LAND, THE WIWA MAP, AND COCA PLANTS:
CURATING MEMORIES OF AN UNFINISHED ARMED CONFLICT

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In this article, two anthropologists reflect on the interdisciplinary research and the curatorship used in *Voices for the transformation of Colombia (Voces para transformar a Colombia)*, an exhibition that put on display for the first time the storyline of the future Museum of Memory of Colombia, which has not yet been physically built. It has, however, already produced photographic exhibitions, set up relationships with institutions, grassroots organizations and communities, and hired a transdisciplinary team composed of urban Colombians, of which we are part since 2017. Focusing on two case studies included in *Voices* where we were directly involved as researchers and curators, one dedicated to Indigenous Wiwa people, and another one to coca leaf peasant producers, we show the ways in which anthropological and ethnographic approaches have been part of our practice.

*Voices* is, simultaneously, an itinerant exhibition that visited the cities of Bogotá and Medellín in 2018, and a pilot of the Museum. This means that, in addition to the exhibit, whose storyline is tested on each occasion, it includes areas dedicated to the other activities that are planned to be carried out in the future building: a memorial, a forum, a radio station, a specialized library, a space for workshops, and a theatre.

In this article we will only refer to a small part of the exhibition space, because it helps us show specific ways in which we used an ethnographic and anthropological approach to curatorship, and how we employed curatorship and the exhibition *Voices* as a means to disseminate anthropological and ethnographic materials. We do this after locating Colombian museums in a broader literature, followed by the conceptual framework for the Museum storyline and a brief description of the curatorial process. We describe some of the encounters the two case studies focused brought about in Bogotá and Medellín, and then conclude with some of our future curatorial plans.

1. Museums and Anthropology in Colombia

In Colombia, as in many other Latin-American countries, museums, schools and the Catholic Church were institutions established by creole elites after the independence from Spain in 1819 as a means of communication and an educational tool to transmit the civilizing principles of group identification, the imaginary of the nation, and the hierarchy of power (Urizar 2008). They served to generate certain types of identity (Macdonald 2003), becoming sites at the service of the nation, its political position, its canonical discourses, and its imaginary (Robb 1992, cited by Navarro 2006). They were also key in the construction of a homogenous national subject that pushed Indigenous and Black populations towards the symbolic and territorial margins of the nation (Botero-Mejía and González-Ayala 2014).
Among those institutions, museums have been a scenario for anthropology, ethnography, and curatorship. Herle (2016: 1) signals how from the 19th century ‘museums with ethnographic collections, particularly those based at universities, were core institutions in the development of anthropology as a specialist discipline’. Colombian anthropology has not been an exception. In the 20th century, the vision of ethnologists and archaeologists was key in the creation of the National Museum’s ethnographic collection. Botero (2013) explains that it was constituted mainly between 1944 and 1963 by ethnologists from the National Ethnology Institute (Instituto Etnológico Nacional). Colombian ethnologists’ interest in indigenous ‘material culture’ followed the training in scientific research imparted by French ethnologist Paul Rivet. By the 1930s, he brought ‘teaching, research, and museum activities closely together’ in the Musée de l’Homme in Paris (Shelton 2006: 71), and would later play a fundamental role in the professionalization of anthropology in Colombia (Pineda 2007). In 1941, he helped found the National Ethnology Institute in support of Indigenous communities whose physical and cultural survival was under threat (Arocha and Friedemann 1984). Rivet conceived of ethnology as an ‘urgent discipline’—under similar precepts set by earlier ‘salvage ethnography’ (Gruber 1970)—and he thought that museums,

because of their visibility in the cities’ structures, were for Rivet tools for ethnological research and dissemination. Therefore collecting objects was an integral part of a process of extensive documentation of a cultural area. The idea was that if ethnography represented a culture in a figurative way by writing, in the Museum the object would be exhibited to represent that culture (Botero 2013: 59).

