respect towards Indigenous peoples” (Tello in Cubías 2019). During my remote research period, this understanding of narrativity as a generative force became especially noticeable in a virtual event organized by Casa de la Literatura Peruana. The event was part of the “XI Congress of Children and Youth Literature: Literature and Citizenship,” a conference that took place on August 6, 7, 13, and 14 of 2021. Leonardo Tello participated on August 13, 2021, talking about Kukama narratives and the media work of Radio Ucamara. His intervention was entitled “Narratives, Memories, and Identities from Radio Ucamara” and it was developed in a dialogue with Peruvian anthropologist Marco Ramírez Colombier. Leonardo’s presentation was transmitted by the Facebook page of Casa de la Literatura Peruana, and a video recording of his participation can be watched online (Casa de la Literatura Peruana 2021).

Leonardo Tello opened his intervention by expressing his intentions of introducing the virtual audience to the Kukama world through narrativity. While sharing digital images of the

rubber-era murals as visual background, he situates the topic of Indigenous memory in a context where orality predominates as the main vehicle for registering the past. Tello explains that, given the significant lack of books about Amazonia or the Kukama written by local voices, the only way to find and document Kukama historical perspectives is through people's memories.

Kukama memory, he said, "is narrated from the wrinkled lips of our parents and grandparents" in quotidian contexts, such as travelling, working, or sharing meals. The records of that history were almost exclusively oral in a context where state literacy was imparted in Peruvian Amazonia only by mid-twentieth century. Moreover, Leonardo explained that in a context of strict anti-Indigenous racism, state public school system aimed to erase Indigenous narrativity and histories. The invisibilization of Kukama historical narratives happened not just by silencing them but by fostering Western narrativity and stories.

Radio Ucamara research efforts were thus oriented to collect memories and stories of the Kukama people to counteract this act of silencing. These stories were in turn transformed into media products (radio shows, videos, paintings) that nurtured the oral with texts, sounds, and visuals. Kukama media therefore opened novel spaces for the interplay between orality and multiple forms of textuality (see Uzendoski 2012).⁷³ For Leonardo this was an effective way to fight the detachment of the contemporary Kukama communities from history. By collecting local stories about the rubber times, Radio Ucamara realized that Kukama memories of the past were filled with sadness and pain, which made the process of registering them loaded with emotions. For Leonardo, although the stories were terrifying, exploring these emotionally complex

⁷³ Anthropological research has been challenging Western oppositions between the oral and the textual by shedding light on how alphabetic literacy beliefs and practices are socially embedded and intertwined with oral worlds (e.g., Piedra 2009; Rappaport 1994; Street 1997; Uzendoski 2012; Wogan 2018). As the Radio Ucamara case shows, media is creating novel forms of literacy and textuality that are also coexisting with oral practices.

narratives lead him to think about a different way to make media communication. Such media creation was driven by the premise that radio can potentiate Indigenous narrativity and magnify historical consciousness. For Leonardo, orality, which is a common feature in everyday activities, gets amplified when is broadcasted on radio:

Orality, which is common to all human beings, when taken to radio becomes more powerful. When this memory that I just mentioned is narrated at home, or travelling through the rivers [...], it gets stronger. But when orality is broadcasted on radio, becomes more visible and more explicit [...]. A magical human being or my deceased grandfather, when they appear in a story, they come to life for those who are listening. Orality gives it shape and describes things that we can feel through listening. When memory turns into orality and then radio, which is an oral medium, that memory becomes stronger and visible. Although all families tell their stories, only radio has the capacity to exteriorize orality and take it out of his hiding place [...]. Radio has been a vehicle that has touched a lot of people [Leonardo Tello in Casa de la Literatura Peruana 2021].

This understanding of radio as an amplifying device for historicity has been mentioned in other arenas of Radio Ucamara media creation. The mediatization and magnification of Kukama orality is based on a conscious approach of their position in a peripheric space. In a 2014 article, Tello highlighted the political and epistemic implications in amplifying Indigenous perspectives of the past through media and how it helped to act upon present day realities:

The individual and collective memory of the Kukama people is implicit in personal biographies and collective stories told from peripheral places. These places are not only spaces, but also views, a way of sensing. When memory passes through the radio, it gains strength in all actions. It becomes visible, it becomes explicit and helps to understand what is happening in our populations in the same logic of Indigenous thought, placing these discourses in other spaces and allowing them to be understood by other political and social actors [Tello 2014].

According to this appreciation, Indigenous histories encapsulate epistemic and sensorial places of enunciation that are culturally and politically situated.⁷⁴ In his 2021 virtual intervention, Tello expanded on this premise by referring to some of the practical implications of narrativity and its mediatization. He highlighted the role of storytelling as a process of healing through historical re-calibrations. For him, “what storytelling does is to break time apart. It totally breaks time.” In such a statement, narrativity is conceptualized as a force capable of disrupting temporalities and reorganizing evaluations of history. He elaborates on this by referring to the transformative power of narratives in individuals (like himself), and how a single narrative can help to re-think someone’s life history. Storytelling and its forms of narration can bring novel aesthetic dimensions, fresh perspectives, emotionality, and new ways to understand a painful past. Based in this notion, Radio Ucamara media production is constantly revisiting and

⁷⁴ The notion of memory as a sensory capacity has been examined in ethnographic analyses of food (Sutton 2011). Anthropologist David Sutton (2011) argues that both memory and the senses should not be understood as passive receptors of information but communicative channels between self and the world. Kukama media activists’ memory politics echo Sutton’s definition of “sensory memories” as active, creative, and transformational cultural processes connected to multiple temporalities.

reshaping Kukama traumatic pasts to imagine new futures for Amazonia. For Tello this is particularly significant since the violent history of the different extractive booms lives on in present-day orality: “It is not a distant history for us, it is running through our veins [...]. It is very important that we embark on this memory travelling to produce different readings of history, but also to tell the greatness of the Kukama people” (Tello in *Casa de la Literatura Peruana* 2021). Radio Ucamara media-making is therefore instrumentalizing Kukama historicity and Indigenous epistememes by virtue of a revisionist approach to confront mnemonic violence.

Apart from creating new historical understandings, media narrative discourses are also opening new avenues for identity building. Tello explained in his intervention how oral historical accounts serve to stimulate collective self-identification as Kukama. In his view, before working with rubber-times memories through the radio, there were ambiguous feelings among Kukama activists about their Indigenous identity. Radio Ucamara’s historical work became crucial to foster notions of indigeneity through acts of self-discovery: “Reconstructing all this memory process has led us to discover the history of the Amazon, to discover ourselves, and to discover the history of our families” (Tello in *Casa de la Literatura Peruana* 2021).

Yet, in the middle of this virtual dialogue, Leonardo Tello explained that the most noticeable generative effect of turning narrative into media is its socially productive character. Telling stories from the past on the radio has caused a significant response in the sociality of Nauta Kukama families. For Tello, telling narratives has had a decisive role in reconstructing social bonds. He brings up the example of elders who shared personal stories on the radio, which up to that point were completely unknown. He mentions the experience of Eduardo Silvano, an elder who endured a smallpox pandemic in 1964. Radio Ucamara broadcasted the pandemic stories of Don Eduardo live, and, as he was narrating those stories, many people called to share

their own experiences. Nauta locals started communicating their own memories of previous epidemics and how they cured themselves, an exchange that became key to face the Covid-19 pandemic. Leonardo explains that, unlike the current pandemic, where written records are abundant, knowledge from previous epidemics was only stored in orality. The mediatization of this orality turned into a socially generative force centered around notions of solidarity and cooperation:

If we work on the topic of orality [...] through radio, this flow of knowledge and stories can make visible the people who keep that knowledge, but also [...] makes us capable of getting together and helping each other, capable of generating a top-level reaction of solidarity. Orality and the stories told from the Radio, create this reaction. Then, there is Don Eduardo, he is in Nauta, his voice is coming out on the radio. In 50 years or more his voice had not been heard, after the last smallpox epidemic. Suddenly Don Eduardo, who tells his story as a child sailing on a canoe to go see his mother and his brother who were both dying, becomes topical again, becomes visible again, becomes a presence again. And not just any presence, but a motivating presence that calls for everyone's solidarity in a complicated situation like this. We believe then that our stories, even if they are not written but orally communicated and shared, can generate a massive reaction, a timely response to something like the pandemic if we communicate them well. [...]. How important is orality as a powerful tool to communicate life, stories, memories, and contingent issues such as the pandemic! [...]. Rapidly, a story can generate the reaction of a hundred, two hundred, or three hundred people or

families, as long as the story is communicated well, told well, and the narrators are respected [Tello in Casa de la Literatura Peruana 2021].

Ultimately, in his intervention, Leonardo Tello takes the politics of narrativity to a higher level. For him, Radio Ucamara memory media-making is part of a larger political movement taking place in Amazonia centered on the revitalization of Indigenous histories to fight capitalism. He calls this a new “Amazonian memory uprising.” Such movement is based on the premise that narrativity possess extraordinary transformative powers: “I believe that narration is such a powerful force that, if all the inhabitants of the Amazon told the stories of our peoples, we would make all the violent extractivist exploitation go away” (Tello in Casa de la Literatura Peruana 2021). Narrativity, thus, is conceived among Kukama media-makers as an anti-extractivist or anti-predatory force. This reflexive statement reaffirms how Radio Ucamara carries out the mediatization of Kukama historicity by amplifying the enactive capacities of narrativity in dealing with contemporary power imbalances. As in the case of the Ecuadorian Amazon, where storytelling becomes a central practice in protests and political mobilizations (Uzendoski 20202), Radio Ucamara journalists are aware of the political dimension of historicity and the relationship between storytelling and transformative practices. Through media-making aesthetics, the set of narratives transmitted through Indigenous orality become semiotic forms of creative agency and discourses capable of unleashing revolutionary actions. Kukama media, in other words, can tame the Black Jaguar.

Final Remarks

Radio Ucamara is an illustration of the novel political dynamics that Indigenous media is generating in contemporary expressions of myth and history in Amazonia. This Indigenous radio station constitutes a striking example of the capacity of mytho-historical consciousness in orienting political action and fueling social agency (Hill 1988a; Turner 1988). Kukama activists engaged in media-making technologies and practices are underpinning unprecedented reworkings of local narrative discourses, adding up new sets of aesthetic and political meanings as well as new forms of storage and transmission. This creative work has been driven by an aesthetic strategy that is not only “embedded” (Ginsburg 1994) in Kukama sociality and Indigenous political agendas but is also highly enactive (Epps and Ramos 2020). Through media, Indigenous historicity expressed in different narrative forms, is transformed into a force with generative potential. When turned into digital and non-digital products, the past becomes not just relevant for building interpretive frameworks for the present but is also used to deliberately transform contemporary realities. As I have discussed, Radio Ucamara videomaking relies on a polyphonic strategy (Turner 2002; Bermúdez and Uzendoski 2018) that combines both elders and media-makers’ voices to convey narrative and meta-narrative messages that make explicit the political implications behind rubber-era historicity. Ucamara activists seek to unveil the hidden messages of such narratives to larger audiences through reflexive discourses that fuel historical awareness and justice seeking demands. Guided by the same purpose, mural art translates oral expressions into a visual narrativity that reaches new audiences through a magnifying aesthetics of violence. Indigenous media then, becomes a tool for the amplification of social agency in neo-colonial contexts.

Indigenous media in Peruvian Amazonia also reveals the persistence of the rubber times as a historical trope in contemporary life. As expressed by my interlocutors and Radio Ucamara media production, the Rubber Boom is a historical period that lives on in Kukama orality and the ghostly landscapes that local population encounters in Nauta. Moreover, the forces that subjugated Amazonian Indigenous population during the rubber times are considered to be embodied by present-day Peruvian state and corporative powers. Radio Ucamara has become one of the multiple voices demanding official state recognition and justice for the atrocities committed during that historical period. As part of these efforts, Kukama media activists are taking rubber-era historicity to a new semiotic space by crafting media products that make rubber-times memories visible and turn them into a building block of their political struggle. Both video and mural art have become practices that highlight the violence involved in the relationships between rubber bosses and Indigenous workers. Past oppression is aesthetically repositioned to generate new approaches to contemporary relations marked by anti-Indigenous racism, political-economic predation, and environmental destruction. Ultimately, the mediatization of Indigenous rubber-times historicity becomes a vehicle for challenging national historical imagination. The crafting of media containing Indigenous versions of the past seeks to defy hegemonic versions of history where rubber barons are portrayed as civilizing heroes.

The instrumentalization of media among Amazonian Indigenous activists has also worked as a device against invisibilization. Echoing other experiences of Indigenous media (Fisher 2013; Ginsburg 2016), analog technologies such as radio have been complemented with digital media in political attempts to position marginalized Indigenous worlds in national and global settings. The station is relying on Kukama histories, mythologies, and cosmologies to shed light on the persistence of Kukama memory in a context still influenced by assimilationist

ideologies. In such context, mytho-historical consciousness (expressed in multiple forms of narrative discourse) is instrumentalized as another piece in the efforts for the revitalization of Kukama language and ethnic pride. For Radio Ucamara media-makers, thus, Kukama historicity is closely intertwined with the construction and reemergence of Indigenous identities. Likewise, the mediatization of mytho-historical narratives is aiming to make visible Kukama cosmological worlds for larger audiences. This task is specifically destined to create collective awareness and gain support in the local struggles against the environmental destruction caused by oil extractivism. As I will discuss in the next chapter, the process of visibilization of Kukama riverine cosmological world is largely sustained by mediatic processes of musicalization.

CHAPTER 4

“MAISANGARA NO MORE”: KUKAMA MEDIA AND THE MUSICALIZATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS

Introduction

One morning in June of 2017, I had the opportunity to join the Radio Ucamara team in their fieldtrips to videorecord testimonies about the recent oil spills that took place in the Lower Marañón. Thanks to their generosity, I could learn about their journalistic work and hear first-hand accounts from people experiencing the destructive power of oil. Radio Ucamara operates in an oil producing region of the Peruvian Amazonia that has been impacted by numerous spills since the 1970s. While the crew was interested in collecting information about the disruption of river ecologies, economic practices (mainly fishing), and people’s health, they were also asking questions about the assault of petroleum on Kukama spiritual worlds. In their interviews with locals, cosmological topics were always elicited. In every single conversation I witnessed, there were mentions to the figure of the “spirit mothers,” a supernatural figure common in Amazonian cosmologies and responsible for the vitality of socio-ecological assemblages in the region (see Fausto 2008). The existence of spirit “mothers” or “owners,” (sometimes embodied in large supernatural snakes) was a contested but common topic of discussion in local discourses about oil pollution. Using media to make visible Kukama cosmological realms and the way they have

been affected, has been one of their main strategies to protect Amazonian rivers. In mediatizing “mothers” and other spiritual agents, Radio Ucayali journalists were interested in capturing the impact of pollution on river’s spiritual ecologies to make media products highly effective against oil companies’ deceiving narratives. Radio Ucayali’s communicative approach is clearly based on a non-anthropocentric reading of the environment where other-than-human actors are part of local systems of sociality and economic practices. This perspective becomes even clearer in the station’s audiovisual work. Among the copious body of media creations found online, music videos were salient examples of the use of cosmopolitical discourses. One of them was based on a rock song about a demonic figure called “Maisangara,” an evil spirit embodied by oil companies.

This chapter (divided in two parts) analyzes the political and aesthetics dimensions of Indigenous media musicality in Peruvian Amazonia. It explores the way Kukama media is creating novel forms of musicalization of “others” (Hill 2018a) through new technologies of communication in the 21st century “middle grounds” of environmental politics (Conklin and Graham 1995; High and Oakley 2020). Radio Ucayali pop songs and their video performances shared in the digital space operate as aesthetic devices to confront state and corporate powers in the region. From this audiovisual corpus, I specifically examine music videos addressing the contamination of Amazonian rivers by neoliberal oil extraction. Expanding on debates around the “Middle Ground” concept and cosmopolitical approaches in anthropology, I examine the way Kukama media-makers from Nauta use urban pop musicalities (e.g., hip-hop and rock music) to invoke cosmological agents and cultivate a set of alliances with global environmentalism. I contribute to these debates by drawing on Jonathan Hill’s concept of “musicalization” (Hill 1993, 1994, 2002, 2004, 2013, 2015, 2018a, 2018b) as an analytical framework to shed light on

how Indigenous Amazonian multimodal aesthetics creates new forms of political power. Radio Ucamara songs and videoclips are produced to musically communicate with both allies (Amazonian and global activists) and enemies (state and corporations). Moreover, these forms of musical communication are based on a poetics of life and death and non-human subjectivities usually attached to two liquid substances: water and oil. The songs allow the incorporation of other-than-human voices through singing and rapping, as well as to speak directly to demonic figures embodied in oil companies. I argue that the aesthetic dimension of the new eco-political fields in Amazonia (in this case music videos), carry and an agentive power that allows Indigenous media activists to enter significant arenas of negotiation with powerful others and potentially transform political realities.

In analyzing Radio Ucamara environmentalist music videos, this chapter engages with two broader theoretical discussions in Amazonianist anthropology: the politics of Indigenous cosmological discourses and the dynamics of interethnic eco-political alliances. Instead of departing from the assumed uniformity and generalized certainty of abstract ontological premises (“ontological turn” style), I rely on Kukama media creations to examine the “pragmatic multiplicity” (Cepek 2016) and multivocality around the presence of non-human agents in political practices and discourses. In their processes of mediatization, Indigenous cosmological worlds acquire new meanings and reach new audiences. Beyond a mere focus on “radical alterity” (see Graeber 2015), music videos illustrate how Indigenous cosmological discourses can be embedded in urban culture (e.g., pop music) and national politics in Latin America (High and Oakley 2020). I also address how Indigenous media and the digital space are becoming powerful vectors in the making of new shifting “middle grounds” in Amazonian environmental politics (see Conklin and Graham 1995; High and Oakley 2020). Community media is now a key arena

in the formation of new environmentalist-Indigenous alliances. Radio Ucamara represents an example of how new digital technologies and audiovisual production is creating novel means to reach potential allies and strengthen Amazonian Indigenous movements. As a result of the impact of Indigenous media in the public imagination, a myriad of allies such as NGOs, lawyers, filmmakers, artists, scholars, and Catholic priests are becoming strong supporters of the Indigenous environmental cause and are actively engaging in media-making processes.

This chapter is thus an examination of the “embedded aesthetics” (Ginsburg 1994) of Amazonian eco-Indigenous middle grounds. My analysis of Radio Ucamara music videos contributes to keep exploring the dynamics of global soundscapes in Amazonia (Hill 2018a). Western Popular music has had a significant but hardly explored role in the constitution of environmentalist-Indigenous alliances since the 1980s (e.g., Sting supporting the Kayapo). Radio Ucamara music videos represent examples of how contemporary Indigenous pop musicalities are shaping the sonic fields of environmental politics. Echoing the way shamanic songs in Amazonia have been transferred from ritual spaces to politico-economic arenas (Hill 1994; 2002), pop songs have become some of the new sonic modalities of Kukama political praxis. Pop music is now indexical of Amazonian youth culture and has the capacity to reach wider audiences. In these processes of musicalization of Indigenous political discourse, popular music aesthetics is now part of the repertoire used to counter neoliberalism in Amazonia. Just as music operates as a central element of shamanic ritual power in Amazonia (Hill 1993), pop music is considered a tool for building secular power. Kukama media-makers have been using pop music to open spaces of communication with corporate and state powers responsible for socio-environmental destruction. Moreover, hip hop and rock songs (image and sound traveling in the digital space) are considered effective forms of communication with multiple others (human and non-human)

and sometimes a way to emulate the voice of those non-human agents. Radio Ucámara media-makers are thus providing musical and poetic dimensions to Kukama cosmopolitical discourses and sociopolitical relations in Loreto. By positioning anti-oil activism as a cosmopolitical struggle, Radio Ucámara challenges modernist assumptions in the realm of politics (De la Cadena 2010). Yet, by indigenizing the modern fields of media technologies and pop music, this radio station is also challenging still prevalent primitivist images attached to Amazonian Indigenous peoples.

Methodologically speaking, I analyze Radio Ucámara videoclips as a form of audiovisual discourse. Following the intellectual tradition of studies of music and discourse in Latin America (Sherzer and Urban 1986; Seeger 1987; Basso 1985; Hill 1993), I examine the musicalization of Kukama eco-political conceptualizations not as an ethnomusicologist but as an anthropologist interested in the role of music in Indigenous Amazonian politics. My analysis of Kukama music videos draws on discourse-centered (Sherzer and Urban 1986) and music-centered approaches (Hill 2018a; 2019) interested in the interplay between musicality and lexicality in understanding Indigenous communicative practices. I treat Kukama music videos as semiotic units that encapsulate different political and poetic discourses conveyed through sound and vision. Following Hill (2018a), I pay attention to music, musicalized speech, and musical sounds in my analysis of Kukama environmentalist media approach. This is done not only by attending to formal elements in both verbal and instrumental music, but also the visual and performative features of videoclips. My analysis of hip-hop, pop, and rock songs relies on the poetic forms and musicality of verbal artistry (mainly singing and rapping) such as rhymes, couplets, quoted speech, metaphors, and metonyms in combination with visual imagery (Amazonian landscapes and performative expression). I focus on how these musical, lexical, and visual forms are tied to

larger social, political, historical, and cosmological contexts. My analysis follows Dell Hymes' (2003) verse-analysis method to transcribe songs according to lines and verses defined by rhyming patterns, repetition, pauses, and thematic content. The verse analysis helps to bring the artistry of the songs into the textual transcription (see Uzendoski and Calapucha 2012).

These artistic and poetic features condensed in the music videos, I argue, are key aesthetic mechanisms in the construction of Indigenous political power. Rapped couplets, metaphors, electronic beats, and river visuals are ultimate sources of beauty and pleasure but also vehicles to amplify political messages that, with the support of the digital space, can reach national and global audiences. The mediatization and musicalization of Radio Ucamara eco-political discourse through videomaking is attached to a basic semiotic principle: audiovisual artistry can empower Indigenous communities in their negotiations with the neoliberal state and corporations in Peru. Through pop music, Radio Ucamara videoclips create symbolic spaces where oil powers can be held accountable. The musicalization of oil destruction (poetically described in, for example, rapped couplets) seeks to expose those responsible for the environmental damage affecting the Peruvian Amazonia since the 1970s. While this chapter acknowledges the undeniable devastation of oil power, it also goes against pessimistic narratives of socio-environmental loss (see Cepek 2012b) by highlight Kukama creative ways of fighting extractivism. Music videos shared on the digital space, have indeed contributed to positioning Kukama media-makers voices in national and transnational arenas as well as to challenge capitalist cosmologies of "nature." Radio Ucamara music videos are an example of Kukama agency and an effective tool in building real transformative power.

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first segment covers the theoretical frameworks I engage with regarding the issue of environmental politics in anthropology as well

as the context of oil extraction in the Loreto region. I finish this section by describing the main premises of Radio Ucamarca's environmental media activism. In the second part, I concentrate on the political and poetic analysis of Radio Ucamarca music videos focused on environmental issues (mostly anti-oil discourses). This section finishes with final remarks encompassing the discussions articulated in the two segments of this chapter.

Environmental Politics and Cosmopolitics in Amazonia

The extensive anthropological literature on environmental issues and multiple forms of contamination shows a significant analytical and political engagement with people's experiences, conceptualizations, and pragmatic responses to the destruction of socio-ecological assemblages, often including physical and spiritual bodies (see, for example, Auyero and Swistun 2009; Checker 2005; Little 2014; Petryna 2002; Rodríguez Aguilera 2022; Waldman 2011). In Amazonia, ethnographers working in the field of environmental politics have explored the conflictive realities emerged after the installation of state sponsored economic projects such as industrial agriculture and cattle ranching, hydroelectric dams, river dredging, deforestation, mining, oil drilling, and other forms of extractive activity. The literature produced within this eco-political analytical space has covered Indigenous and non-Indigenous people's perceptions, negotiations, accommodations, and resistance to state-corporate partnerships responsible for environmentally disruptive interventions (see, for example, Cepek 2018; Conklin and Graham 1995; High 2020, Lu et al 2016; Oliver-Smith 2014; Turner 1993, 1995). Petroleum extraction has been one the main ecologically destructive activities in Amazonia's recent history and a prominent field of discussion among Amazonianist ethnographies. Within this body of literature, anthropologists have discussed a wide variety of topics such as human rights (Rival 1993);

neoliberal rationalities (Sawyer 2004); gender relations (Belaunde 2019); Indigenous discourses vis-à-vis narratives of loss (Cepek 2012a; 2012b; Cepek 2018), conservationism (Cepek 2008, 2012b); tensions between social hierarchies and Indigenous egalitarianism (High 2007); environmental governmentalities (Cepek 2011, 2012c); and ontological and cosmopolitical discourses (Cepek 2016; High and Oakley 2020). In this chapter I examine oil-related media production in Indigenous Amazonia by looking at two sets of discussions: the cosmopolitical approach and the “middle ground” concept.

Environmental debates in Amazonia have been influenced by the intellectual movement known as the “ontological turn” in anthropology, led by scholars such as Mario Blaser (2009, 2013), Phillipe Descola (2013; Descola and Pálsson 1996) Martin Holbraad (2007, 2012; Holbraad, Pedersen, and Viveiros de Castro 2014), Bruno Latour (2004, 2012) Morten Axel Pedersen (2007, 2011), and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1998, 2004, 2013, 2015). One of the main conceptual junctions between ontological anthropologies and environmental ethnographies is their emphasis on the way Indigenous people’s cosmologies and socialities challenge Western modernist ideas of “nature” that have sustained state policies and environmental politics in South America (High and Oakley 2020). In Amazonia, the ideas of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro on perspectivism and Phillipe Descola on animism have been the main building blocks for the production of ontologically oriented ethnographies in and about the region. Drawing on ethnographies focused on Indigenous cosmologies and philosophies, both approaches question the classic Western separations between nature and culture and provide examples of more inclusive notions of humanity. Perspectivism’s basic premise is that, in Indigenous Amazonian ontological systems, non-human entities possess human subjectivities. Animal, plants, spirits and other kinds of beings carry a human essence expressed in different bodies and corporalities that

gives them a specific positionality in the world and therefore a distinctive perspective of it (Viveiros de Castro 1998). Instead of reproducing the Western assumption of the existence of a single nature and multiple cultures, Amazonian perspectival ontologies conceive one single culture expressed in multiple natures (multinaturalism). Ontological approaches, thus, are based on the notion that different people live in different and conflictive realities or different worlds (Latour 2004).

Building on these conceptual frameworks, some scholars have tried to make sense of different contexts in which other-than-human beings take part in Indigenous socio-environmental struggles. These settings have been described as “cosmopolitical conflicts” (Adamson 2012; de la Cadena 2010; Latour 2004; Stengers 2005). Under this perspective, eco-political conflicts are not simply based on “cultural differences” but on notions of “what exists” by virtue of people inhabiting “different worlds” (de la Cadena 2010; cf. High and Oakley 2020). The term cosmopolitics was coined by philosopher Isabelle Stengers in the 1990s (1997). For her, eco-political approaches are inseparable from cosmopolitical proposals. In Stengers’ definition of cosmopolitics, “cosmos refers to the unknown constituted by these multiple, divergent worlds and to the articulations of which they could eventually be capable” (Stengers 2005, 995). Stengers’ definition radically departs from the Kantian notion of cosmopolitanism as a worldwide and conflict-less model of citizenship beyond nation-states. Philosopher Bruno Latour (2004) drew on Stengers’ conceptualization to argue against modernist ideas based on the existence of one cosmos (mononaturalism). For Latour, the *cosmos* in cosmopolitics refers to a realm that is not exclusively human. Instead of reproducing the cosmopolitanist premise of building tolerance among humans with different representations of a single world, Latour’s

definition of cosmos means analytically embracing all that there is in the universe, including “all the vast numbers of non-human entities making humans act” (Latour 2004, 454).⁷⁵

One of the most notorious cosmopolitical approaches on socio-environmental conflicts comes from the work of Marisol de la Cadena (2010). De la Cadena has explained how in 21st century Latin America, Indigenous movements are increasingly invoking the presence of other-than-human beings into political practice and discourse that challenge modernist separations between nature and humanity. De la Cadena (2010) describes how Andean Indigenous peoples discursively invoke cosmopolitical agents (“earth beings”) as non-human political actors with agency. For her, Indigenous cosmopolitics transcends the ontological separation between nature and culture that sustains modern Western politics. Moreover, such assumptions represent manifestations of the existence of a “pluriverse” or multiple worlds that enter in tension in political spaces. For the promoters of the cosmopolitical approach, Indigenous discourses of non-humans participating in political conflicts are not cultural representations of reality but evidence of the existence of worlds that exceed classical notions of ethnic politics based on identity, class, race, or gender (de la Cadena 2010, see also Latour 2004, Stengers 2005). Thus, the neoliberal policies endangering social and material life are also affecting spiritual bodies. Environments

⁷⁵ The concept of cosmopolitics is part of the theoretical frameworks currently used to understand contemporary discourses about the “end of the world” and the Anthropocene (see Danowski and Viveiros de Castro 2015). Deborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro contrast Western apocalyptic narratives with Amerindian cosmologies, in which the environment is seen as a *cosmopoliteia*, a society of societies with multiple subjectivities. As they observe, the natural world and animal species are political entities that have a society behind them (Danowski and Viveiros de Castro 2015).

cannot be reduced to “natural resources” since are inhabited by beings with subjectivities and agency (see Cepek 2016; High and Oakley 2020).⁷⁶

Ontological and cosmopolitical approaches (a non-homogenous theoretical field) have been the center of heated debates regarding their epistemic and political premises (e.g., Bessire and Bond 2014; Graber 2015; Heywood 2012; Keane 2009; Ramos 2012; Turner 2009; Watson 2011, 2013). Lucas Bessire and David Bond (2014), for example, accuse ontological turn proponents of being too reductionist, of using ethnographic evidence to selectively construct simplified models of non-Western perspectives, and ignoring key politico-historic realities. In the specific case of Amazonian perspectivism, different authors have engaged in discussions about the analytical and political limits of these approaches. While Terence Turner (2009) has called out perspectivism for making ethnographic overgeneralizations and reproducing the excesses of structuralism’s a-historical abstract propositions, Alcida Ramos (2012) has characterized perspectivism for being a politically reactionary theory. Further contributions have also discussed its excessive focus on predation as a theory of sociality (Hill 2013, Santos Granero 2007) and for neglecting the subjective worlds of things and objects (Santos-Granero 2009).

Within the specific conceptual junction between ontological theories and environmental politics, debates have emerged around the validation of interlocutors’ cosmopolitical statements as to the actual existence of multiple worlds (as contrary to modernist ontologies), and the extent to which Indigenous cosmologies are embedded within global and nation-state politics (Cepek

⁷⁶ June Nash (1979) and Michael Taussig (1980) classic works on Indigenous and non-Indigenous conceptualizations of capitalism as interactions with the Devil, can be considered pre-ontological-turn examples of cosmopolitical understandings of economic exploitation.

2016; High and Oakley 2020). Michael Cepek (2016) has been particularly outspoken in his critique of the ontologically oriented anthropologists' excessive focus on abstract propositions. He enters in this debate by showing ethnographic evidence of the multivocality, contentiousness, and uncertainty of cosmological ideas in Ecuadorian Amazonia.⁷⁷ Cepek shows how these affirmations are romanticized by Western environmentalists and used in eco-political discourses. For him, these attitudes are analytically problematic and politically ineffective. Despite their epistemic-decolonizing efforts, Cepek accuses ontology anthropologists of downplaying the intellectual and analytic capacities of field subjects in critically assessing cosmological statements. By not being rooted in accurate ethnographies, cosmopolitical approaches tend to construct homogenizing models that end up being detrimental to Indigenous peoples' political aspirations. Reducing Indigenous politics to cosmopolitics can foster misunderstandings of local political agendas and underestimations of the real threats Amazonian communities are facing (Cepek 2016). For Cepek the idea of ethnographic research on Indigenous cosmopolitics is not to debunk local ontological discourses but to grasp their "pragmatic multiplicity," that is, their, social, affective, and epistemological complexity (Cepek 2016).

Echoing Cepek's call to evaluate the pragmatic configurations of Amazonian cosmopolitical discourses, Casey High and Elliot Oakley (2020) expand the focus on the study of Amazonian philosophies and cosmologies by looking at the way this knowledge is embedded in Latin American culture, national politics, state institutions, and alliances with non-Indigenous peoples. These authors reflect on the tensions between the Amazonianist anthropology focused on radical alterities and the fact that extractivism has placed Indigenous peoples at the center of

⁷⁷ For example, among the Cofán, some people consider that oil is the blood of subterranean non-human beings. Cepek shows how some people do not accept or are dubious about the certainty of these statements (Cepek 2016).

environmental conflicts and therefore in close relation with national politics in Latin America (High and Oakley 2020, 237). Although recognizing the crucial role of ontological discourses in Amazonian politics, High and Oakley warn about the impossibility of separating Indigenous philosophies and epistemologies from broader Latin American ideas and the risks of assuming a cohesive consensus of cosmopolitical discourses among Indigenous communities (High and Oakley 2020, 244). In this chapter I follow their suggestion of combining approaches centered on the study of Indigenous ontologies and radical alterity with those focused on global politics and Indigenous-state relations. Since socio-political mobilization and cosmological practices are both part of the multiple responses Indigenous peoples pose to colonial experiences, they are equally necessary in carrying socioenvironmental analysis in Amazonia. High and Oakley engage in such debates by revisiting the concept of the “Middle Ground” of environmental politics in Amazonia (Conklin and Graham 1995) and evaluating the way Indigenous cosmologies and concepts of nature permeate contemporary politico-economic fields.

The “Middle Grounds” of Environmental Politics

Drawing on historian Richard White’s (1991) conceptual framing, Beth Conklin and Laura Graham (1995) used the “Middle Ground” category as an analytical device to examine the emerging alliances between Amazonian Indigenous peoples and Western environmentalists in the 1980s and 1990s. In their influential work, Conklin and Graham argued that such alliances were based on the conservation of Amazonian “nature” as a common ideological eco-political agenda. This “eco-Indigenous middle ground” opened unprecedented spaces of mutual support and collaboration between Indigenous peoples and global activists (e.g., pro-environmentalist and pro-Indigenous NGOs). Although, such alliances were embedded in asymmetries of power

between actors with different positionalities, the eco-political middle grounds in Amazonia entailed a relative political balance and created the possibility of yielding mutual benefits for the agents involved (Conklin and Graham 1995). While Western environmentalists promoted Indigenous struggles into national and international arenas, they also used the symbolic politics around Indigenous peoples in their fight against Latin American governments and multinational corporations. Conklin and Graham also highlighted the constraints that eco-Indigenous alliances opened for Indigenous Amazonians. Global imaginaries of “ecologically noble savages” turned detrimental for Indigenous peoples’ main political demands since they led to the misunderstandings of complex Amazonian realities. The middle ground concept sought to call attention to the essentialist imaginaries of environmentalist allies by shedding light on the multivocality of environmentalist perspectives within Amazonian communities (Conklin 2020).

The Middle Ground model as a conceptual framework for discussing Amazonian environmental politics has been the subject of recent theoretical developments and expansions⁷⁸. Reflecting on the 1995 influential article, Beth Conklin (2020) warns that a middle ground is not an all-purpose conceptual tool. Not all intercultural exchange takes place in middle ground spaces. They are restricted to realms of practice and social networks where power is relatively balanced and constantly shifting (Conklin 2020). Middle grounds are also more than modes of self-representation to appeal to larger audiences. Cultural and symbolic work can foster transformations in politico-economic, territorial, and technological arenas. Furthermore, middle grounds are morally complex. Some Amazonian communities might seek to establish alliances with extractive companies and cultivate relations of dependency with environmental NGOs in

⁷⁸ See for example the *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*’s issue from June 2020 (Volume 25, Issue 2) where different authors revisit the Middle Ground concept.

order to guarantee important sources of income. Such relationships are seen as contradictory for environmentalist principles and can challenge stereotypes of autonomous Indigenous communities. Conklin shows how Indigenous peoples are embedded in global economic networks and are always creatively negotiating those relationships (Conklin 2020).

High and Oakley (2020; High 2020) expand Conklin and Graham model by looking beyond the symbolic politics of environmentalism to evaluate economic structures that are part of the middle grounds in Amazonia. They refer to the emergence of new shifting middle grounds of environmental politics in 21st century Amazonia centered on the dynamics of extractivism and conservation (High and Oakley 2020). Although the symbolism of Amazonian Indigenous peoples as icons of global environmentalism is still strong, these new middle grounds encompass complex practices where Amazonian people enact processes of accommodations, alliances, negotiations, and contestation to multiple institutions (governments, corporations, and NGOs). According to High and Oakley (2020), these new sets of alliances illustrate how Amazonian Indigenous peoples are deeply engaged with national culture and politics and, often, involved in debates on environmentalism that exceeds national spheres. Although usually overlooked in these conversations, media-making has been a fundamental part of the engagements of Amazonian people with national and transnational politics. Western media was there to support the symbolic politics of ethnicity and environmentalism that shaped this heterogeneous space. As Conklin and Graham (1995) have shown for the case of Brazil, media technologies have had an important role in the middle grounds of eco-political alliances since the 1980s.

The scholarly literature on Indigenous media shows how environmental issues have been a prominent part of the content produced by native media-makers experiencing socio-ecological pressures in different parts of the world. Media has been used to address problems of

environmental rights alongside the advocacy for land rights and identity politics (see Wilson and Steward 2008). As observed by Terence Turner (1991, 1992, 2002a, 2002b), this has been the case of some Amazonian Indigenous groups, most notoriously the Kayapo, who since the 1980s have been using videorecording technology to fight miners, loggers, and megaprojects (namely, hydroelectric dams) threatening their territories. Videomaking became one of the main strategies the Kayapo used to gain supporters from international audiences (Turner 2002a). Continuing this trend, communicative technologies such as radio, video, and social media are gaining more relevance in the construction of the 21st century middle grounds described by High and Oakley. Through different forms of digital and non-digital media and the growing access to the digital space, Indigenous peoples are increasingly gaining control of the symbolic politics of Amazonian environmental struggle. Indigenous media-makers can put out their own modes of self-representation and discourses to larger audiences and even forge durable inter-ethnic alliances (Leite 2014).

I argue that Radio Ucamara is an example of how Indigenous media is boosting new eco-political middle grounds in Amazonia. Part of the radio station's work is made possible through alliances with external actors and institutions that support different forms of Indigenous struggle. Yet, media-making is also a vehicle to enlarge and diversify those alliances. Radio Ucamara's media operations are the result of a partnership between the Catholic church and Kukama journalists. Drawing on the increasingly environmentalist discourses within the Catholic church and the influence of progressive Catholic priests in the area, Indigenous media-makers have expanded their alliances by associating with other actors such as Indigenous organizations, academics, filmmakers, lawyers, journalists, artists, and NGOs. Within these exchanges, mutual influences take place. While Kukama activists adopt and reinterpret Western environmental

discourses, allies validate and incorporate Indigenous ontological discourses into their own ideological repertoire. Following Cepek's anti-essentialist critique (2008), I argue that Radio Ucamara use of media is not just based on a mere instrumentalization of global environmentalist discourse but rooted in ontological, epistemic, and aesthetic premises deeply connected with river territorialities. Kukama mediatization of environmentalist discourse is politically savvy but socioculturally grounded. Often, the forms of embedded aesthetics (Ginsburg 1994) found in Radio Ucamara media are rooted in spiritual premises, but also challenge primitivist images by showing artistic sensitivities that connects them with Latin American culture, especially through urban popular music. Building on High and Oakley's arguments (2020), I sustain that pop musicalities are another arena in which the Indigenous Amazonian experience is embedded in Latin American culture and politics.