By the end of the 1950s, Colombian anthropology had a stronger influence from North American social and applied anthropology, with an emphasis on the ‘living man’ (Botero 2013: 61). Anthropology departments were created in the 1960s around the country, closely linked to the implementation of state development policies with the support of international cooperation agencies, or with the Alliance for Progress US Programme in the late 1950s (Arocha and Friedemann 1984). In Botero’s view, later generations of Colombian ethnologists did not collect objects due to the development of audiovisual recording techniques and also due to recent research carried out by the communities themselves.³

Nowadays, the concept of what museums and exhibitions are has transformed, as well as its relationship with anthropology and ethnography. A growing research area found in the literature invites us ‘to consider the exhibition and its process as one extended cultural act or artifact’ (Levine 1992: 153), and museums as ‘ethnographic sites’ (Bouquet 2012; Macdonald 2002). Furthermore, Voices can be placed in ‘a micro-history of [an] approach to exhibition development’ (Phillips 2003: 157) that began in the early 1990s, a reflection of the challenges that the ‘post-modern turn’ posed on ethnographic writing and the authority of anthropologists, drawing attention to the ‘poetics and politics of display’ (Herle 2016). This approach is characterized by power sharing, ‘the articulation of a post-colonial museum ethic, a shift in emphasis from product to process and a renewed affirmation of the museum as a research site’ (Phillips 2003: 157-158). There is no single model, instead, a ‘spectrum’ has emerged between two types, the ‘community-based exhibit’ and the ‘multivocal exhibit’ (Phillips 2003: 157-158).⁴ These ideas link to museum anthropology’s ‘overlapping interests in field research and public outreach’ (Herle 2016: 1), and to thinking about what anthropologist-cum-curators do embedded less in academic environments and more in the ‘domain of public engagement’ (Thomas 2010: 6). This exhibition and the museum it pilots pose new challenges
regarding the role of ethnography as a means to do curatorship. It pushes us to think about what it means to curate ethnographically.

2. An Unfinished Armed Conflict and the Museum of Memory of Colombia

For over 60 years, Colombia has experienced a changing, fragmented, regionally diverse, ambiguous, and deeply degraded armed conflict that, despite the signing of several peace agreements, has not yet ended. It has had a differential impact on people according to their age, gender, ethnicity, sexual identity and disability, and has been spatially and temporally profound. It has involved illegal armed groups such as the different left-wing guerrillas, the far-right paramilitary groups, the drug cartels and the criminal gangs, as well as the legal forces of the State; however, this war has not been fought solely by armies. Entrepreneurs, state officials and different members of the civilian population have also participated.

According to the Observatory of Memory and Conflict of the National Center for Historical Memory, between 1958 and 2018, 261,619 people died as a result of the armed conflict, of which 80% are part of the non-combatant civilian population (CNMH s.d.); however the number of direct and indirect victims is immeasurable. Attacks on the civilian population, forced displacement, massacres, selective killings, kidnappings are some of the forms of violence that have characterized a conflict that has broken all humanitarian rules, beyond the social or political objectives of the multiple actors involved in it.

Despite the above, the victims, their organizations and communities have worked so that the acts of violence committed upon them, as well as their resistance, are known by the national society and are not to be repeated. The Museum of Memory of Colombia was born from this social conquest. It was decreed by the Victims and Land Restitution Law (1448 of 2011) (Congreso de la República 2011) and is part of the symbolic reparation measures that respond to the right of integral reparation to the victims of the armed conflict in the country. It is a public institution funded by the Colombian state and depends from the Presidency of the Republic (CNMH 2017).

The Decree 4803 of 2011 mandated that the construction and management of the Museum had to be participatory (Presidencia de la República 2011). In consequence, between 2012 and 2016, the Museum’s transdisciplinary work team carried out participatory processes with different grass roots and victims’ organizations, and also with experts, artists and academics on issues related to memory, the Colombian armed conflict and museums. The results obtained in these consultations provided decisive information for the development and definition of the Museum’s institutional framework, the architectural program and the conceptual guidelines (CNMH 2017).

Although the Museum is a scenario that contributes to make memories visible and to clarify what, why, how, and when it happened, who it happened to, and who facilitated its occurrence in the context of the Colombian armed conflict, it does not focus on spreading knowledge. On the contrary, it seeks to provide the keys to understand the contexts that have made conflict possible and, from there, generate questions that lead to recognizing and dignifying victims, which takes place through the transmission and appropriation of information, as well as through sensorial and emotional experiences (Lleras et al. 2019).
The Museum has the potential to bring diverse sectors of society together around reflections and complex dialogues about the conditions the country must generate to avoid human rights violations and to build peace. Therefore, it should be a safe space for difficult conversations, where all voices are welcome. A meeting place for people from distant or nearby territories, but not necessarily in contact, and where it is possible to tackle differences through dialogue, active listening, the act of doing and sensorial experience. Consequently, the curatorial proposal is inclined towards creating exhibitions that, as *Voices*, are not exclusively for viewing but are also multi-sensory, immersive and polyphonic. All of the above, as a unity, is called at the Museum expanded storyline, because we are aware that it is impossible for objects distributed in an exhibition space to ‘tell’ or ‘say’ it all, and this is what makes our exhibits so particular. They ensure an experience that is not limited to the exhibition but includes workshops, concerts, lectures, commemorations, encounters, dialogues, among many other activities. In that sense *Voices* provides a response to the post-modern turn as it shows ways anthropological work has expanded from the field of the written text.