In this chapter, I expand the theoretical frameworks of cosmopolitical and middle-ground debates by analyzing processes of mediatization and musicalization (as defined by Jonathan Hill 2018a) of Indigenous environmental discourses. Radio Ucamara mediatization of environmental political discourses is embedded in an aesthetic regime where music occupies a key place. In examining contemporary Indigenous media-making practices, in particular music videos, I sustain that the aesthetics of musicalizations are playing a fundamental role in the dynamics of eco-political alliances and the reworking of cosmopolitical premises in online and offline spaces. Building on Michael Cepek's (2016) warning in paying attention to the pragmatic complexity of ontological discourses in Amazonia, in this chapter I analyze how non-human forces, whether they are considered real or not, are invoked in mediatic representations and imbued with aesthetic and therefore transformative powers. Songs shared in the digital space referring to other-than-human beings as politically active subjects open new spaces of action in anti-oil

struggles. Musicalizations are but one instance of the presence of non-human-actors in Loreto environmental politics. Radio Ucámara music videos are part of a corpus of audiovisual creations conceptualizing oil and oil companies as pieces of a cosmopolitical multiverse. In using cosmological discourses, Radio Ucámara media-makers seek to highlight environmental damages beyond the material (Cabel 2022) but also calling for the support of more allies.

Musicalizing Environmental Struggle

Pop music has played a significant part in the construction of Amazonian middle grounds of environmental politics since the 1980s. The partnership between British pop star Sting and Kayapo leader Ropni is one of the most famous examples of the presence of global musicalities in the eco-political alliances in Amazonia, materialized in concerts, documentaries, and wide media coverage that supported Indigenous territorial struggles in Brazil (Conklin and Graham 1995; Menezes Bastos 2012; Turner 2002b). Yet, the artistic and aesthetic dimensions of the eco-political alliances in Amazonia are usually downplayed issues among scholars. As the Radio Ucámara case demonstrates, Indigenous peoples have been increasingly relying on their own versions of Western pop music to engage in political struggle (Hill 2018a). Among the mediatic strategies of communication used to fight state-corporate partnerships (especially oil companies), music-making has been one of the most important practices in environmental activism. Since pop music can travel fast through audiences with already established pop tastes, artistry forms such as music videos have been as effective as other forms of action. Just as music is a central vehicle for communication and transformative action in ritual spaces, music can have similar impacts on politico-economic arenas.

But what exactly is the nature of the musicalizations taking place in contemporary Amazonian vis-à-vis the expansion of global soundscapes and digital media? How is popular music entering the realm of Indigenous politics? Radio Ucamara offers an exceptional case to address questions on the links between Indigenous Amazonian musicality and media. As in other Amazonian ethnographic examples, Kukama media-makers have been using musical sounds and musicalized speech to manage relations with powerful others. Radio Ucamara journalists are seeking socio-political transformations through media musicalizations that create a socialized space to foster ethnic pride and to resist the pressures of the Peruvian neoliberal state. Similar to the political use of ritual music in Amazonia, Kukama musical media can be considered a form of social action since it is based on the idea that aesthetic productions have the power to defy and change political orders (Hill 2002). Like the Wuakuenai, Kukama media-making is musicalizing “ambiguous sociopolitical relations to transform them” (Hill 2002, 359). Music serves as a resource to change their status from passive victims of neoliberal exploitation to active agents capable of transformative power. Beyond these continuities, Radio Ucamara shows how Indigenous musical practices are increasingly adopting global soundscapes in novel political musicalizations in Amazonia. The links between musical sounds and politico-historical consciousness seen in other Amazonian groups (Hill 1994; 2002) can be observed in Radio Ucamara pop songs. Music videos seek to mobilize collective solidarity and resist the violence coming from the Peruvian neoliberal state. Unlike groups using exclusively Indigenous musicality for political action, Radio Ucamara is indigenizing pop music for the same purposes: a symbolic control of history (see Hill 1994). Under this novel media aesthetics, musical sounds that come from digital audio software or instruments like electric guitars, become ways to amplify political discourses. Radio Ucamara production of pop music is not regarded as the

music of the “other” but the music of the younger Kukama generations, who are collectively creating distinctively Kukama worlds.

This speaks about communicative ideologies in Amazonia (Hill 2015), where musicality persists as a key feature of Amazonian political struggles in the 21st century. Echoing what Jonathan Hill calls “ritually powerful songs” (Hill 2015), I argue that Radio Ucamara creates “politically powerful songs” not rooted in live performances but in audio recordings in combination with visuals. Videoclips emerge from extra-ritual musicalities and create new political meanings destined to reach national and global audiences. Electronic beats, pop melodies, and rapping, work as energizing mechanisms of diffusion in the digital space. In Amazonian regions, Indigenous political leaders are also often skillful artists, poets, or musicians (Uzendoski 2020). Kukama media-makers embody a new kind of political frontline specialized in media and musical sounds. These media masters use semiotic power to confront adversaries. The Kukama music videos are used to expose or make visible the dangerous predatory others (e.g., oil companies) to enact social transformations and as a demand for harmonious relations.

In this chapter, I analyze Radio Ucamara music videos as a form of discourse. I situate this analysis in the intellectual tradition of studies of music and discourse in Latin America that started in the 1980s with the works of Sherzer and Urban (1986), Seeger (1987), Basso (1985), and Hill (1993). In examining the musicalization of Kukama political discourse, I do not take the approach of an ethnomusicologist but of an anthropologist interested in the role of music in Indigenous Amazonian politics. My analysis of Kukama musical media combines discourse-centered (Sherzer and Urban 1986) and music-centered approaches that give equal significance to the co-occurrence between musicality and lexicality (or semanticity) in understanding Indigenous discourse and communicative practices (Hill 2018a; 2019). A “music-centered

approach” places music, musicalized speech, and musical sounds at the center of cultural analysis to understand key political mediations (Hill 2018a, 175). This is accomplished by paying attention to formal elements in both verbal and instrumental music (Hill 2019,161). Furthermore, in this chapter I follow Jonathan Hill’s (2019) methodological insights in combining discourse and music-centered approaches with critical historical analysis of culture and power (Hill 2019, 162). My analysis of Kukama videos, thus, builds on an intellectual lineage interested in Indigenous discursive forms emerged in the neocolonial conflicts between Indigenous peoples and nation-states in South America (Albert and Ramos 2000; Fausto and Heckenberger 2007; Hill 1988; 2019). In the recent history of Indigenous-state relations in Peruvian Amazonia, oil extraction has been one of the most conflictive politico-economic settings where musical discourses have surged.

Oil Landscapes in Loreto

Oil, the primary source of energy in the industrialized world, has a major presence in Amazonia. The early stages of oil exploration in the Peruvian Amazon started in the 1920s (Grados Bueno and Pacheco Riquelme 2016; Orta-Martínez and Finer 2010), but its extraction begun in 1939, when the company Ganso Azul initiated operations in the Aguas Calientes oil field. Yet, the most intense period of oil exploration and exploitation in the Peruvian Amazon took place in the 1970s (Ccoillo Sandoval 2021; Orta-Martínez and Finer 2010; Santos Granero and Barclay 2000). After a phase of intense oil exploration in the late 1960s, in 1971 the companies Occidental Petroleum Corporation and Petroperú discovered large crude deposits in northern Peruvian Amazon (Loreto Department) close to the border with Ecuador. After this discovery, oil companies from the United States and Peru obtained concessions from the

Peruvian government to operate in the Loreto region (Orta-Martínez and Finer 2010; Santos Granero and Barclay 2000). The discovery of oil Block 1AB (later renamed 192) in 1971 by state oil company Petroperú⁷⁹ in the Corrientes River Basin (Trompeteros District), opened a new era of high revenue for the Peruvian national economy (Grados Bueno and Pacheco Riquelme 2016). This is what Orta-Martínez and Finer (2010) have called the “first oil exploration boom,” which turned into a highly productive period between 1979 and 1985, when oil extraction produced abundant fiscal resources and a more active participation of the Peruvian state in regulating Loreto’s economy (Santos Granero and Barclay 2000). For Santos Granero and Barclay (2000), oil governance generated a radical change in the Peruvian state’s perception towards the role of Amazonia in the national economy.⁸⁰ After the rise of international oil prices between 2003 and 2008, a second oil exploration boom took place in Peruvian Amazonia in the 2010s (Orta-Martínez and Finer 2010). By December of 2009, 41.2% of the Amazonian territory in Peru was covered by hydrocarbon concessions, often overlapping with titled Indigenous land and forest reserves (Orta-Martínez and Finer 2010).⁸¹ This second oil exploration boom was bolstered by the neoliberal government of President Alan García (2006-2011) who was aggressively committed to expand the extractive frontier in Amazonia. During this period, socio-

⁷⁹ Petroperú is a state oil company created in 1969 to replace Empresa Petrolera Fiscal. Petroperú explored and discovered oil in 1971, opening the door for the arrival of more oil companies in Amazonia as well as the construction of the North Peruvian pipeline. This pipeline was inaugurated in 1977 and, until today, has been used to pump oil from Loreto to the Peruvian coast (Santos Granero and Barclay 2000).

⁸⁰ Santos-Granero and Barclay refer to the governments of Fernando Belaunde (1963-1968), but specially the military revolutionary government lead by Gen. Juan Velasco Alvarado (1968-1975) and Gen. Francisco Morales Bermudez (1975-1980) (Santos Granero and Barclay 2000).

⁸¹ Between 1970s and 2009, 84% of the Peruvian Amazon had been under proposed or active oil and gas concessions at some point (Orta-Martínez and Finer 2010).

environmental conflict in the region, including violent clashes due to access to water, became a constant feature in the region that continues until today (Okamoto and Leifsen 2012, 193-194).

Oil Blocks are pivotal spaces in the oil landscapes of Peruvian Amazonia. Blocks 192 (512 347, 24 ha) and 8 (182 348,21 ha), both located in Loreto, are the most important and longest running oil blocks in the country, producing an average of 70,000 barrels per day between 1971 and 2008. The crude extracted from these units is transported through the North Peruvian pipeline to refineries on the coast (Grados Bueno and Pacheco Riquelme 2016). These blocks were held initially by US-based Occidental Petroleum Corporation (Oxy), and Petroperú, but later transferred in 1996 and 2001 (respectively) to Pluspetrol, an oil and gas company from Argentina (Orta-Martinez and Finer 2010). Located in northern Loreto, Block 192 is the largest oil reserve of Peru (Ccoillo Sandoval 2021), crossing the watersheds of the rivers Corrientes, Pastaza, and Tigre; territories of the Achuar and Kichwa Indigenous peoples. This block was operated by the Canadian firm Frontera Energy after Pluspetrol's concession expired in 2015 but is now in the middle of ongoing negotiations (Peru Support Group 2020). Block 8, managed by Pluspetrol Norte, is fragmented into several areas in the basins of the rivers Corrientes, Chambira, and Marañón, including the block 8x situated in the community San José de Saramuro within the Pacaya Samiria national reserve. Block 8 is located in the district of Trompeteros and covers the territories occupied by Achuar, Kichwa, Kukama, and Urarina Indigenous peoples (Grados Bueno and Pacheco Riquelme 2016; Peru Support Group 2020). Since 2018, Petrotal, a Canadian company domiciled in Calgary, Alberta, started the exploitation of Block 95, close to the community of Bretaña, District of Puhinahua, at an oil field bordering the Pacaya Samiria

national reserve.⁸² Block 95 is now one of the most important oil producing areas in Loreto and the space of recent conflict and repression against Kukama communities (Tello Imaina 2021).

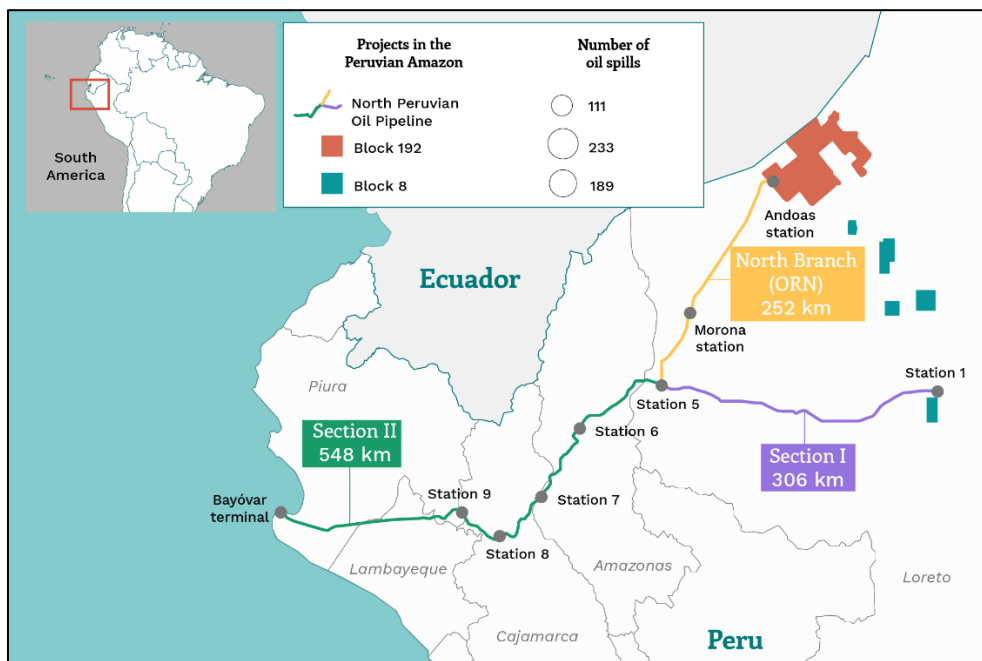


Figure 15. Map of the location of oil blocks in the Loreto region and the extension of the North Peruvian Pipeline. Source: <https://dialogochino.net/en/extractive-industries/53777-peru-oil-spills-stain-amazon-why-slow-to-act/>. Accessed on May 5, 2023.

Since the beginnings of oil history in Peruvian Amazonia, oil companies have threatened local biodiversity and the Indigenous communities in the region, including those living in voluntary isolation. In Loreto, as in other oil-producing regions in Amazonia (see Cepek 2012, High 2007), petroleum extraction produced radical transformations in the social and ecological conditions of local people. The pollution of communities' main sources of water became part of the assortment of socio-environmental problems affecting Amazonia, such as mining (legal and extra-legal), deforestation, the building of hydroelectric dams, and harassment to environmental

⁸² Petrotal's website releases monthly updates of extractive and exploration activities in the Peruvian Amazon. See <https://en.petrotal.pe/nosotros/>

activists.⁸³ In the Amazonian regions of Ecuador (Cepek 2012a) and Peru, oil spills have been an unescapable reality for the last 40 years. Yet, they tend to be silenced by national institutions unless they become massive (Okamoto and Leifsen 2012). Oil contamination started right after the materialization of the concessions of blocks 192 and 8 in the 1970s (Orta-Martínez and Finer 2010). Between 2000 and 2019, the Peruvian Amazon has registered 474 oil spills that have caused multiple damages to the local population. While 65% of the spills were the product of lack of infrastructure maintenance and pipeline corrosion, 28% were due to human intervention (Ccoillo Sandoval 2021; Servindi 2022). The company Pluspetrol is responsible of 1,500 contaminated sites in Loreto in their operation of blocks 192 and 8. In block 8 only, there has been registered 180 oil spills since 2000 (Ccoillo Sandoval 2021). Some of them have been highly destructive. For example, on October 2, 2000, an oil spill in the Lower Marañón river released 5,500 barrels of crude in the rivers near the Saramuro area. Another 400 barrels spill took place on June 19, 2010, harming the Kukama-Kukamiria communities in the Lower Marañón.⁸⁴ (Grados Bueno and Pacheco Riquelme 2016; Okamoto and Leifsen 2012; Orta-Martínez and Finer 2010). Apart from spill events, oil extraction brought toxic waste burial, gas flaring, poisoning, cancer, sexual abuses, illegal logging, and over hunting to the areas affected

⁸³ Apart from oil pollution, Amazonian rivers are threatened by development projects such as the Amazon Waterway (Hidrovia Amazónica) that seeks to dredge the Marañón river so commercial ships can navigate it more “efficiently.” Additionally, the Marañón and the human and non-human population connected to the river are threatened by the building of two hydroelectric dams that will disrupt its course: Chadín 2 (Odebrecht) and Veracruz (Edel) (CAAAP 2021a; SPDA 2021).

⁸⁴ During my data collection period, environmental activists from Loreto reported at least three significant oil spills on social media: 1) On May 13, 2021, an oil spill broke at Lote 8 of Pluspetrol in Villa Trompeteros District, contaminating the Corrientes River and affecting Achuar and Urarina communities (Ccoillo Sandoval 2021). 2) In July of 2022, another oil spill took place in the Chambira river. After this event, Urarina communities decided to stop the petroleum distribution of the North Peruvian pipeline. 3) On January 8, 2022, a pipeline broke at Lote 8 near Pavayacu in the Corrientes River.

(Orta-Martinez and Finer 2010). Moreover, oil contamination caused numerous cases of sickness from consumption of contaminated water among locals. Stomach pain, headaches, fevers, and skin disorders are now common health problems within the communities living around oil blocks (Okamoto and Leifsen, 2012, 180).

Kukama communities' experiences with oil contamination have been particularly devastating. One of the most emblematic socio-environmental events in recent history took place in June of 2014, with the spill of 2,358 barrels of petroleum in the Cuninico river, a tributary of the Marañón. The spill, one of the largest in Peru's recent times, was responsibility of Petroperú and directly disrupted the native communities of Cuninico, Santa Rosa, Nueva Esperanza, and San Francisco from the Urarina district in Loreto (López 2017). The case of Cuninico became emblematic not just for its volume but for the responses of the Indigenous communities harmed. Organized around the Federation of United Kukama from Marañón (Fedepcum), in 2015 the communities filed a lawsuit against Petroperú. This legal action was supported by the Catholic church, Radio Ucamara media activists, lawyers, and Canadian filmmakers. In 2018 and 2021, the Kukama communities had two major victories with favorable legal sentences that obliged Petroperú and the Peruvian state health institutions to make reparations and to provide medical attention to the communities affected. Against historical trends, for the first time, national (the Peruvian Constitutional Court) and regional courts (Loreto's Superior Court Justice) benefited the Indigenous communities over the oil companies (IDL 2021; Sierra Praeli 2018). Kukama women from the community of Cuninico were highly influential in the outcomes of these sentences. In the aftermath of the oil spill, female political leadership have been consolidating their forms of organization and mobilization, performing very effective forms of activist power (García Delgado and Romo 2020).

Despite legal victories, the Peruvian state partnership with petroleum companies make it difficult for Indigenous leaders to enact the sentences in favor of the communities affected by oil spills. This kind of behavior corresponds with a pattern of structural violence reproduced in the area for decades. Okamoto and Leifsen (2012) explain that there is an “unruly management” of the oil-based pollution in the Peruvian Amazon. Oil companies in Loreto tend to operate mostly undisturbed and use criminal tactics to avoid responsibility for oil spills. They handle oil contamination and Indigenous political action in corrupt and unethical ways. Under this model of “hydrocarbon governance,” companies such as Petroperú and Pluspetrol (and now Petrotal) are constantly breaking the law and implementing ineffective reparation plans. Significantly, one of the main strategies of oil companies when handling an oil spill is media manipulation. Oil companies tend to have control over the dissemination of information about contamination on different forms of media to detach from responsibility and silence Indigenous voices (Okamoto and Leifsen 2012).⁸⁵ Sometimes, Indigenous communities are even blamed for causing the spills. During my fieldwork in Nauta, I could witness how low rank representatives of oil companies accused locals of purposefully causing the oil spills in order to bring money for reparations.