3. Anthropology, Ethnography, Curatorship and Research in *Voices*

Herle (2013: 114) states that anthropology has the possibility to contribute with a critical view of what curatorship is and argues that ‘the curatorial techniques used in the creation of exhibitions can be vital components of broader research processes’ and also that creating exhibitions may ‘generate new ideas and understandings’ (Herle 2016: 7). In *Voices*, curatorship implied establishing connections between the curatorial team at the Museum and other researchers and practitioners from different disciplines, such as art, literature, psychology, law, anthropology, social work, history, design, architecture, geography and biology, among others, but also from Indigenous groups and non-academic initiatives.

Bhaskar (2016) states the meaning of the verb ‘to curate’ has transformed from the idea of ‘looking after’ objects in private collections and museums to a wider notion of curatorship as the use of acts of selection and ordering, but also of refinement, reduction, exhibition, simplification, presentation, and explanation in order to add value. In this sense, to curate involves changing the senses or connotations (the value) of those objects that are displayed before an audience. *Voices*’ mission was to put on display particular kinds of objects: memories, testimonies, and stories of victims of the armed conflict, as well as academic studies that have sought to describe and explain war in Colombia, mainly research reports the CNMH has published. That is to say, words, ideas and narratives that become tangible, even if only temporarily, when writing about them, recording or photographing who tells or sings songs about the events, drawing what someone describes, evokes or imagines, among many others. Everyday stories that look very much like the kind of ‘data’ anthropology and ethnography are interested in.

By 2017 three narrative axes were established in the aforementioned conceptual and museological storyline for the Museum: Body, Land, and Water (CNMH 2017). These three axes constituted the core structure that would organize those narratives and stories and were metaphors that would serve to communicate specific messages on the armed conflict: its dimensions, modalities, and causes; its faces, damages and impacts; and on the recognition of dignity, peace, and resistance (CNMH 2017). We, as members of the curatorial team, attempted to answer three guiding questions: what war did to each axis; what each axis did during war; and how the three axes recount war. Furthermore, to ground the narrative onto something less ethereal, we selected twelve nodal cases.
They were thought of as places of interconnection from which an integrative, plural, and relational story about armed conflict could be told. That is, nodal cases that allowed us to account sensorially, analytically and historically for how processes, relationships, territorialities and spatialities, temporalities, and structures that explain milestones, changes, and the everyday of the conflict are hybridized and, at the same time, show resistance processes.

With all this in mind, *Voices’* transdisciplinary team of curators began the exploration of the materials produced by the National Center of Historical Memory (CNMH, by its acronym in Spanish), the entity to which the Museum belongs. In many cases, the curatorship was built from there; however, the selecting and ordering process also showed us the museal limits of many materials, which is why it was necessary to produce new content with external researchers, artists, and organizations from around the country.

This is how the design and creation of new pieces were part of our tasks as curators. To do so, we considered a multiplicity of knowledges, methodologies, voices, forms of representation, languages, and formats, and the result were photographs, infographics, graphic histories, audio-visual pieces, paintings, diagrams, texts, maps, murals, installations, multimedia devices, among others (Lleras et al 2019). Messages, narrative axes, and nodal cases were the frame of reference not only for the exhibition but for the concerts, lectures, plays, rituals, and performative actions for which *Voices* served as a stage, as well as for ‘mediation’, the label that replaced the more traditional ‘museum tour-guiding’.