Oil production is part of a neoliberal economic model (and associated notions of “development”) in which resource extraction overrides local communities’ rights. Under this model, corporations use legal and extralegal strategies that keep resources flowing and Indigenous communities in a permanent state of marginalization. The long history of exclusion of Indigenous Amazonian peoples is rooted in the racial ideologies reproduced by Peruvian

⁸⁵ As we will see later, this is what the hip-hop artists are referring to when they rap: “*Lo de ellos es mentira, solo esta es la verdad*” (“they are full of lies, only this is the truth”).

national elites and their discourses of “backwardness.” Former president Alan García was notorious for considering Indigenous peoples’ defense of their rights as a selfish strategy to obstruct progress in Peru (Espinosa 2009; Okamoto and Leifsen 2012; Orta-Martinez and Finer 2010; Stetson 2012). Global capital is also entrenched in this prolonged assault to Amazonian communities and ecosystems. According to the report of Stand.earth (2021), a complex network of powerful banks in Europe and the United States are responsible for financing oil extraction activities in Amazonia. Among those banks co-responsible for the ongoing environmental destruction and violation of human rights in the area are JP Morgan Chase, Goldman Sachs, Deutsche Bank, and Credit Suisse (Stand.earth 2021).

In spite or because of the severe damage of extractivism in Amazonia, the violent encounter with petroleum has stimulated the political organization and mobilization of Indigenous communities across the region. As Michael Cepek (2012) has observed for Ecuador’s Amazon, oil pollution has fostered the emergence of environmentalist subjectivities in the Peruvian Amazonia. Communities from Loreto have enacted multiple forms of political action against oil companies, such as the occupation of oil wells and facilities, protests, blockades, and judicial action (Orta-Martinez and Finer 2010). These actions have also been part of the strategies used against oil companies in the Marañón river (see Okamoto and Leifsen 2012). For example, in August 2021, I documented the social media reports of a protest against Petroperú at the native community of Saramurillo. For three weeks, Kukama activists blocked oil operational activities due to the company’s failure to hold up previous agreements between the Peruvian State and the Indigenous communities. Political action has the purpose of stopping contamination, but also demanding a fair distribution of oil wealth. Based on their own perceptions of “development” (Stetson 2012), some Indigenous communities strive for the

transformation of hydrocarbon wealth into infrastructural materiality (e.g.: school buildings, health care posts, clean water supply systems, and efficient roads). Closeness to oil blocks is often locally imagined as a pathway to development.⁸⁶

In the 21st century, Amazonian Indigenous activists have increasingly incorporated media and digital technologies as part of their repertoire to exert political action. Given the invisibilization of Amazonian regions in Peruvian mainstream media, Indigenous peoples are relying on communication technologies to defend themselves against states, extractive companies, loggers, miners, and narco-powers, that constantly threaten and murder Indigenous leaders (Santos 2021). In recent years, media has been a key tool to fight oil companies. Indigenous media-makers have been struggling to balance the differential coverage that exists between oil spills on coastal Peru and Amazonia.⁸⁷ Oil spills in Loreto are destructive events that always mobilize people offline and online. Images showing black stains in the waters or broken pipelines with the oil pumping out of their fractures, now circulate rapidly on social media when a spill occurs. In a context where oil companies have the power to control the production and consumption of information, Indigenous media becomes a fundamental tool to confront the false narratives of corporate powers. For example, with the support of non-Indigenous activists, Catholic priests, and academics, Kukama women of Cuninico community have been engaging in digital media strategies of storytelling as a way to make visible the destructive impact of oil

⁸⁶ In the local discourse, this state of marginalization from oil bonanza in Loreto tends to be temporally framed as a condition that started “40 years ago.” Although in August of 2020 the Peruvian government approved plan destined to improve the living conditions of the population inhabiting the oil extraction areas (the “*cierre de brechas*” [“closing the gap”]) (Andina 2020), tensions have emerged regarding how to operationalize the distribution of wealth.

⁸⁷ On January 15, 2021, the Spanish oil company Repsol was responsible of a massive spill in coastal Lima that caused generalized indignation in Peru. This collective reaction, expressed on mainstream media and social media, clearly contrasted with the coverage of Amazonian oil spills, which occur more frequently (Servindi 2022).

extraction in their territories. Podcasts have been part of the audio media production used to highlight female voices and explain processes of emergence of political consciousness amidst socio-environmental violence.⁸⁸

Radio Ucamara's Environmentalist Approach

Within the Kukama world, Radio Ucamara represents one of the most important Indigenous media outlets entering the field of environmental politics in Amazonia. Socio-environmental struggle is one of the most concerning topics in Radio Ucamara media-making practices, producing more media content about the protection of rivers than any other issue. The station's coverage reaches the areas of the main oil blocks in Loreto. Among their aural and audiovisual creations, anti-oil content constitutes a central part of their activist work. When oil spills take place in Loreto, Radio Ucamara media and social media platforms enter in full action to support the communities affected. Kukama journalists share images of the polluted rivers and produce reportages from the affected sites, providing first-hand evidence (pictures and videos of the spills) that strengthen local denunciations against oil companies, calls for state intervention, and the actions taken by Indigenous organization. Radio Ucamara instantiates the way Indigenous media is changing environmental performance of struggle in Amazonia. Through audiovisual production, Kukama media-makers are creating effective mechanisms that go beyond conventional political organization and mobilization. Media has been used as an experimental method of struggle whereby Kukama activists make visible the often-invisible

⁸⁸ Yet, as Alexa Velez, journalist of Mongabay news outlet explains, media activism can also expose Indigenous leaders to retaliations and criminalization (Conversatorio Virtual Memoria Amazónica. Comunicación para la preservación de la memoria Amazónica. October 29, 2021).

contamination (see Cabel 2022). Images of oil covering streams and rivers, blackened shores, and dead fish, (shared across the digital space) are part of this work. In Amazonia, even activists not trained in media-making practices are increasingly incorporating media as part of their political praxis. Building on Michael Cepek's notion of "utopian sensibilities" (2012b), I argue that media is reworking local notions of possibility and hope that go against narratives of defeat or inevitable failure in Indigenous Amazonia.

As Andrea Cabel (2022) already discussed, one of the main strategies of Radio Ucamara's media approach is to shed light on the cosmological worlds damaged by oil extraction. Apart from exposing the harm to environments and bodies, Kukama media-makers reveal the oil companies' assault on the spiritual realm. This strategy translates into an audiovisual aesthetics that rely heavily on river cosmologies. The literature on the Kukama-Kukamiria communities shows the existence of an intimate relationship of this group with water. Rivers are central spaces for the transmission of Kukama fishing knowledge and cosmological interactions (Grados Bueno y Pacheco Riquelme 2016; Cabel 2022; Okamoto and Leifsen 2012, Rivas Ruiz, 2004). During my fieldwork in Nauta, people frequently expressed their concerns about how oil pollution was disrupting local fishing economies and aquatic spiritual worlds. Some locals blamed oil companies such as Pluspetrol and Petroperú for the scarcity of fish and their high cost in the market (Fieldnotes, June 22, 2017). But beyond the damage to river ecologies, some interlocutors expressed their concerns for the safety of the people living in the rivers. For many Nauta locals, water is a space inhabited by people and relatives.⁸⁹As some of

⁸⁹ In Kukama ontologies, the world is classified in three segments: earth, heaven, and water. The aquatic worlds are inhabited by beings such as the yacuruna, mermaids, pink dolphins, as well as people who drowned in the rivers and have transformed into Karuaras (Grados Bueno y Pacheco Riquelme 2016).

them told me, “There is a lot of people living underwater” (Fieldnotes, June 29, 2017). Many of the fishers I met while joining Radio Ucámara field trips also talked about how petroleum is killing the “spirit mothers.” In Nauta, references to spirit mother (or spirit owners) are frequent in conversations. They inhabit forests and water spaces and are sometimes embodied in cosmological snakes that can control meteorological phenomena. Fish abundance in those spaces is considered a sign of vitality and, thus, of the presence of spirit mothers. Some interlocutors explained that due to oil pollution spirit mothers get displaced and some *cochas* (lagoons) dry out. Also, the presence of oil in the waters hinders shamanic cosmic navigation, curing practices, and communication with water beings. As Andrea Cabel (2022) discusses, oil affects both local environments and the relationship with non-human worlds. Oil spills transcended the material, harming entities that have human qualities and subjectivities.

These ontological premises inform Radio Ucámara’s media environmentalist approach. Kukama media-makers are promoting the politization of a perspectival understanding of the world (Viveiros de Castro 1998), where human subjectivities do not belong exclusively to human bodies. The Radio Ucámara team is making Kukama perspectivist gaze visible through media products to defy Western notion of rivers as spaces of “nature” and recognize them as spaces of humanity. This political approach has been explicitly expressed in different spaces, such as virtual events. For example, on May 27, 2021, Radio Ucámara director Leonardo Tello explained in a public forum about river policy that for Amazonian Indigenous peoples there are not just one but multiple categories of people (Tello calls them “*gentes*”). Animals, plants, spirits, and the river itself are all considered “people” that enter in non-discriminatory interactions. By expressing how humans are not the only inhabitants in Amazonia, Radio Ucámara audiovisual

creations are driven by a cosmopolitical premise: to make visible cosmological worlds to foster peaceful social relations. In the prologue to the Karuara book, Leonardo Tello (2016) outlines his concept of “gentes” and reflects on the importance of situating animals, plants, and other beings in the same ontological status:

“We must be *gente* (people).” That is what the Kukama say when they refer to the necessity of a life with dignity, filled with abundance and respect between the diverse categories of being “*gente*.” This way, they point to the intrinsic relations that exists between the “spirit-*gentes*”, “animals-*gente*”, “plants-*gentes*”, “fish-*gentes*”, and “bird-*gentes*.” Thus, we find that in the [Kukama] narratives, a snake can turn into “*gente*”, a heron can turn into “*gente*” and we, people, can live in those spaces where other categories of “*gentes*” live [Tello Imaina 2016, 8. My own translation].

Lately, Radio Ucamara media-makers and their allies have been positioning the conceptualization of the Marañón river as a person (“*gente*”) as a central political point of their environmental agenda. The subjectification of the Marañón river is now part of an ongoing legal battle. In their efforts for protecting Amazonian rivers, Radio Ucamara and other Kukama organizations have been pushing forward a request for the legal recognition of the Marañón river as a subject with rights. Drawing from previous experiences of river rights recognition (e.g.: the Atrato river in Colombia), Kukama communities affected by oil pollution are legally demanding the recognition of the Marañón river as a subject protected by Peruvian state laws. Supported by lawyers, academics, and Indigenous media-makers, on September 8, 2021, the Kukama women

organization *Huaynakana Kamatahuara Kana* initiated this judicial action, and, in October 2021, they made it public in a press conference from the Radio Ucamara building in Nauta. The legal action also demands the recognition of Indigenous communities as the official voices of the Marañón river and thus representatives of its interests in dialogues with the state (CAAAP 2021b). This action is currently supported by progressive Catholic priests from the Augustinian Order of the Iquitos Vicariate. Catholic actors in the region have adopted a strong environmental discourse that advocates for the “rights of nature” and the validation of Indigenous ontologies.⁹⁰ Influenced by Indigenous cosmopolitics and ontologically oriented anthropologies, Catholic priests argue for an amplification of the concepts of nature that transcends its ecological dimensions and a revision of the notion of human rights that recognizes other ideas of personhood (Berjón and Cadenas 2020).

This legal action illustrates how Radio Ucamara media production operates within a rich set of alliance that includes Indigenous organizations, filmmakers, global activists, scholars, lawyers, musicians, and Catholic priests. Kukama media-makers are immersed in a dynamic “middle ground” (Conklin and Graham 1995) based on national and transnational collaborations destined to protect Amazonian rivers. Some of these allies bring their own teleologies and notions of indigeneity into the symbolic politics of these new middle grounds. For example, in the introduction to the book *Karuara* (2016), American filmmaker Avi Lewis and writer Naomi Klein frame Kukama media politics under discourses of global crisis. Much like their Western environmentalist predecessors, they identify Indigenous epistemologies and cosmologies as essentially anti-capitalist conceptualizations that can help to find alternatives to the eventual

⁹⁰ This environmentalist turn in the progressive sectors of the Catholic church has grown under the influence of Pope Francis. Catholic environmentalist discourse can be read in texts such as *Laudato Si* (Francis 2015) and the final document of the *Sínodo Amazónico* (2019).

destruction of the world. Although Radio Ucamara's media-makers also frame river politics as a global environmental issue and a concern for humanity (Digital fieldnotes. December 12, 2020), their media cosmopolitanism has a strong Amazonian identity. Environmental problems are seen as a common Amazonian issue and therefore a topic of Indigenous transnational solidarity. Radio Ucamara media-makers use the digital space to express their support to other Amazonian communities and activists sharing similar experiences of environmental violence that reinforces these new eco-political alliances (Digital fieldnotes. June 15, 2021). In the mediatization of these alliances, music is playing a key role in creating spaces of communication with human and non-human others. In the next chapter, I will analyze how Radio Ucamara media-makers have turned music videos as one of their main aesthetic instruments in their engagement with Amazonian environmental politics.

CHAPTER 5

VIDEOCLIP ANALYSIS: THE POLITICS AND COSMOPOLITICS OF ENVIRONMENTALIST MUSIC VIDEOS

Introduction: Video Enlivened the Radio Star

One of the most effective media products within Radio Ucamara's activist agenda has been the making of music videos, also known as videoclips. Music videos are a specific type of audiovisual work that are produced alongside other kinds of videos such as documentaries, storytelling videos, and journalistic reportages. Radio Ucamara music videos are a form of audiovisual artistry that currently embody some of the most innovative strategies of musicalization of Indigenous political discourses in Amazonia. This is a relatively novel media creation incorporated to Amazonian Indigenous activism in which multiple political messages and demands are delivered through different aesthetic devices such as musical sounds, musicalized speech, dance performance, and visuals. The overall goal of Radio Ucamara music videos is to make visible local disenfranchisement and address political demands within asymmetrical fields of power in Amazonia. In fulfilling this task, videos have become semiotic

units that include different discursive themes such as mytho-histories, Indigenous cosmologies, territorialities, linguistic ideologies, and identitarian concerns. The videoclips also represent multilingual and multi-mythical forms of musicalizations. The songs written for the music videos usually include lyrics sung in Kukama and other Indigenous languages, and some of them use musicalized fragments of mythical narratives from different Indigenous oralities. Within this multimodal aesthetics, the videos are always reinforced with a visuality based on footage of Amazonian landscapes.⁹¹

Radio Ucámara is currently one of the Indigenous media outlets more invested in music video production in Peruvian Amazonia. Radio Ucámara produces MTV style videoclips, a visual artistic genre popularized in Western mass media since the 1960s with the expansion of television and rock and roll music, and particularly prominent since the 1980s (Korsgaard 2017). Allowed by the internet and the new digital technologies of communication, all Radio Ucámara videoclips are made and recorded in digital format and shared through digital video platforms such as YouTube or Vimeo. Radio Ucámara has been posting videos on their YouTube channel since July 26, 2013 (their very first videoclip being a musical one). By July of 2022, this YouTube channel contained 98 videos available for public watching. Among these videos, 20 of them are videoclips of songs dealing with different aspects of the Kukama political struggle such as ethnic pride, linguistic revitalization, territoriality, memory, socio-environmental concerns, women's experiences, shamanic knowledge, and the Covid-19 pandemic. Like the Suyá from Brazil (Seeger 2013), Kukama media-makers are using video and YouTube to present themselves in rapidly changing contexts. According to Seeger, “[v]ideo, even more than live

⁹¹ As in other cases of video production in Amazonia (Ribero Moreira 2019), the videos display an interaction between urban and “natural” landscapes. In the case of Radio Ucámara, the videos also musicalize polluted and dystopic landscapes.

performance, can focus the foreigner's gaze exactly where they choose" (Seeger 2013, 374). The Kukama videos are recorded performances that seek to capture the attention of a global audience.

The preferred genre of music used in the songs is their own version of Western popular music (vaguely defined), including sub-genres like hip-hop, pop, reggaeton, and rock. These genres are combined with local Indigenous songs and musicalities that are sometimes incorporated in the choruses of the songs. Hip-hop music and rapping have been the most prominent source of musical and verbal artistry used in these collective artistic creations.⁹² Following the significant and completely unexpected impact of their first videoclip ("Kumbarikira"), a rap song with a reggaeton beat focused on the revitalization of the Kukama language, Radio Ucamara media-makers realized the aesthetic and affective power of music videos in reaching wider audiences and fostering political consciousness. Videoclips, thus, quickly became one of main audiovisual resources to enter the fight in a key arena: the field of environmental politics. In the context of Radio Ucamara's media activism, the musicality or urban settings is now used in combination with indigenous musicalities for delivering political messages.

Given the systematic occurrence of oil spills produced by the petroleum industry since the 1970s, Amazonian rivers and many Indigenous communities in the Loreto region are constantly threatened. In addition to the oil economy pollution, projects such as the *Hidrovia Amazónica* (Amazonian Waterway), which entail the highly disruptive dredging of the rivers, and the building of hydroelectric dams in the Upper Marañón river, have become serious threats

⁹² Amazonian hip hop is still an unexplored topic in anthropological analysis. A notable exception comes from Brazilian ethnomusicologist Rafael Barquinho Abdala Norberto, who has studied hip hop culture and rap music (MCs, beatmakers) in Amazonian cities like Manaus. His work does not deal with Indigenous communities but with the politics of rap music associated with blackness and caboclo identity (Abdala 2019).

to local communities in the Peruvian Amazonia. In this context, environmental justice has become one of the main creative battle fields within Radio Ucámara media-making practices, and this can be noticed in their aesthetic production, including songwriting and music video recording. After the disastrous event of a massive oil spill in 2014 close to the Kukama community of Cuninico and other subsequent spills in 2015, Radio Ucámara videomaking (both documentaries and music videos) oriented their content towards socio-environmental denunciation in an attempt to make visible the oil industry violence in the region.

Although Radio Ucámara video documentaries about environmental problems are rich in analytical and empirical information, they are less artistic or poetic than videoclips and they do not get as many views. Music videos always have more collective impact and reach higher audiences due to their aesthetic appeal. Radio Ucámara music videos tend to get more views than any other videos, which can be noticed in the quantitative data of the YouTube platform. This pattern is not only true for Radio Ucámara but for digital media content in general. Globally, music videos are amongst the most consumed content shared on YouTube (Kosgaar 2017). Some of the music videos, such as the 2016 song Yuwara (Radio Ucámara 2016a) (the environmentalist video with most reproductions), have numerous comments, some of them very recent, which points to the social life of the video and its enduring impact. The appeal of this form of musicalization of political discourses speaks to the power of music videos in shaping public imagination regarding Indigenous issues.

Due to Covid-19 pandemic restrictions I could not observe or participate in Radio Ucámara's songwriting and music video-making process. Nevertheless, during my preliminary fieldwork in Nauta, I collected testimonies from some of the camerapersons and hip-hop artists involved in the production of the music videos. They explained to me that the filming of the

videos usually follows a general visual concept, but the entire process is completed without a script. Although the effectiveness of this method was always debated among Radio Ucamara media-makers, most of the video filming relied heavily on improvisation⁹³. Musically speaking, the station's songs are always written in partnership with local artists and beat makers. Rappers are usually in charge of the lyrical content of the songs. For the video performances they request the collaboration of members of different communities, whether artists or not, that want to be on screen. Radio Ucamara works with a multiplicity of actors and institutions in the production of music videos. Videoclips are the result of a collective effort that include local communities, Kukama language teachers, NGOs, the Catholic Church, governmental institutions, universities, and international companies. Videomaking, thus, has become a powerful practice for Radio Ucamara media activism whereby collaborative dynamics expand by incorporating more allies. As local Kukama artists expressed during my preliminary fieldwork, they did not expect the massive impact of the music videomaking. Now they have become one of the main semiotic devices deployed in a shifting political terrain.