4. Land Axis: The Wiwa Map and Coca Plants

Land axis comprised a message or a set of ideas the curatorial team wanted audiences to apprehend after their visit. This message was that war in Colombia is complex and difficult to explain, but it is not fortuitous or irrational, on the contrary, it is intentional and responds to economic, military, moral, political, and institutional interests and dynamics. Hence commitments and responsibilities pertain not only to armed actors, but also to those who support and benefit from war. To communicate this message Land included five case studies about communities or groups located in different areas of Colombia. They show the diversity of conflicts and forms of violence that have shaped the relationships between human collectivities and the territories they inhabit, including dispossession and the fight for land; the various configurations that war acquires be it in urban or rural environments; their contextual characteristics; and differentiated affectations that it produces among women, Indigenous groups, Afro-descendent and peasant communities (CNMH 2017).

In the following section we will describe what it meant for the two of us, as members of the curatorial team at the Museum, to use an ethnographic approach towards curating, focusing on the methodologies we employed to conceptualize and produce two pieces of Land axis: one from the case study of Indigenous peoples from Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, and the other one from the case study of coca leaf harvesting peasants from Puerto Guzmán, Putumayo.
Figure 1: Map of Colombia indicating with blue circles the places named in the article. From North to South: Santa Marta, Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Medellín, Bogotá and Puerto Guzmán. Designed by the authors.
4.1 A Map for Sacred Wiwa Places, Interconnections, and Damages

Since before dawn (Desde antes del amanecer) is the name we, as curators, gave to the nodal case dedicated to a few Indigenous groups in the north end of the country, one of them the Wiwa people of Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. It seeks to indicate the damages of the territory from an Indigenous point of view but in a way that is comprehensible for non-Indigenous Colombians. It emphasized that dispossession extends in time even before the armed conflict and that the concept is understood not only as the loss of land but as the change of its use by different actors, which goes against the territory sacredness and its cultural uses by these communities.

This case’s highlight was what we called Wiwa piece (Wiwa map), which was not meant to be an exhibition object. It was originally thought of as part of the social cartography methodology, a sort of ‘cultural mapping’ exercise (Strang 2010) used by the CNMH team dedicated to ethnic groups to collect historical memory with young members of Golkushe Tayrona organization in Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. This was in 2014, and during the following two years young Wiwa men and women walked around their territory and discussed with elders what it implied to think of ‘land’ as a living entity, but also translated into Spanish what these implications were for non-Wiwa researchers. Walking around, recognizing and drawing their land was a form of healing this organism. After documenting the way that sacred sites had been affected, two-dimensional non-cartographical maps
did not seem to do justice to the damages that armed conflict had produced to their society, culture, and to their territory. Wiwa young men and women thus decided to create a map that showed how sacred sites are not just points on a chart but, instead, that they are all interconnected. This map was thought of as a means to emphasize and demand respect from non-Indigenous Colombian population to their conception of ancestral land.

Then, in 2016, a non-Wiwa consultant helped develop a three-dimensional ‘map’ adding sticks and thread to the drawings. This was a ‘cartographical representation model’, not a finished or complete map, as well as a methodology—developed through long conversations with Wiwa people—that made it possible to emphasize one of the fundamental principles that rule Wiwa territoriality: interconnection. Due to this principle, war and violence have deeper consequences than those visible or tangible, as one Indigenous leader explained in a video that was also part of Voices later on. For example, there are sacred sites for coca plants, for life cycles, for each kind of food, or to stop the rain. Each one is a unique ecosystem that has been affected historically by wars that do not belong to Indigenous people. Sacred sites, he says, have been looted, weakened, destroyed and burnt, trees have been cut, and rivers dammed, or they have served as scenario for assassinations, torture or kidnapping, or military actions. Each one of these forms of violence, due to interconnection, has brought along pollution and disease problems and social, family and personal disorder in their territory and beyond.

In 2017, the curatorial team at the Museum became interested in this map because it constituted a sort of meeting place between Wiwa people and the CNMH interdisciplinary group of researchers. It seemed like a good example of an attempt to create a bridge between two different territorial conceptions, which could also extend to the future exhibition—and Museum’s—non-Indigenous visitors. It was, at the same time, the product of cultural mapping work, of historical memory and a translation of Wiwa’s conception of space. It only referred to a specific aspect (interconnection) and to a fraction of Wiwa territory and although the names of sacred sites were presented in Wiwa language, their meanings and damages were made into conventions such as colours, shapes, wooden sticks and wool.