General Features of Radio Ucamara Music Videos

So far Radio Ucamara media-makers have produced and released four music videos entirely dedicated to socio-environmental issues. Those videos, made between 2015 and 2017, are complementary to a myriad of documentaries and other audiovisual content produced since

⁹³ As controlled performances, Radio Ucamara music videos pay great attention to form. Improvisation and experimentation are pathways to accomplish aesthetic envisions. As Ellen Basso discusses: "Anthropologists see performances as especially heightened forms of cultural expressions wherein creative experimentation is appropriate, even often expected, where the performer is responsible to a critical audience and therefore needs to adjust the action to satisfy that audience" (Basso 1985, 2).

2015 about environmental problems in the region, but mainly oil pollution. In order of appearance, their titles are: 1) Parana; 2) Yuwara; 3) Maisangara; and 4) Madre Rio, Madre Tierra.

The first Radio Ucámara music video focused on denouncing the pollution of Amazonian rivers was released on May 25, 2015. The title of the song is “Parana,” a word meaning “river” in Kukama language (Radio Ucámara 2015). The production of this video was part of the efforts of Radio Ucámara and the Ikuari school (a local school in Nauta dedicated to teach the Kukama language) in using music as a tool for the revitalization of the Kukama language. After two music videos dedicated to invigorating Indigenous pride, Radio Ucámara musical strategy shifted to the realm of river protection. The fact that the “Parana” song has an intro sung in Kukama language keeps this music video attached to the notion that environmental politics is an Indigenous issue. The central purpose of the videoclip is to create political awareness and seek support to preserve the rivers from pollution and development projects. The song was written from the perspective of the Kukama children, with lyrics expressing the beauty and the value of the river as a space of vitality and playful joy. The lyrics are also a message from Kukama children to outsiders. They sing about their love for the river and its ongoing destruction in order to elicit support from the national society.



Figure 16. “Parana,” video by Radio Ucámara 2015.

Following the same line of environmental concerns, in 2016, Radio Ucamara released the “Yuwara” music video (Radio Ucamara 2016). “Yuwara” means manatee in Kukama language, and the song is explicitly about the Marañón River. While the title refers to the species of Amazonian manatee (*Trichechus inunguis*), the chorus, which comes from a song learned from Kukama elders, refers to its disappearing due to predatory activities. “Yuwara” is a hip hop song with aggressive lyrics against oil companies and the Peruvian state. Although the “Yuwara” music video continues with the conceptual premises of the “Parana” videoclip, this time local hip hop artists and media-makers add themes of decay, loss, dispossession, death, and extinction, alongside hope and agency. “Yuwara,” as an audiovisual poetic and musical space, expresses Radio Ucamara concerns on a dystopic future and conveys a direct critique to Western notions of progress. Just as Indigenous musical performances can be forms of making history and producing new conceptualizations of the past and visions of the future (Seeger 1991), Radio Ucamara videoclips encapsulate ways of making the future amidst the dystopian landscapes of oil destruction.



Figure 17. “Yuwara.” Video by Radio Ucamara 2016.

Released almost simultaneously with the “Yuwara” videoclip, “Maisangara” is another song and music video made as a local response to recent oil spills. The title of the song refers to a demonic figure in Kukama cosmology that Radio Ucamara media-makers and some Nauta locals identify as the spiritual force behind state and corporate powers. The song increases the aggressive tone of the “Yuwara” videoclip both lyrically and musically. Unlike the previous videos, driven by hip-hop musicality, “Maisangara” is a rock song powered by heavy guitar sounds (the only rock song Radio Ucamara has produced so far). The central theme of the song is the presence of death in the rivers due to extractive activities. The figure of Maisangara, identified with the White/Mestizo predatory alterity, is poetically connected to the recent history and current realities of violence and dispossession in Amazonia. The song revolves around devil imagery, but it is also an anti-dystopic musical device. Some fragments of the lyrics are written as a message of defiance to the Maisangara spirit. By musically confronting the presence of Maisangara, embodied by the oil industry and the Peruvian state, the song becomes a statement of Indigenous agency and empowerment. Like in other ethnographic contexts (Gordillo 2002; Nash 1979; Taussig 1980), the music video encapsulates Kukama historical and political consciousness by mediatizing Maisangara as a symbol of the colonial and neo-colonial experience.



Figure 18. “Maisangara.” Video by Radio Ucamara 2016.

The final videoclip analyzed in this chapter about mediatic socio-environmental struggle is “Madre Río, Madre Tierra” (“Mother River, Mother Earth”). With the title, Radio Ucamara songwriters provide an interesting twist to the environmentalist trope of Mother Earth (a common depiction of nature) by adding the notion of Mother River. This re-conceptualization speaks to the importance of the rivers in Amazonian worlds and symbolically echoes the subjectification of the Marañón river in local cosmologies and current political action. The notions of mother earth/river also constitute a word play rooted in the concept of the spirit mothers (spirit owners) prevalent in Kukama and other Indigenous cosmologies in the region (Fausto 2008). Rather than being delimited to a localized Indigenous struggle, this videoclip is conceptually connected to the notion of a Pan-Amazonian activism and a transnational environmental movement. The lyrical content of the song represents a calling to a large Amazonian alliance. Such calling is supported by the inclusion in the video of Portuguese subtitles translating the Spanish lyrics, which seek to reach out the Brazilian Amazonian allies. The videoclip is a musical manifesto against the ongoing experiences of oppression and dispossession in Amazonia and the urgency to confront socio-environmental violence. The song’s lyrical content is based on freedom symbolism, notions of radical transformation, and ultimate times. It is an ambitious call for transnational political consciousness and action that reflects on Radio Ucamara Pan-Amazonian identity. With the “Madre Río, Madre Tierra” video, the Radio Ucamara team explicitly situates themselves in the world of global environmental politics.



Figure 19. “Madre Río, Madre Tierra.” Video by Radio Ucamara, 2017.

I dissect these videos by analytically looking at the interplay of their semantic, poetic, musical, performative, and visual dimensions, in terms of the way these aesthetic processes reconfigure local environmentalist discourse. The most important conceptual similarity among these music videos is that all of them advocate for the protection of Amazonian rivers, and thus represent novel expressions of a poetics of Indigenous environmental resistance. Visually and lyrically, the songs and music videos are sculpted around river imagery and a dichotomy of life and death. The visuality of Radio Ucamara environmental music videos constantly incorporates footage of Amazonian landscapes and images of its destruction due to the oil industry activities. Poetically speaking, tropes of life and vitality are expressed in the lyrics of the songs through the incorporation of Amazonian cosmological worlds and interspecific socialities. Furthermore, in the Kukama pop songs, images of death are evoked through metaphorical references to oil.

In terms of the music used for Radio Ucamara anti-oil songs, the production of musical sounds and beats comes from a combination of electronic instruments made with Digital Audio Workstations software and the execution of conventional instruments. Radio Ucamara works in partnership with local musicians and beat-makers that produce the instrumental tracks upon which the Kukama artists rap and sing over. Voices recorded are sometimes embellished with

sound effects coming from the audio software. As a common feature of the music video genre, all Radio Ucamara videoclips include a performance of Kukama artists lip-synching and dancing to the prerecorded songs. All the performers are children and teenagers, and the videos tend to include multiple singers/rappers (both male and female) that divide their singing roles throughout the songs.⁹⁴ These performances of Indigenous youth are enriched with dance and other forms of body expressions (mostly Hip-Hop gestures and mannerisms) that add another artistic level to the video visual aesthetics.

The poetic forms in the song's lyrics are aesthetically amplified through different vocal expressions that move across the spectrum of musicality and lexicality. The songs in the music videos include different forms of speech that can be situated within different positions in the continuum between musical sounds and semanticity. The Kukama artists perform their songs through multiple forms of verbal artistry that include, singing, rapping, reciting, screamed vocals, and sometimes spoken speech, all of them shaped by different levels of melodic complexity. Often, more than one of these forms of musicalized speech and verbal art can be delivered within a single song, and they all have aesthetic and affective roles in delivering a political message. For example, in some songs, like Parana and Yuwara, the choruses are delivered in melodic singing, but the verses are usually rapped. While the musicality of singing draws on shaping the voice through melodic patterns and notes, rapping musicality relies in rhyme, rhythm, and tone. In other words, singing is usually tied to the melody of musical sounds and instruments, but rapping can flow more or less independently of the melodic content of the song. In the case of recitation, this vocal form does not follow a melodic or rhyme pattern but

⁹⁴ The "Madre Río, Madre Tierra" music video is an exception. It includes just one female singer and a brief cameo of a local musician playing the acoustic guitar.

one of pronunciation that includes pauses and emphasis usually absent in everyday language. Finally, some Radio Ucámara songs can include portions of non-musical speech. The videoclips use fragments of recorded verbal registers to add emotional layers to the songs. The videos can sometimes incorporate additional aesthetic features in the textuality found in YouTube descriptions. Video description texts can provide poetic and reflexive discourses that complement the vocal and musical expressions found in the songs.

Repetition is a general formal feature in Radio Ucámara songs. Inspired by Dell Hymes' (2003) Verse Analysis Method, I deconstruct Radio Ucámara songs in Lines, Verses, and Choruses. In all the songs analyzed choruses repeated three times throughout their structure (a common pattern in Western pop music). But the main poetic resource developed in Radio Ucámara songwriting is a rhyme pattern based on couplets, this is, pairs of consecutive lines that rhyme. In most of the environmental songs, couplets are the dominant rhyme pattern. This is particularly noticeable in the songs that incorporate rapping as the main form of verbal art. The rapping verses in the songs tend to be built through couplets, which is a common lyrical resource in popular music and a classic rhyme pattern for hip hop music. Couplets can be combined with other rhyming patterns (or the absence of rhymes). For example, while in "Parana" the chorus and some verses follow a monorhyme structure in which the same rhyme follows in every line, in "Maisangara" and "Madre Río, Madre Tierra," apart from a few couplets, there is no rhyme pattern. In "Yuwara," the rhyme schemes are diverse. Some of the verses are structured in couplets and others are monorhymes. Sometimes there are lines that break the rhyme or follow a different rhyming structure. The importance of couplets in Radio Ucámara songs resides in the capacity of building levels of musicality able to please the taste of the urban population and therefore reach larger audiences. In this chapter, rhyming patterns are transcribed by assigning

letters to lines. Lines that rhyme in a verse are marked with the same letters. In the case of couplets, for example, they follow the pattern AABBCDD.

Many of the songs written for Radio Ucamara music videos are bilingual or multilingual. While the first music videos produced by Radio Ucamara were mostly sung in Spanish using intros and choruses in Kukama-Kukamiria language, subsequent videos incorporate other Indigenous languages such as Awajun, Achuar, and Urarina. Two of the music videos focused on environmental issues are bilingual: they use singing in both Kukama and Spanish. Unlike “Maisangara” and “Madre Río, Madre Tierra” (songs that are performed entirely in Spanish), in “Parana,” the song starts with an intro section sung in Kukama language and the rest is sung and rapped in Spanish. In “Yuwara,” the chorus that repeats throughout the song is sung in Kukama language, and the verses are rapped in Spanish. Using Kukama as a linguistic form in Radio Ucamara songwriting accomplishes one of the main goals of Kukama media-makers: to foster ethnic pride and stimulate linguistic revitalization. In this case, an ethnic politics strategy is intertwined with issues of environmental justice. Invoking indigeneity through language becomes a key strategy to turn socioenvironmental politics into identity politics. Language use is also present in other levels of videomaking. In “Yuwara,” the song fragments sung in Kukama language are always translated with subtitled in Spanish. Subtitles are an important visual device that make opaque messages accessible to larger audiences. In the “Madre Río, Madre Tierra” video, although the song is sung exclusively in Spanish, it includes subtitles in Portuguese as a bilingual feature. Choosing to visually translate to song to Portuguese has the purpose of enlarging its reception in a common Pan-Amazonian space. Multilingualism in the Radio Ucamara digital productions is part of the anti-assimilationist efforts in making visible Indigenous identities in the region.

The symbolic content encapsulated in Radio Ucamara digital videoclips is expressed in multiple poetic, musical, performative, and visual forms that amplify its political message. Such aesthetic resources are some of the main tools Kukama media-makers have used to come up with a set of communicative processes with both internal and external political agents jeopardizing the existence of many local Indigenous communities. This communicative process is based on a highly creative operation of musicalization in which songs are dialogically written as open-ended conversation with powerful others, whether potential allies or enemies. Expanding on a previously non-existent or limited space of mediation, the musical defiance to the Maisangara evil spirit, for example, must be understood as a dialogue with state and corporate powers. Likewise, the musical call for support from global activism represents a way of establishing alliances with political actors sharing the same cause. In the following sections, I will unpack these musical mediations encapsulated in Radio Ucamara pop songs and the way they are tied to two symbolic processes: 1) the incorporation of other-than-human subjects (fish, aquatic species, and spirits) in building images of vitality, and 2) the incorporation of a poetics of death in which oil's destructive power is made visible in a context where pollution is silenced. Without the electronic beats, the melodies, the rapped couplets, or the oil spill visuals, those messages would have never gained strength in the realm of Indigenous-state relations in Peru. Beauty, again, is a pathway for building political power.

Musicalizing Enemies and Allies

Radio Ucamara videomaking embodies a novel form of political musicalization in which audiovisual artistry is opening new spaces of communication between Indigenous peoples and the Peruvian neoliberal state. Through sound and vision, Kukama media unfolds a poetics of

environmental struggle that serves to 1) defy state and corporate powers activities in Amazonia; and 2) obtain support from different sectors of the national and global society. This intentionality can be heard in the songs' lyrical content and sometimes in the reflexive discourses about the videos coming from Radio Ucamarca media-makers. One of the most salient features in the song's lyrical work is that, often, the verses are dialogically built as direct messages or interrogations to powerful others. The songs are intended to be heard by national and global audiences, but especially by the Peruvian state and oil companies. In accomplishing this task, Kukama media activists use the digital space to put those musical messages into circulation,

Out of the four videos analyzed in this chapter, "Yuwara" and "Maisangara" contain the clearest examples of the musical communication established with the agents responsible for the destruction of the rivers. Although in "Parana" (the first Radio Ucamarca videoclip focused on socio-environmental problems) some of the verses are implicitly directed to outsiders in order to stimulate river protection, in "Yuwara" and "Maisangara" we find lyrics that openly engage in a conversation with extractivist agents. Yet, the performers in the video always refer to the oil companies without naming them. Petroleum companies are only mentioned using metaphoric language (e.g., "monsters") and third person pronouns (e.g., "them"). Sometimes, the lyrics use second person forms a direct message to dangerous others. In the fifth verse of the "Yuwara" song, one of the rappers performing in the video looks straight at the camera and asks questions (expressed in couplets) directed towards corporate powers as a way of poetically confronting them:

Yuwara. Fifth verse

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| A | Quiero una respuesta ¿Por qué mi río contaminan? | A | I want an answer. Why do you contaminate my river? |
| A | Otra pregunta, ¿Por qué se van perdiendo vidas? | A | Another question. Why are we losing lives? |
| B | ¿No se dan cuenta que van matando sueños? | B | Can't you see you are killing dreams? |

B ¿No se dan cuenta que tenemos miedo?

B Can't you see we are afraid?

This lyrical style of direct communication is even more elaborated in the song “Maisangara.” The “Maisangara” song has an acoustic introduction in which one of the singers recites a poem about the destructive encounter with the petroleum industry (see further below). In this introduction, images of loss and decay are prevalent, ending with the shouted sentence: “Maisangara no more.” After this sonically quiet introduction, the song explodes with loud rock music sounds. Throughout the song, the lyrics of the first, third, and fourth verses are delivered in second person and melodic vocals directed as a defiant message to Maisangara’s power and as a statement of empowerment and agency. The chorus of the song, delivered through sung and screamed vocals, becomes a musical message to reject the presence of extractivism in the area. In the chorus, the Maisangara is assigned responsibility for the killing and dispossession of members of the Indigenous population. As discussed by Michael Cepek (2012), contamination and dispossession are the main outcomes of the installation of oil industries in Amazonia. Although not present in all the lines of the song, couplets are the rhyming structure preferred for this unidirectional dialogue with Maisangara spirit:

Maisnagara. First verse

Ya no decides por mí, soy libre
 Soy autor de mi destino
 Ya no pintas de luto mi camino
 Vienes y devastas la selva que es mi hogar
 No lo permito tengo fuerzas pa' luchar

You don't get to decide for me. I am free
 I am in control of my destiny
 You do not paint with mourn my path
 You come and destroy the forest, my home
 I won't allow it. I have the strength to fight

Miasangara. Chorus

A Eres la muerte en nuestros ríos
 B ¡Maisangara!
 C Nos quitas nuestras tierras, nuestras vidas
 B ¡Maisangara!
 D No habrá más niños sufriendo (x2)

A You are the death in our rivers
 B Maisangara!
 C You take our land and our lives
 B Maisangara!
 D No more children suffering (x2)

Maisnagara. Third verse

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
| A | En el pasado estabas, hoy en el presente | A | You were here in the past, and now in the present |
| A | De aquí no pasas, el futuro será diferente | A | You stop here. The future will be different |
| B | Basta de tanta destrucción | B | No more destruction |
| B | Hoy dejas de causar tanto terror | B | Today you stop causing terror |

Maisangara. Fourth verse

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
| A | Nunca me faltó el valor para enfrentarte | A | I never lacked the courage to confront you |
| B | Cuando nací aprendí a cuidarme y a luchar | B | When I was born, I learned to take care of myself and fight |
| B | Ya fue suficiente tu crueldad, tu falta de humanidad | B | We had enough of your cruelty, your lack of humanity |
| B | Ya no explotes, ya no mates, ya no dañes más | B | Do not exploit, do not kill, do not harm anymore |
| B | Ya no dañes más (x2) | B | Do not harm anymore (x2) |

These fragments of the “Maisangara” song illustrate how non-human demonic imagery is invoked in Indigenous environmental discourse. Furthermore, the lyrics exemplify how such invocations take the form of a dialogical engagement with the oil companies (the embodiment of Maisangara), thus making musical practices a political form of communication. Songwriting as Kukama media strategy for political communication also seeks to reach out to allies as much as to enemies in the Amazonian middle grounds of environmental politics (Conklin and Graham 1995). The first videoclip (“Parana”) contains some of initial examples of this call for support from outsiders. In this song, multiple verses throughout its structure show this trend. The monorhyme lyrics in the chorus are examples of how some musicalized words are directed to outsiders to ask for support to protect the rivers. With a musicality built around a pop melody and a reggaeton style beat, the grammatical form of the chorus is sung in second person in order to speak to potential collaborators. In every line, the repetition of the last words (embellished

with a sound effect in the voice) functions as a musical fill that reinforces the main idea of the song:

Parana. Chorus

A	Todos buscamos la felicidad	A	We all seek happiness
A	A nosotros nos gusta en el río nadar	A	We like to swim in the river
A	Sé que con tu ayuda podemos lograr	A	I know with your help we can make it
A	Y nuestros sueños se harán realidad	A	And our dreams will come true
A	Todos buscamos la felicidad	A	We all seek happiness
A	Y esas manchas muy negras del río sacar	A	And taking those black stains out of the river
A	Ahora ayúdanos para poder continuar	A	Now help us to keep going
A	Y al mundo podemos cambiar	A	So we can change the world

Through the musicalized voices of Kukama children, the chorus of “Parana” conveys an explicit request for support from the national and international public towards Indigenous communities facing the problem of oil contamination in Amazonia. Nevertheless, the most ambitious video in terms of building a musical channel of communication with potential allies is the video “Madre Río, Madre Tierra.” The song enacts a musical call to Amazonian fellows but also to global allies. The most distinctive visual detail of the video is the display of Portuguese subtitles. Translating the song from Spanish to Portuguese is clearly a strategy designed to reach audiences in Brazil that points toward the role of Indigenous media and the digital space in re-making Pan-Amazonian political identities.⁹⁵ The textual description of this YouTube video makes explicit the political target of the song and its visuality. The “Madre Río, Madre Tierra” video description is a poetic manifesto of Pan-Amazonian socioenvironmental activism where Radio Ucamara media-makers situate their local struggles within larger transnational arenas.

⁹⁵ The role of the internet and digital technologies in creating an Amazonian “imagined community” (in the classic Andersonian sense) beyond ethnic, local, and national levels, is a topic that deserves further examination.

Significantly, this manifesto is not written in everyday speech and is characterized by its sense of urgency in seeking justice.

Let the people rise. Let the mouths of those who are silent about the cruelty and injustices that hit our people be opened. Let the hands that were kept tied be untied. Let the eyes closed by greed or by order be opened. Let there be no space left where a cry can be heard, that each foot walks to meet the others, that each oar travels through Amazonia summoning the arms that dare to take it as a symbol of struggle, unity, and hope. Amazonia needs us all and needs everyone. For we need Amazonia to continue living, to continue existing and to continue fighting, hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder as a single force, as a single cry of rage and hope. How many more must die to be able to smile? the mother river and the mother earth shout FREEDOM!! With her, we must shout, with her and only with her you must fight. For every brother and sister that falls, thousands more will rise. Thousands of trees will rise for each tree that falls. We will not let our children say that we did not dare to fight, that we abandoned them. Now is the time, the time has come, the time is here, because “nobody can stop an idea, an indignation, a fight whose time has come.” [Radio Ucamara 2017].

In line with the tones of radical transformations and “ultimate times” of this poetic videoclip description, the song “Madre Río, Madre Tierra” contains a lyrical content that musically invokes both human and other-than-human subjects into a unified collective movement for revolutionary action. And it does so through pop musicality. “Madre Río, Madre

Tierra” is a pop-folk song with reggae hints. The main instrument used is an acoustic guitar with flute arrangements. Singing instead of rapping is used as the preferred vocal performance and rhymes are absent. On this occasion, the performance is almost entirely done by a Kukama female singer who participates in most of the Radio Ucamara videos (sometimes accompanied by a male guitarist who vocally supports some of the verses). In both the first and second verses of the song, the lyrics are outlined as a communicative line with Amazonian agents (human and non-human) as a call for action:

Madre Río, Madre Tierra. First Verse

A	Vuelen todas las aves, vuelen deprisa	A	All the birds fly, fly fast.
B	Sobre los árboles y el río	B	Over the trees and over the river
C	Vuelen, vuelen ya	C	Fly, fly now
D	Por todos los pueblos, hombres y mujeres	D	For all the people, men, and women
E	Anuncien con su grito y con su canto libertad	E	Proclaim freedom by screaming and singing
F	Los convoco desde el fondo de los ríos	F	I summon you from the underneath the rivers
G	Desde la espesura del bosque	G	From the forest’s thickness
H	Desde los espíritus del viento	H	From the wind’s spirits
I	Hay que juntarnos todos los pueblos	I	We must all get together
J	Ya no hay más pechos que lactar	J	There are no more breasts to lactate with
J	La madre río y la madre tierra gritan: “libertad”	J	Mother River and Mother Earth scream: “freedom”

Madre Río, Madre Tierra. Second verse

A	Nos roban el sol	A	They steal the sun from us
B	Abre los ojos	B	Open your eyes
C	Saldrá la luna	C	The moon will come out
D	La casa está cayendo y tu debes despertar	D	The house is falling apart, and you must wake up
E	Cuántos más han de morir, para poder sonreír	E	How many more must die before we can smile
E	El tiempo ha llegado, el tiempo ya está aquí	E	The time has come, the time is here

Just as the song’s metaphors and parallelisms (e.g., lines referring the sun and the moon) are full of images of “nature” (birds, river, wind, trees, the forest) that provide a sense of placement, the visuals in the video include numerous images of Amazonian landscapes (forests,

rivers, fish, birds). Although this is a common trait in Radio Ucamara visual aesthetics, the innovative visual aspect in “Madre Río, Madre Tierra” videoclip is the inclusion of images of protests and political mobilizations from different parts of Latin America. The footage of protests in other places of Amazonia, such as Brazil, Bolivia, and Colombia, places the communicative scope of the videoclip on a global stage. These images are intertwined with the lyrics in order to highlight the transnational politics of the song and the protection of Amazonia as a global issue. The song exceeds the local dimensions of environmental politics in Loreto to become a multiethnic Amazonian claim that includes both footage of Indigenous and non-Indigenous protests. In a way, the “Madre Río, Madre Tierra” videoclip musically embodies, more than any other video, Conklin and Graham’s middle ground concept (1995). As an audiovisual expression, the video invokes the interaction and collaboration of heterogeneous agents driven by the notion of socio-environmental violence as a common shared experience.

While this musical calling is expressed mostly through sung speech, the song includes a fragment in which the lead singer shifts the vocal performance from melodic singing to recitation. Before the final chorus repetition, the female singer recites a poem that reinforces the calling of unity through listing as the main poetic device. The lyrics address the killing of political activists, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, and the loss of rivers, forests, and peoples. In this short manifesto, the song mentions the name of a group of environmental activists from within and outside Amazonia, alive and dead, that are considered part of the global efforts for environmental protection. The poetic resource of listing activists’ names reflects Radio Ucamara’s identification of their struggle as a global endeavor. Interestingly, the list of potential allies includes Pope Francis. His inclusion in the song openly establishes Radio

Ucamara's Catholic identity and opens the possibility of musically gaining a powerful ally.

Although this fragment is less melodic, it is still highly poetic:

Unamos nuestros brazos, mujeres y hombres	Let us join our arms, both women and men
Levantemos un árbol por cada hermano caído	Let us raise a tree for every fallen brother
Por cada río envenenado, que se levanten los pueblos	For every poisoned river, let the people rise
Por cada bosque destruido	For every forest destroyed
Por cada pueblo desaparecido	For every people disappeared
Por los niños que sufren a causa del progreso	For the children suffering due to progress
Por tantas mujeres como Berta Cáceres, Máxima Acuña, Flor Parana	For so may women like Berta Cáceres, Máxima Acuña, Flor Parana
Por hombres como el Papa Francisco, Edwin Chota, Chico Mendes	For men like the Pope Francis, Edwin Chota, Chico Mendes
Por tantos que entregaron su vida y hoy luchan	For so many that sacrificed their lives
Que se levanten los pueblos	Let the people rise

This list of activists' names sided with imagery of loss and destruction is part of the strategy of musicalization of political discourses directed to gain support from global audiences. Both enemies and allies are mentioned in Radio Ucamara songs as potential receivers of messages from Amazonian Indigenous communities. These attempts to open dialogues through media may be followed by complete silence or non-verbal responses from those "others" mentioned in the songs but are a key part of Radio Ucamara communicative aesthetics in the realm of environmental politics. Sometimes, music videos also instantiate forms of communication with other types of alterities. In songs like "Yuwara," other-than-human agents such as the rivers are mentioned as the main sources of vitality. Parts of the lyrics are built as a poetic conversation with the Marañón river, which can be read as another instance of its conceptualization as a subjectified entity. Such communicative process is part of a media operation consisting of the musicalization of life in the aquatic worlds.

Musicalizing Life: River Subjectivities and Vitality

One of the main semiotic processes taking place in Radio Ucayali songwriting and videomaking is the musicalization of the realms of life and death, a conceptual duality analogue to the dichotomy of water and oil, material substances that represent antagonistic symbolic forces. The main political and ontological point in Radio Ucayali environmental music videos is that the songs offer an alternative to an anthropocentric interpretation of the environment. The songs and music videos bring the aesthetic, sensorial, social, and spiritual dimensions of rivers from the perspective of the local population that are absent from the capitalist gaze. Through musical, visual, and poetic devices the aquatic forces of the rivers (especially river species) are foregrounded in Ucayali musical media to highlight the value of the life threatened by extractivism and commodity production.

As it stands out in the previous section, the communicative strategy of Radio Ucayali music videos includes a poetic incorporation of other-than-human agents. As we saw in the “Madre Río, Madre Tierra” song, the first verses include a call to animals and spirits as allies in the struggle. In this calling, the voices of the rivers and the forest are used as metaphors of the integration of Amazonian “nature” into political action. The vitality of cosmological worlds is invoked as another political arena that complements that of human actors. In “Madre Río, Madre Tierra,” the central metaphor of the song is the voice, and thus elicits an act of listening. The subjectivities of the rivers and the forests are poetically and musically incorporated to bring the experience and point of view of the non-human world into the political space. This notion can be better appreciated in the chorus of the song:

Madre Río, Madre Tierra. First verse

A Escuchen las voces de los pueblos
B Las voces de los ríos

A Listen to the people’s voices
B The river’s voices

C	Escuchen las voces de los bosques	C	Listen to the voices of the forest
D	Siente hermano	D	Feel it brother
E	Que salga el fuego de tu interior	E	Let your inner fire come out
F	Une tu corazón al mío	F	Join your heart with mine
G	La Amazonía será libre y será libre hoy	G	Amazonia will be free, and it will be free today

Yet, this process of incorporation of Amazonian vital forces through music making can be better appreciated in songs like “Parana” and “Yuwara.” The “Yuwara” title refers to the Amazonian manatee, an aquatic species facing potential extinction. In the “Parana” videoclip, the song describes how the river and the beings that inhabit the waters (e.g.: dolphins, mermaids, and fish) are being affected by oil pollution. Among these beings, fish are the most mentioned. The first rapped verses refer to dream communicative practices and interspecific socialities with animal-peoples. Through couplet rhymes, the voice of the fish is quoted to show their own perspective in experiencing oil contamination. This is rooted in the perspectival approach of Kukama ontological premises:

Parana. First verse

A	Anoche soñé que vivía en el río	A	Last night I dreamed that I lived in the river
A	Que me hablaban las sirenas y un delfín era mi amigo	A	That the mermaids spoke to me, and a dolphin was my friend
A	Y los peces me pedían “por favor cuida los ríos.	A	And the fish asked me “please take care of the rivers.
A	Quita ya esa mancha negra que a mi mundo deja frío”	A	Remove that black stain that leaves my world cold”
B	Cuánto quisiera hacer por mis amigos lo que piden	B	I would like to do what my friends are asking
B	Pero sola es que no puedo sé lo muy triste que viven	B	But I cannot do it by myself. I know how sad they live
C	Amamos el río y queremos cuidarlo	C	We love the river and want to protect it
C	Ayúdanos, vamos, podemos salvarlo	C	Help us! come on, we can save it

This incorporation of river worlds in the music videos also takes place visually. River (and to a lesser extent urbanized) scenery are central elements in Radio Ucamara videomaking. In the “Parana” video, for example, images of rivers and water landscapes predominate while the

song is performed (dancing and lip-synching) by a group of Kukama children (four girls and four boys).⁹⁶ The children mostly perform next to the rivers, while riding on boats, and sometimes walking on the streets of Nauta. Visually, the video is a mixture of performance sequences and scenes of everyday life, such as children swimming and playing in the rivers. Scenes of conviviality attached to the water are instances of the model of good life (threatened by oil companies) that Radio Ucamara is trying to protect. Vitality symbolism linked to the audiovisual portrayal of the river is often complemented with footage of species such as fish and dolphins. In concurrence with this visual aesthetics, the lyrical content of the “Parana” song brings the subjectivities of river species through lines written in first person. In the second verse of “Parana,” one of the performers impersonates the rapping voice of a river dolphin who describes his playful interaction with the fish and expresses his own political demands:

Parana. Second verse

A	Yo soy un delfín del río	A	I am a river dolphin
A	Y con mis amigos yo sonrío	A	And I smile with my friends
B	Me gusta ver los peces por montones	B	I like to see lots of fish
B	Pero no quiero verlos en cartones	B	But I do not want to see them in boxes
C	Escúchame, amigo	C	Listen to me my friend
C	y haz lo que te digo	C	And do as I say
C	No me ensucies el río	C	Do not pollute the river
C	Los peces tienen frío	C	Fish are cold
D	A mí me gusta así, quiero vivir aquí	D	I like it this way, I want to live here
D	Con los peces reír y mejor poder vivir	D	To laugh with the fish and to live a better life

Through rapped couplets, Kukama music videos musicalize interspecific socialities and place humans and other species in the same social spaces. These verses illustrate how non-human agents become politically active subjects in Radio Ucamara music videos. In these poetic

⁹⁶ In some of the videos, elders from the Ikuari school who teach the Kukama language are also visually present. Sometimes they act as supporting performers and sometimes they just appear next to the main performers.

recreations, dolphins can also speak to powerful others responsible for the contamination of rivers.⁹⁷ Another important instance in the process of musicalization of aquatic worlds is the subjectification of the Marañón river itself. In both the songs “Parana” and “Yuwara” we find rapped lines in the lyrics that are built as a dialogical message to the river. “Parana” includes an intro sung in Kukama language that takes the form of a direct message to the river and its beauty:

Parana. Intro

Río bonito	Pretty river
Dentro de ti hay muchos peces	There are a lot of fish inside you
A tu orilla están las playas (x2)	On your shore are the beaches
En balsa bajamos	We go down on a raft
En canoa surcamos (x2)	We sail in a canoe

In a similar way, the first verse of the song “Yuwara” is poetically constructed as an ode to the Marañón river. By virtue of rhymed verses, Kukama young rappers express their love for the river, addressing their message in second person pronouns that outline a dialogue with the river, highlighting its aesthetic and economic value:

Yuwara. First verse

A	Acabo de despertar con las ganas de sentir la brisa	A	I woke up wanting to feel the breeze
B	Que es una tierna caricia que acaricia mis mejillas	B	Which is a tender caress caressing my cheeks
B	Cuando sopla el viento y choca con tus orillas	B	When the wind blows against your shore
A	Es algo incomparable cuando haces que en mis labios aparezca una sonrisa	A	It is amazing when you make me smile
C	Amo tus curvas como a nadie	C	I love your curves like no other
D	Tus aguas, los peces que hay dentro de ti	D	Your waters, the fish inside you
D	La gente que vive y sobrevive gracias a ti	D	People who live and survive thanks to you
E	Por eso te canto con el corazón	E	That is why I sing to you with my heart
E	Lo hago a puro sudor y pulmón	E	I do it with pure sweat and passion
E	Por mi río Marañón	E	For my Marañón river

⁹⁷ For a similar interpretation of this song, see Angulo Giraldo (2019).

In these rapped lines, the Marañón river is represented as the ultimate source of life and an entity imbued with deep beauty. As in other lines present in the environmental songs, water works as a metaphor of vitality, where fish is once again a recurrent image of abundance and life. These symbols of vitality in the lyrics extend beyond aquatic species to include the spiritual worlds underneath the rivers. One of the main poetic features in this hip hop song is the incorporation of sensorial images (e.g., “caresses”) of the river and the way it becomes a source of health for local bodies. In “Yuwara,” for example river vitality is referenced throughout the song with lines such as “the water of life”, “in the river lies the life,” or in liquid metaphors such as “like blood through my veins, the river will flow freely.” Visually, in the “Yuwara” videoclip, river vitality is incorporated in the videorecording process when the performers sing next to the rivers, using footage of the river as visual transitions, and showing Radio Ucamara mural artistry as a background of the performances. These murals contain mythological scenes associated with the rivers, which adds another layer of water symbolism portrayed in video artistry.⁹⁸ The “Yuwara” song ends with lines of hope and optimism in which the river is referred as “eternal and beautiful” as the main desire of the performers. In this sort of coda, the song goes from a dark political tone to a more joyful one in which, musically, there is a radical change of rhythm: from hip-hop to carnival music.

The notion of river as vital force and a repository of life (both biological and spiritual) in Radio Ucamara songwriting is closely related with the subjectification of the river and the ongoing political claim of seeking its legal recognition as a person (a subject with rights).

⁹⁸ These representations of the rivers often mix with urbanized landscapes of the city of Nauta as a background. It is common to see public squares and streets with vendors, local people, and *motocarros* as a background of the video performances. City dynamics provides a sort of social vitality crucial in the video aesthetics.

Sometimes this personification is expressed in representations of the river as having an animal body and as an entity that lives and dies. The textual description of the “Parana” videoclip is an example of this:

The river has a belly, which are the large and deep lagoons where the fish live. The river has a face. When it is calm it is very bright. The river has a tail, where the river ends the fish reproduce. The river has a mouth. The river is a big snake. The river dries up when there is no one to take care of it. Many people live inside the river, many of them are our relatives, the people who fell into the river and their bodies have not been found is because they have gone to live inside the river. PARANA means RIVER in the Kukama language [Radio Ucamara 2015].

In the same textual description of the video, Radio Ucamara media activists make explicit the purpose of the videos and their main political significance: to protect the different forms of life that live in Kukama water worlds.

This video addresses the importance of the river for the Kukama and for many Indigenous peoples who not only live on the banks of the river, but inside the river and who live from the river. Projects that damage the river cause the destruction of the river itself but also the disappearance of many communities that are co-dependent with the river. The children in the video clip sing in Kukama, they sing their culture, their dreams with the river and their fears. If a child is afraid of what is happening to the rivers, this should interest us all. This time, with

their song, they return our gaze to the river, drawing attention to the importance it has in their lives, its destruction caused by pollution, and the intention of turning the rivers into highways for the Amazon Waterway. Helping to protect the river is also protecting the lives of the thousands of inhabitants who depend on it, the lives of children. Let's all sing to revitalize our memories, our cultures, our life, let's sing to feel united, to be happy with the river. "THE RIVER IS OURS, WE MUST RECOVER IT" [Radio Ucamara 2015].

As the music videos show, one of the main purposes of Radio Ucamara media work is to make visible the multiple expressions of life and beauty attached to the Amazonian rivers (cf. Cabel 2022). Through a novel process of musicalization of river subjectivities and its different forms of life, the perspective of many Kukama locals on the environment and its value can reach broader audiences. The weapon used in this political strategy has been pop music genres such as hip hop and rock. Far from producing disconnections with Indigenous cosmological worlds, Western pop music is now part of the musical soundscapes in Indigenous Amazonia. The indigenization of these forms of musical artistry has become one of the resources new generations are using to creatively engage in effective political action. But singing about life and river vitality is just one dimension of Radio Ucamara videomaking work. Musical images of oil and death also play a big part in the poetic transformations of local environmental struggle.

Musicalizing Death: Oil Metaphors and Metonyms

The second major lyrical and visual topic in Radio Ucamara music video-making is petroleum and its significance as a substance of death. One of the main characteristics of the

socio-environmental music videos is that oil pollution and the oil companies are only mentioned in poetic ways. Oil's lyrical presence in the environmentalist songs takes place mostly in the form of metaphors and metonyms. Yet, at the same time, oil becomes explicit and factual in the visual aesthetics of the music videos by virtue of the incorporation of oil spills footage. In all the videos, this substance is shown as a flow of dark liquid invading the rivers and killing fish. Footage of the oil spills comes from Radio Ucamarca's own journalistic work, which has been creatively re-signified in the music videos. Images of polluted water, dead fish covered in oil, and sick children are aesthetically intertwined with the musical sounds of the environmental songs focused on the destruction of the rivers. The images of oil spills coupled with anti-extractivist musical discourse have the power of making visible the events of socio-ecological violence not covered in Peruvian mainstream media. This interplay between media aesthetics and political action in Radio Ucamarca video-making also became clear during my preliminary fieldwork. In my conversations with local hip hop artists, they talked about the anger they felt after watching the oil spills footage and the damage caused to Kukama riverine communities. Reflecting on the importance of making oil destruction visible in the videos, they claimed that Radio Ucamarca journalistic footage became a creative source for songwriting. Oil spills footage were useful not only to visually complement musicalized discourses, but also to stimulate lyrical and musical production, thus creating aesthetic feedback between sounds and images. The Kukama music videos have the role of making visible oil devastation in Amazonia through both visual and verbal artistry. Among the latter, vocal forms such as singing, rapping, reciting, spoken speech, and voiceovers play a big role in this political mission.

In "Parana," for example, musicalized speech about oil pollution is expressed through metaphors such as "black clouds" or "gloomy rivers" and metonymic forms such as "black

stains.” In the context of the Loreto region, the overwhelming and enduring presence of oil pollution makes these metaphoric and metonymic references completely self-evident. In the song “Parana,” Kukama artists deliver this semantic content through couplets, both in the sung chorus and the rapped verses. The references to oil pollution in the chorus of “Parana” (previously mentioned), are incorporated in the musical communication with outsiders and potential allies. The chorus refers to the destructive presence of oil in the rivers in a metonymic way. Kukama artists replace literal references to crude with a consequence of the oil spills: black stains:

Parana. Chorus

A	Todos buscamos la felicidad	A	We all seek happiness
A	Y esas manchas muy negras del río sacar	A	And take those very black stains out of the river
A	Ahora ayúdanos para poder continuar	A	Now help us to keep going
A	Y al mundo podemos cambiar	A	So we can change the world

Visually speaking, these lyrical forms take place while the Kukama children perform the song next to the rivers or walking around the city of Nauta. While in the previous example the Kukama artists deliver this musical reference to oil through melodic singing, in the sixth verse of “Parana” oil discourse is delivered through rapped couplets performed by multiple children. One of the children metaphorically describes the presence of oil as a “gloomy river.” Using a monorhyme pattern, the children elaborate an explicit petition to outsiders to stop polluting the rivers and harming people and fish:

Parana. Sixth verse

A	Desde el río les digo, no lo contamines, aquí vivo	A	From the river I tell you, do not pollute it because I live here
A	Los peces sufren y no creas yo sonrío	A	Fish suffer, but I smile
A	Me gusta ver la luz que se refleja en el río	A	I like to see the light reflecting on the river
A	Pero el río está sucio, no quiero que esté sombrío	A	But the river is dirty, I don’t want it to be gloomy

In the seventh verse of “Parana,” oil is mentioned through the “black clouds” metaphor amidst monorhymes that talk about the life and vitality of the rivers. In this example, oil is clearly depicted as a substance that needs to be collectively resisted:

Parana. Seventh verse

A	Yo me puedo imaginar y un nuevo mundo soñar	A	I can imagine and dream about a new world
A	A los peces en el río y con ellos yo nadar	A	I want to swim with the fish in the river
A	En un barco yo pasear y del viento disfrutar	A	I want to travel on a boat and enjoy the wind
A	Y juntos aquellas nubes negras vamos a sacar	A	And together we are going to remove those black clouds

Yet, although in the “Parana” song oil is always referred to in poetic language, there is a moment in which non-musical speech is used as an aesthetic resource to make explicit (through prosaic language) the main theme of the song: oil pollution. In “Parana,” right before the final chorus repetition, there is a fragment where we can hear the voice of a child explaining how he could not eat a fish due to its strong smell of petroleum. Radio Ucamara media-makers used this real-life testimony as voiceover to illustrate how oil threatens the health and food security of local communities. Although this spoken part is not sung and has no poetic elaboration, it represents a powerful sensorial image that points to the disruptive power of oil spills. While the voice of children is describing the impossibility of consuming a toxic fish, visually, the video includes footage of oil invading a local river as a strategy to explicitly foreground the main problem addressed in the video: environmental destruction.⁹⁹

Yo cuando he comido la lisa, el pescado estaba
puro petróleo. No le podía comer. El olor de
petróleo estaba fuerte.

When I ate the lisa (a fish), the fish was full of oil.
I could not eat it. The smell of oil was very strong
[delay effect in the voice when he says “strong”].

⁹⁹ The song expresses what Michael Cepek (2012) has called the “sensuous presence of oil” in Amazonia. The way oil has entered the sensory fields of local population is usually manifested as an olfactory experience while eating fish or drinking the water from the rivers.

The “Parana” song includes three different forms of speech in a single musical unit (singing, rapping, and speaking) that fall in the musicality-lexicality spectrum. These language forms are used to portray in a poetic continuum the abrasive presence of oil in Amazonian socio-ecosystems. While singing and rapping rely on metaphorical language, spoken speech offers explicit mentions of oil. Unlike “Parana’s” warm political tone, subsequent musical references to oil and death became more aggressive. The musicalization of extractivist violence became stronger in songs like “Yuwara” and “Maisangara.” In “Yuwara,” the musical dynamics present in the song structure encapsulate the poetics of life and death unfolded in Radio Ucamara songwriting. “Yuwara” has two clearly distinguishable parts. In the first one, the two initial verses express the love local inhabitants feel for the Marañón river and the city of Nauta. The rest of the song (four verses in total) shifts towards a more political and a darker aesthetics, both musically and lyrically.

Musically speaking, when the “Yuwara” fourth verse starts (right after the second chorus) there is a significant change in both the melody driving the song and the sound of the beat. The sound of the electronic snare changes from soft to thicker and louder, which makes the song closer to the aesthetics of urban hip-hop rather than the reggaeton style of “Parana.” Likewise, while in the first part of the song (both in the chorus and the first verses) the melody is based on a chord progression of three notes (C-Am-F) that gives the song a happier feeling, the second part of the song changes the chord progression to C-G-F (with a different set of arrangements) that provides a darker tone corresponding to the violent imagery of the lyrics.

“Yuwara” is essentially an anti-dystopic song. The poetic references to pollution, oil companies, and death are fully developed in the second part of it. Like “Parana,” “Yuwara” is a

hip-hop song in which political discourses are delivered through rapped verses. Oil pollution is always referred metaphorically with images such as obscurity, poison, selfishness, darkness, darkened waters, and paradise-hell analogies. Likewise, oil companies are mentioned only through pronouns and metaphors. This extreme expression of dangerous alterity is referred to as “them,” “monsters,” or through the concept of selfishness. Yet, in the “Yuwara” song, when some lines become more aggressive, lyrics are less poetic and more explicit. References of killings of activists and local inhabitants, the loss of fish, drinking water, and agricultural practices are plainly expressed through rapping. The song even reaches deep critical tones to Western grand-narratives such as the notions of progress when anti-capitalist and anti-extractivist statements are expressed. This poetics of environmental destruction starts to develop in the third verse of “Yuwara,” when references to dystopic futures and images of loss are intertwined with metaphors of oil as “poison” and accusations of oil companies’ dishonest behavior:

Yuwara. Third verse

A	El futuro oscuro aterrera y el presente no me va	A	The dark future is terrifying, and I do not like the present
A	Sonrisas y sueños. Todos los peces ¿dónde están?	A	Smiles and dreams. All the fish, where are they?
A	Veneno corre por las aguas, esto me hace sentir mal	A	Poison runs in the water; this makes me feel bad
A	No pondré sonrisas pintadas que fingen felicidad	A	I won't fake smiles that simulate happiness
A	Lo de ellos es mentira, solo esta es la verdad	A	They are full of lies, only this is the truth
A	En el río están las voces que debemos escuchar	A	In the river are the voices we must listen to
A	Mil canciones aquí dentro, mil historias que contar	A	A thousand songs in here, a thousand stories to tell
A	Los ríos son nuestras vidas y los vamos a cuidar	A	The rivers are our lives, and we are going to take care of them

In the fourth verse, the lyrics reflect on the tensions built among the local communities due to oil pollution. This occurs while the musical beat shifts towards a more sinister territory.

Oil companies are mentioned with the metonymic image of “selfishness” in a contrastive interplay with the previously mentioned trope of water as the ultimate source of vitality:

Yuwara. Fourth Verse

A	¿Qué pasa con la gente? Nadie me mira de frente	A	What happens with the folks? No one looks me in my eyes
A	Pa’ poner pa’ echar problema, aquí la cosa está caliente	A	To cause some trouble, things here are tense
B	El egoísmo contamina y me sube la adrenalina	B	Selfishness pollutes and my adrenaline rises
B	Quiero verme sonreír en tus aguas cristalinas	B	I want to see myself smiling in your clear waters
B	Ansía mi alma herida por beber del agua de la vida	B	My wounded soul longs for drinking the water of life
A	Que son los ríos de mi pueblo y mi gente	A	Which are the rivers of my people

In the fifth verse, an iteration of the life and death duality is expressed through heaven-hell metaphors. A dystopic present is portrayed through explicit mentions to the destruction of local ecological conditions such as loss of soils, clean water, and fish.

Yuwara. Fifth verse

A	Recuerdo el suelo donde mi abuelo cosechaba	A	I remember the soil where my grandfather used to harvest
A	Ahora no cosecha porque está contaminada	A	Now he cannot harvest because it is contaminated
A	El agua limpia que tomaba, en la actualidad, no sirve para nada	A	The clean water he used to drink today is useless
B	Los peces poco a poco van muriendo	B	Fish are slowly dying
B	Yo sé por qué están desapareciendo	B	I know why they are disappearing
B	Mi paraíso se está convirtiendo en un infierno	B	My paradise is turning into hell
B	Flora y fauna están desapareciendo	B	Flora and fauna are disappearing
C	Alzo mi voz, es mi manifestación	C	I raise my voice; it is my own expression
C	Porque amo y respeto a mi río Marañón	C	Because I love and respect my Marañón river

In the sixth and final verse, the rapped lyrics poetically address the greedy alterity of oil companies as “monsters” and the oil spills as “darkening waters.” Most importantly, the song

outlines a critique and moral delegitimization of the Peruvian state's Eurocentric notions of progress and development:

Yuwara. Sixth verse

A	El monstruo no es lejano, no podemos esperar	A	The monster is not far, we cannot wait
A	La vida dentro del río no es algo que quiero dejar	A	The life inside the river is something I don't want to abandon
A	Tus aguas oscurecen y no quiero ni pensar	A	Your waters get dark, and I don't even want to think
A	Que ellos tendrán su dinero y yo sin ríos pa' nadar	A	That they will have their money and I won't have rivers to swim
A	¿Dónde dicen que hay progreso? Aquí en nada van a ayudar	A	Where is the progress they talk about? They won't be helping at all
A	Cosas vacías sin sentido las que dicen que harán	A	They say they'll do empty and meaningless things

Co-occurring with the rapped verses in the “Yuwara” video, there is a significant performative level. The three rappers' body and facial expressions change according to the tone of the song, adding another aesthetic and emotional layer to the political content of the “Yuwara” video. This performance shows the body dynamics (hands moving, pounding, or crisscrossing) common in the hip hop genre body language that are used to enrich the verbal delivery of musical messages. Likewise, when the lyrics acquire a radically anti-extractivist tone, so do the visuals. Footage of dead fish and petroleum overflowing out form broken pipelines are sequentially combined with the rapper's performance. The oil spill footage is used as a visual transition to the darker part of the song. Images of children crying, and arid soils become part of the corpus of death aesthetics usually embodied in images of oil spills and dead fish. Sometimes the performers sing and rap in these dry landscapes to highlight the dystopic elements of the videoclip. These visuals coming from Radio Ucamara journalistic reportages, when incorporated in the music videos, shift from empirical evidence of socio-ecological damage to artistic creation and, thus, a tool for discursive amplification.

Lastly, “Maisangara” is the song and videoclip that best represents Radio Ucámara audiovisual aesthetics of death. In Nauta, Radio Ucámara media-makers explained to me that Maisangara is a demonic figure (the equivalent of the Christian devil) belonging to a spiritual hierarchy of evil forces inhabiting the world. Maisangara is usually identified with powerful alterities: the White or Mestizo man, the Peruvian state, oil companies, or the Amazonian Hidroway project (Rita Muñoz, Nauta. June 22, 2017). This obscure imagery is clearly expressed in the chorus of the song: “You are the death in our rivers. Maisangara!” In both my preliminary fieldwork and online research, references to the figure Maisangara emerged several times in conversations and social media activity. The identification of this demonic figure with colonial predatory forces sometimes emerged in online spaces. For example, on May 26, 2022, one of the hip-hop artists who participated as a performer in the videoclips, referred to the Maisangara as the main force behind the violence unleashed during the rubber boom. On Facebook, he posted a video of a rubber tree (*Hevea brasiliensis*) framed with this text:

Almost a little over [100] years ago, due to the great world demand for this latex product obtained from the shiringa tree, an unfortunate dark age was unleashed in the Amazon; leaving wounds that still hurt in the memory of the Amazonian peoples. Due to the ambition of foreign businessmen, "the Maisangara" or demon that brings misery and chaos, devastated entire towns and people, enslaving them and reducing them to the point of extinction [Facebook post May 26, 2022].

In these depictions, Maisangara is an evil force that is identified as a master spiritual force behind historical predatory processes underpinned by colonial ventures such as the rubber boom or contemporary oil extraction. Maisangara is a cosmopolitical trope ingrained in local historical consciousness used to understand the colonial experience. In Nauta, this figure is being conceptually reworked through Indigenous media aesthetics and activism. The Radio Ucumara team has developed a process of musicalization of the Maisangara figure (the ultimate deadly other) through rock music and audiovisual productions as a mechanism to resist his destructive power. This identification of the Maisangara spirit as the White men, the Peruvian state, and private companies is made textually explicit in the YouTube video description of the “Maisangara” song:

MAISANGARA, in the Kukama language means “Evil Spirit,” the one who steals your soul. Over the years, the “Maisangara” took on another connotation. The “Maisangara” became the white man or the one who destroys everything, who steals your face (your identity), who destroys the rivers, who kills, poisons, and brings suffering to our people in the Amazonia. To that “Maisangara” we say NO MORE Maisangara!! The young people of the lower Marañón River say ENOUGH! to the abuses of the companies, of the Peruvian State, which means death for the rivers and for the people [Radio Ucumara 2016].

Musically, Maisangara is a hard rock song. The sound is driven by distorted heavy guitar riffs, guitar solos, and the classic drumming instrumentality of rock music. It initiates with a quiet acoustic guitar intro and a poem recited by one of the performers. Then the song explodes

into heavy rock music and keeps that tone throughout all its duration. The song relies on a polyrhythmic approach: the verses are fast, and the choruses are slow. While the verses use a four-chord progression (G-D-C-D) the chorus uses two chords (F# and B). The chorus slows down the tempo of the song to reach a heavier and gloomy effect, which sonically echoes the dark imagery of the lyrics (“You are the death in our rivers. Maisangara!”). The music video is performed by the same artists who appeared in the “Yuwara” video. Although the lyrical content is mostly delivered through sung speech and screamed vocals, at the end of the song, one of the singers performs a few rapped verses.

As in the previous music videos, in “Maisangara,” oil is never explicitly mentioned. Oil as a deadly substance is mobilized in the lyrical content of the song through metaphors and metonyms. In “Maisangara” the songwriters refer to oil pollution through sensorial images like “bitter flavors” in the water, the river changing colors, or as a “deadly black stain.” As we have seen, the “Maisangara” chorus deals with experiences of environmental destruction and dispossession by portraying the Maisangara as the embodiment of death itself. Through this song, the Kukama artists develop a poetic form of agentivity in which they directly defy Maisangara’s power by taking control over their own history. For example, in the second verse of the song, the performers use monorhymes to confront oil companies:

Maisangara. Second verse.

A	Mis raíces, mi vida y mis sueños aquí están	A	My roots, my life, and my dreams are here
A	El sabor amargo de los ríos vamos a cambiar	A	We are going to change the bitter taste of the rivers
A	La lupuna, el papatúa de la selva no caerá	A	The Lupuna, ¹⁰⁰ the Papatua of the forest won’t fall

¹⁰⁰ A species of tree (*Ceiba pentandra*) with mythical connotations.

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
| A | Voy a escribir mi historia, Maisangara ya no más | A | I will write my own story, Maisangara no more |
|---|--|---|---|

Similarly, in the third verse, we can notice how Kukama artists build images of sadness and incorporate the subjectivity of cosmological agents in their songwriting process. These cosmopolitical references are positioned in an interplay with visual metaphors about the oil spills: the darkening of the river waters:

Maisangara. Third verse

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| A | Me paro en la orilla veo que el sol no brilla | A | I stand on the river shore, and I see the sun does not shine |
| B | El agua cambia de color porque hay tristeza en su interior | B | The water changes colors due to its inner sadness |
| C | El cielo llora eso me apena | C | The sky cries and that saddens me |

This dystopic imagery persists throughout the song. In the fifth verse of “Maisangara,” there is fragment where the lyrics are rapped through two sets of couplets over heavy guitar sounds. In these couplets, images of dead trees and fish are expressed in metonymic forms where oil is portrayed as a deadly substance:

Maisangara. Fifth verse

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| A | No me quedaré tranquilo, esto me enoja | A | I won't stay quiet, this angers me |
| A | Que los árboles estén quedándose sin hojas | A | The trees are losing their leaves |
| B | Yo quiero ver mis peces nadar | B | I want to see my fish swimming |
| B | No quiero ver mi río con esa mancha negra mortal | B | I don't want to see the river with that deadly black stain |

Visually speaking, same as in the “Yuwara” video, Radio Ucamara video-makers use both river landscapes and footage of oil spills in the visual aesthetics of the “Maisangara” videoclip. This sequence of visuals occurs in juxtaposition with the performance of the Kukama artists usually singing next to water bodies. The visuals of environmental destruction are also

enriched with images of children being affected by the toxicity of oil extractivism. Blackened rivers, oil companies' ships, and machinery operating in the rivers become illustrations of the poetics of death verbalized in the song. In line with the dark imagery and heavy sounds of the "Maisangara" video, the performers also draw on body expressions and micro-dramatizations. Facial gestures deliver an emotionality of aggressiveness and anger that mixes with the dancing that occurs when singing the song. The performers, for example, adopt dead body postures laying on the floor while singing, adding another aesthetic layer to the musicalization of death that takes place in the videoclip. Radio Ucámara media-makers understand these strategies of mediatization and musicalization as cosmopolitical tools. By conceptualizing neoliberal institutions as the expression of demonic spiritual forces, music videos take Amazonian environmental politics beyond the limits of a struggle for material resources and make it a cosmological conflict. In such battlefields, music persists as one of the main devices for building power.

Final Remarks

In this chapter, I have analyzed the interplay between music and politics found in Kukama media-making practices. In examining Radio Ucámara anti-oil music videos, I drew on Jonathan Hill's concepts of "musicalization" and "musicalizing the other" (Hill 1993, 1994, 2002, 2004, 2013, 2015, 2018a, 2018b) to argue that musical sounds travelling in the digital space are re-shaping Indigenous cosmopolitical discourses and stimulating the formation of eco-political alliances in Amazonia. While the scholarship on processes of musicalization in Lowland South America have emphasized the use of ritual music to interact with the White-Mestizo society, the Radio Ucámara case illustrates how the multimodal aesthetics of media and urban

pop musicalities are now part of the artistic repertoire instrumentalized in Indigenous Amazonian politics. Echoing the power of shamanic music, pop musicalities (rock, reggeton, pop, and especially hip-hop) are now used as a mechanism to confront corporate and state agents responsible for socio-environmental predation. The popularity of this music, in combination with visual and performative features, is conceived as a transformative force that has helped the Kukama to deliver their voices to wider audiences. Radio Ucamara media products such as videoclips are semiotic units that encapsulate aesthetic and political meanings with the capacity of opening new spaces of negotiation with powerful others. The music videos combine musical sounds, images, and dance, that are building an audiovisual poetics of environmental struggle highly effective in positioning Indigenous voices in national and global spheres.

I have also discussed how Radio Ucamara process of mediatization and musicalization of cosmopolitical discourses are providing novel poetic dimensions and spaces of action in the field of environmental politics. Radio Ucamara music videos shed light on the “pragmatic multiplicity” (Cepek 2016) of Indigenous ontological discourses and the way video artistry is repositioning Indigenous ontologies in new symbolic arenas. Regardless of its multivocality or contentiousness in the region, Kukama media musicalizations amplify cosmopolitical notions and make visible the multiple worlds and subjectivities entangled in Amazonian oil extraction. Musical sounds in co-occurrence with visuality, become formal elements that incorporate other-than-human voices and serve to confront neoliberal notions of “nature.” When non-human agents such as rivers, fish, and spirits like the Maisangara are evoked in songs circulating in the digital space, they have the capacity to reach national and global imaginations and therefore challenge modernist notions of the environment. Electronic beats, metaphors, rapping, singing, and rhyming patterns make ontological discourses more appealing than mere spoken speech for both

global audiences and the new Kukama generations. Confronting the idea of the incommensurability of Indigenous ontological worlds, I argue that Radio Ucamara aesthetic strategies are a good example of the entwinement of Amazonian Indigenous cosmologies with national politics and cultures in Latin America (see High and Oakley 2020). Pop music is a contemporary example of the way Amazonian ontological premises, although different from Western cosmologies, can be embedded in different semantic and practical fields beyond realms of “radical alterity.” In short, Indigenous ontologies are inseparable from the Indigenous modern experience.

In this chapter, I have also explored the significance of the musical dimension of current eco-political alliances in Amazonia. The new middle grounds of environmental politics (Conklin and Graham 1995, high and Oakley 2020) often encompass aesthetic and poetic features usually overlooked in the anthropological literature. My analysis of the Radio Ucamara environmentalist songs and videos shows how media multimodal aesthetics is becoming a key element in the circulation and reception of political symbols amidst Amazonian environmental struggles. Radio Ucamara musicalized speech is used as a communicative device to reach out to potential partners (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) in the protection of Amazonian rivers. In enacting this form of musical communication with global activists and the public, the songs and videos have effectively contributed to building strong networks with scholars, activists, lawyers, artists, priests, and other media-makers around the world. Radio Ucamara has received significant coverage from national and international media outlets due mostly to the music videos. Kukama rappers included in Radio Ucamara music videos have been invited to perform in Lima (Peru’s capital city) and Washington D.C. in public events and festivals. I argue that Radio Ucamara media-makers are consciously using global soundscapes as a pathway for building political

power materialized in interethnic alliances. Although these alliances still rely on stereotyped images of Amazonian indigenosity (e.g., “the ecologically noble savage”), they are now being nurtured with cosmological discourses, the presence of urban expressive culture (e.g., rap music), and representations of urban indigeneity.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

This exploration of Indigenous media and processes of mediatization in Peru sought to engage in the analysis of power dynamics in contemporary Amazonia, while also exploring broader theoretical questions around the interplay between politics and aesthetics. The central argument of my dissertation is that aesthetic forms operating in Kukama media-making practices carry a generative energy which is increasingly becoming a building block in the construction of political power in Peruvian Amazonia. As in many other ethnographic cases worldwide, image, sound, narrative, and poetic production in Radio Ucamara media is understood as a form of social action. Such production relies on the digital space as a vehicle for the amplification of the subaltern voice, in which attention to form is crucial for the transmission of political messages. As I already discussed, the link between power and aesthetics has been a well explored topic in Western philosophy (e.g., Rancière 2010; Fischer-Lichte and Wihstutz 2018; Sartwell 2010) and anthropology (e.g., Cant 2016; Epps and Paiva Ramos 2020; Gell 1992; Ginsburg 1994b; Hill 1993; Stalcup 2016; Stainova 2022). Yet, the intellectual contributions of Indigenous media-makers to such discussions still occupy a marginal place. As the case of Radio Ucamara shows,

media-making is always accompanied with the production of reflexive and innovative discourses in which artistic form is explicitly conceived as necessary to political praxis as “factual” registers of reality. When media aesthetics is imbued with transformative power, Indigenous media specialists add yet another conceptual dimension to broader discussions about modernist notions of politics and the role of beauty and emotions in the dynamics of power structures.

I have encapsulated this form of “media consciousness” found among Nauta media-makers under the concept of *generative aesthetics*, to refer to creations that are not only socially “embedded” (Ginsburg 1994b) but also conceived as potentially transformative. Indigenous music videos, for example, are inscribed in neo-colonial histories of Indigenous discrimination and environmental damage, but also linked to the emergence of possible futures. Nevertheless, we should be wary about the limits of this capacity for socio-political intervention. Although the use of media as a tool for the empowerment of the subaltern is a widespread practice, scholars such as Pace (2018), Wortham (2013), and Ginsburg (2018) have warned that media-making by itself does not lead to complete autonomy or the overcoming of state and corporate violence. The capacity for self-representation and negotiation are unquestionably significant accomplishments in contexts of severe power imbalances, but media has its limitations in materializing real structural change and reaching the most utopian ambitions held by Indigenous activists and non-Indigenous collaborators. Indigenous media can effectively help to call attention to significant issues and build strong alliances amidst long-term processes for the recognition of basic rights. Yet, intervening in the ultimate causes of anti-Indigenous racism or environmental destruction, for example, require a set of political maneuvers that go beyond any form of mediatization. This does not mean, however, that the power built through media is not significant or desirable. Local

media-makers are conscious of both the limitations and the effectiveness of media interventions in making their lives better, and they keep using them as a vehicle for empowerment.

In my analysis of Amazonian Indigenous media, this effectiveness is maybe clearer in the case of Radio Ucamara music videos centered around linguistic revival. Relying on hip-hop musicality and audiovisual performativity, Kukama media-makers turned indigeneity into a politico-aesthetic space that acquired a replicating power. What they have called “Kumbarikira effect” refers precisely to the unexpected and significant impact that a single song and music video had on the public imagination in terms of challenging anti-Indigenous linguistic ideologies. In Radio Ucamara’s work focused on linguistic revitalization and the restitution of Kukama pride, notions of indigeneity (rooted in language and myth as the base of a politics of difference) were enlivened by the power of modern sounds (e.g., electronic beats, rapping vocalizations, digital instruments) and visuals. As in many other settings in which local artists have articulated Indigeneity with hip-hop (Bodunrin 2019, 2021; Leza 2019; Woloshyn 2021), Kukama activists have instrumentalized urban musical sounds and poetic forms (especially rhyming patterns) to amplify discriminated voices and position them in relation to larger audiences. The aesthetic process behind the mediatization of concepts of indigeneity has helped Radio Ucamara to gain a significant amount of visibility and recognition nationally and globally. Awards, public promotion, a transnational network of allies, and multiple cover versions of the song *Kumbarikira* have given Kukama media-makers a clear perception of the role of the sensory in the construction of power. Although Indigenous media is not able to destroy the racist structures operating in Peru, it certainly can help to defy aural hegemonies and change the way people perceive Indigenous languages and identities.

This conceptual premise is also applicable to Radio Ucayali's mediatization of the past. In chapter 3, I have proposed the concept of "enactive narrativities" to understand how Radio Ucayali media aesthetics is able to imbue rubber times mytho-histories with transformative capacities. Ucayali media producers have been able to reconfigure local Indigenous historicity (expressed in oral histories and different narrative forms) via digital and non-digital creations that facilitate the amplification of political agency. From the perspective of Nauta media activists, videos and murals based on narratives about the Rubber Boom can make the past relevant for both re-interpreting and, most importantly, changing present-day oppression. As we have seen, Radio Ucayali narrative videos centered around ghost ships, pink dolphins, and black jaguars rely on a polyphonic strategy (Bakhtin 1984; Turner 2002b; Bermúdez and Uzendoski 2018; Cabel 2022) that incorporates the interplay of multiple voices. While some voices narrate events of encounters with supernatural forces spawned during the rubber economy era, other voices offer meta-narrative interpretations that make explicit occult experiences of violence and highlight the political potential of Indigenous narrativity in demanding justice. Such strategies, I argue, make Radio Ucayali aesthetics a highly enactive form of expression (see Epps and Paiva Ramos 2020). In the process of building a multimodal aesthetics of violence, mytho-histories not only get formally and textually updated, but also acquire new modes of storage and transmission. Even though mainstream media and education in South America still reproduce Eurocentric notions of history, the Indigenous mediatization of rubber times historicity becomes a vehicle for challenging national historical imagination in Peru and defying hegemonic versions of the past.

Likewise, in chapters 4 and 5 I have examined how pop music has become one of the most effective aesthetic resources in making visible the assault of oil companies on Amazonian

ecosystems and native communities. Radio Ucamara acts of mediatization of Indigenous environmentalist discourse have included innovative processes of “musicalizations” (Hill 2018) that are significantly empowering. Amazonian youth are increasingly using pop musicalities to manage relationships with powerful others (enemies, allies, human, and other-than-human) and to add innovative aesthetic dimensions to the emergence of new eco-political interethnic alliances or “middle grounds” (Conklin and Graham 1995). In such processes, audiovisual work, especially music videos, have become a vehicle to make visible the environments, cosmological worlds, and other-than-human subjectivities that have been threatened with the destruction of Amazonian rivers by oil extraction. In these acts of mediatization and musicalization of cosmopolitical discourses, Amazonian ontologies are imbued with novel poetic dimensions and are re-positioned in new political fields. Electronic beats, electric guitars, metaphors, rapping, singing, and rhyming patterns are making Indigenous ontological and environmental discourses more appealing than mere spoken speech. Radio Ucamara video artistry, I argue, is an example of the “pragmatic multiplicity” (Cepek 2016) of Indigenous ontological discourses in Amazonia. In Nauta, non-human agents such as rivers, fish, and spirits (e.g., Maisangara) are now part of the intersubjectivity expressed in songs and videos circulating in the digital space aiming to reach national and global audiences. The audiovisual musicalization of Kukama cosmological worlds has become a key aesthetic force in confronting modernist notions of “nature.” As I have discussed, Radio Ucamara aesthetic strategies illustrate the entwinement of Amazonian Indigenous cosmologies with national politics and cultures in Latin America (High and Oakley 2020). Indigenous pop music offers a contemporary example of the way ontological premises are embedded in different semantic and practical fields in Amazonia challenging primitivist stereotypes.

Due to space and time constraints, I have left out a series of topics and media creations relevant for my analysis of Radio Ucamara that will be developed in future iterations of this research project. One of the subject areas yet to be examined in detail is the relationship between media and territoriality. Radio Ucamara has produced a series of digital and non-digital works addressing the materiality and cosmology of Amazonian rivers, a central element in the construction of their territory. By making audiovisual documentaries, animations, digital maps, podcasts, audio soap operas and murals, Radio Ucamara media specialists have been amplifying and reconfiguring the spiritualized aquatic worlds that are part of Indigenous ontological systems and inter-specific socialities. In the context of their struggle to protect Amazonian rivers from extractive activity, Kukama media activists are making visible for larger audiences the cosmological worlds threatened by corporate and state powers. Among those worlds, Kukama media is revealing the existence of underwater cities inhabited by aquatic beings (called *Karuara* or *Yacuruna*) that engage in kinship relations and establish constant communication with those living out of the water. This mediatization of Kukama territoriality has an explicit political purpose. Documentaries, for example, combine both Indigenous and Western scientific knowledge to defy the Amazonian Waterway project, a development plan that entails the dredging of the Marañón River to increase its commercial navigation. Another interesting digital creation is an online digital map entitled “*Parana Marañún tsawa: El alma del Río Marañón. Historias sumergidas del pueblo Kukama* (The soul of the Marañón River. Submerged stories of the Kukama people). In this digital representation of the Lower Marañón river, the territory is depicted through the overlapping of multiple layers of mythological and cosmological meanings. The spatialization of narrativity holds a multimodal aesthetics (texts, maps, pictures, and videos) that functions as a digital repository of orality. It features images of contemporary

phantasmagoria such as the figure of the *pelacaras* (“face-peelers”), identified as demonic others with supernatural powers, placed in specific points of the territory. The mapping of Kukama ontological geographies both represents and reworks Kukama territorialities to offer an alternative approach to the capitalist conceptualization of Amazonian rivers. Due to such efforts, Indigenous media-makers have been able to establish a significant dialogue with the Peruvian national authorities as well as positioning their visions of the rivers in national debates.

Another research topic delayed for future analysis is Radio Ucamara’s creative response to the COVID-19 pandemic. When the pandemic hit Peruvian Amazonia in March of 2020, Radio Ucamara started working on media products and radio broadcastings addressing both the biological and social intricacies of the virus. Kukama media-makers had to deal with a new kind of invisibility (a biological invisible) that in combination with the severe social marginalization of Amazonian communities, caused a substantial state of disruption in the area. The arrival of the COVID-19 virus to the Peruvian Amazonia became the latest chapter in a long history of epidemics and disease that have been intrinsic to the colonial and neocolonial processes in the region. Nauta communities not only had to deal with the biological impact of the virus, but also with the policies of discrimination perpetrated by the Peruvian state and the companies operating in the area. In this context, Radio Ucamara media team started to support donation campaigns lead by the Catholic church, as well as producing informative radio programs, documentaries, journalistic articles, music videos, and children’s contests, that functioned as semiotic strategies to shed light on the deep inequalities that the pandemic revealed. Given the differential treatment and resource placement of the Peruvian state health policy regarding Amazonia, one of the most significant strategies coming from Radio Ucamara media was encouraging people to use medicinal plants and shamanic knowledge to fight the virus. This strategy unfolded in radio

shows that focused on narrations of previous experiences with epidemics and healing practices. Likewise, Radio Ucamara created audio and visual promotions of comic contests for children where they were prompted to create superheroes based on medicinal plants that fight the evil powers of COVID and “its nineteen powers.” A future analysis of these events would also touch on broader theoretical discussions regarding the intersection between media agency, the politics of health, and the ontologies of disease in Amazonia.

This dissertation has also opened spaces for the future exploration of phenomena that exceed Kukama media worlds. One of these topics is the politics of Catholic media in Amazonia. My research has shown how Radio Ucamara is inserted in a global network of media owned by the Roman Catholic Church (e.g., SIGNIS, the World Catholic Association for Communication) that has a significant influence across multiple localities. Media has been a crucial part of Catholic governmentality in Amazonia since the early 2000s. This interest in communication technologies was led by progressive priests fully engaged in Amazonian Indigenous politics. The role of faith-based organizations, institutions, and actors in the expansion of media landscapes in Amazonia and their support to Indigenous activists is a topic that needs further exploration. Currently, some religious orders in Amazonia are actively engaged in the making of media (including the use of digital platforms) for both evangelical work and social activism. For example, in June of 2021, Augustinian Catholic priests from Iquitos started to promote the production and distribution of small radio transistors among Amazonian communities. The radio-receivers were employed for the transmission of educational and evangelical programs among communities without access to internet. Much of the content produced by Catholic media focuses on environmentalist discourses reproduced by global Catholic authorities. The influence of “green Catholicism” seen in Amazonia is notorious in, for example, Pope Francis’s

environmentalist political discourse and the audiovisual production associated with him.¹⁰¹

Likewise, there is a whole branch of Catholic print media focused on this religious turn towards environmentalism, such as magazines promoting cosmological and apocalyptic views through the discussion of concepts such as “Biblical Ecology” and “Eco-spirituality.” In these discourses there is a constant concern over the “health of the planet” as well as a clear interest in the preservation of Amazonia. The analysis of Catholic environmentalism represents a unique opportunity to study contemporary processes of post-secularism.

Another topic that requires further exploration is the expansion of hip-hop in Amazonia. As we have seen, hip-hop is the preferred musical genre employed in Radio Ucayali musical media. In Kukama videoclips, as in many other cases in Amazonia, hip-hop sounds are now indexing the subalternity of indigeneity, but also urban subjectivities, and sometimes modernity. Rap culture and hip-hop music are having a strong influence on the way Amazonian youth produce musical sounds and poetic messages as novel ways for understanding their own historical experiences (Hill 2018). Yet, the way younger artists are incorporating hip-hop into Indigenous Amazonia musical repertoires is still a neglected topic in the scholarship of Lowland South America. Among Amazonian Indigenous peoples, hip-hop is creating new aesthetic and political spaces that help to navigate the pressures of global and national forces in South America. As Jonathan Hill has discussed (2018), the purpose of performing music among

¹⁰¹ During my research I came across with a video representing Pope Francis fighting transnational corporations and global climate crisis. The video is a humorous performance in which we see an actor interpreting Pope Francis, who is training to fight the corporate powers responsible for destroying the environment. At some point in the video, the Pope says, “If we destroy creation, creation will destroy us.” The video is loaded with images of disaster and environmental collapse framed in Christian apocalyptic imagery. The video can be watched at this link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sr6l_xEhUfs&list=PLmiGYrPZmesXICELibAjsKuEUi8fD0_U&index=1&ab_channel=Observat%C3%B3riodoClima

Indigenous communities is not only to enter in contact with the sacred worlds of Amerindian cosmologies but to create political and symbolic spaces to avoid the disruption of those worlds (Hill 2018a). Moreover, hip-hop is currently being negotiated in intergenerational dynamics and debates around notions of authenticity. This music genre is bringing a new materiality and a set of digital technologies and software used for music making that are diversifying the aural and sensory fields in Amazonia. In such processes, urbanized Indigenous youth can reconnect with and rework oral histories, mythic narratives, territorialities, cosmologies, languages, and identities (Hill 2020). All of which opens new stimulating research avenues for exploring the relation between power and aesthetics.

Finally, I want to close by offering a few methodological reflections about the role of digital ethnographies in anthropological research. This dissertation emerged as a response to the impossibility of conducting fieldwork during the years of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is the result of multiple reconfigurations of an initial research project that radically departed from its original focus: debt and historicity in Peruvian Amazonia. Given the challenges that emerged to complete the usual year of fieldwork required for a cultural anthropology dissertation research, my project relied heavily on the use of data existing in the digital space. These circumstances also led me to engage with a corpus of methodological literature in anthropology and other social sciences that advocate for the inclusion of online discourses in conventional ethnographies, a statement already circulating decades before the pandemic. As I have already discussed, I draw on recent work from anthropology and other disciplines encouraging a style of fieldwork research that considers the dynamics of online spaces; this is, the methodological interplay between online and offline data (Airoldi 2018; Ardévol and Gómez-Cruz 2014; Gajjala 2013; Hallett and Barber 2014; Miller 2018; Miller and Slater 2000; Postill and Pink 2012; Whitehead

and Wesch 2012). Given the ubiquity of social media and digital technologies in the contemporary world, the incorporation of the discourses and practices that our interlocutors produce in the digital space are now difficult to avoid when doing ethnographic research. This is even more evident when, increasingly, social media and other digital platforms form a continuum with off-line realities in which social and political relations are often affected by the activities taking place in the digital space.

I have, thus, followed Postill and Pink's (2012) recommendation of doing an "ethnography that engages with internet practices and content directly, but not exclusively..." (Postill and Pink 2012, 125). In my research, I complemented conventional ethnographic practices (participant observation, interviews, etc.) with the analysis of online discourses and participation in social media platforms to communicate with my collaborators. The methodological engagement with the internet does not mean, thus, the abandonment of the long-term fieldwork tradition in anthropology. Quite the contrary. Just as archival research provides historical depth to the realities observed in the field, the engagement with the digital space (a virtual archival in the making) can add vital layers of meaning-making activity usually neglected in place-based registers, and that can improve our analysis of social reality. Now that we are entering into a post-pandemic era, and the opportunity of returning to the field is already on the table, my hopes are that I can resume my ethnographic engagement in Amazonia in the coming years. Going back to the field means being able to explore topics hard to document while physically distant, such as radio-making activities, sound recording and filming process, and the social life of media materiality. Hopefully, returning to the field will open up new questions and reflections around the dynamics of power and aesthetics in Amazonia.

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