The final ‘object’ was a three-dimensional map that we hung on the wall, on which wooden sticks were interconnected by coloured wool. Each stick stands for a sacred place and rises over it, as if it were an antenna that sends signals to other places with which it is connected. The wool represents the connections between the places and the colours the type of damage caused (blue for megaprojects; red for forced displacement, homicides and mass graves; black for armed conflict; yellow for illegal mining or looting; and green for illicit crops). Red circles indicate sacred places, and hearts those sacred places that were directly affected by the violent action indicated. Each colour does not have a specific meaning in Wiwa cosmology. The team that created those conventions chose them randomly so that they were understandable for the non-Indigenous general audience. Our intention as curators was that visitors, by reading, pulling and pushing sticks and wool, would experience and understand how multiple interconnections between sacred places implied multiple forms of territorial, social and symbolic harm.
4.2 Our Dreams Lie on the Territory

Figure 3: This photograph shows the space dedicated to coca leaf peasants and two exhibition visitors in Bogotá’s version. Photograph by María Camila Suárez. Image courtesy of María Camila Suárez.

Making life. Beyond fumigation and other evils (Haciendo vida. Más allá de la fumiga y otros males) is the title of the case dedicated to the municipality of Puerto Guzmán, in Putumayo department. Unlike the other cases of Land axis, with this one we, the transdisciplinary team of curators, did not focus on land dispossession, but about control over the territory, its population, and the coca economy exercised by the different actors that take part in Colombia’s armed conflict.

The CNMH has carried out several research projects in Putumayo department, but to a large extent they have focused on historical memory of the paramilitaries’ actions. With this case we wanted to talk about the guerrillas and their interest in controlling the territory, therefore, the curatorship team conducted its own research in municipality of Puerto Guzmán. This followed a more classical ethnographic methodology: in 2017, an anthropologist-curator and an audio-visual producer travelled for one week around the rural area of Puerto Guzmán conducting individual and group interviews to coca leaf peasant producers—the lowest and most vulnerable link in the drug-dealing economy—, but not exclusively. Our main local guide and collaborator was an American anthropologist and professor who has worked for over 15 years with local communities, and social movements in Putumayo.
During our visit, we asked about how the guerrillas exercised control over the population through the establishment of laws that regulated daily life; how they control the circuit of coca production, and the production and marketing of cocaine base paste; and how they control the territory in military terms. We wanted to hear local inhabitants’ stories about how the guerrilla's economic, political, and social territorial interests are interconnected to those of drug traffickers, but also with those of national and international governments, for example, with actions such as Plan Colombia in the context of the war on drugs. As a consequence of all this, the population of Putumayo has suffered multiple types of violence, including stigmatization as guerrilla (guerrilleros) and paramilitary (paramilitares) members, air fumigations with glyphosate, and direct confrontations. Their activity as peasants has also been stigmatized simply by cultivating coca, one of the raw materials that, after being processed with chemicals, becomes an illicit drug.

The fieldwork’s result was the production, by the curatorial team, of a sound piece that mixed fragments of the peasants’ testimonies with music of different genres that are heard in the region. The piece played in a loop during the exhibition and ‘shared’ the space with a live coca plant, the other ‘museum piece’ displayed in this nodal case.

We included the coca plant because many people in Colombian cities have never seen it and it has nevertheless been demonized to the point that, back in 2008, a government campaign of the National Drug Directorate called it ‘the plant that kills’ (la mata que mata). We wanted to point out that coca and cocaine are not the same, as so are not coca leaf peasant producers and drug traffickers. We believed the plant would encourage conversations among strangers on an issue that has affected every Colombian at many levels.

5. Ethnography and the Audiences

Another way in which anthropology and ethnographic data was part of this project was through an audience study. Macdonald (2006: 8) points out that since the 2000s audiences or publics of museums have been recognized as ‘diverse, plural, and active, and not as relatively homogeneous and passive masses’. This diversity influences the difficulty of ‘measuring how much the curatorial intentions coincide with the expectations and responses of the visitors’ (Herle 2013: 129). The curatorship used in Voices echoed these museological trends and challenges and, from the beginning, we were interested in the things people would do with, inside and outside the exhibition. The Museum team wanted to know what spaces, objects, and events would do to them, and what the people who gathered in the exhibit did among themselves, what paths they followed, what they would see, read, contemplate, listen to, or touch. In order to collect and analyse visitor’s reactions, an audience study was designed, which included an ethnographic approach that used participant observation and focus groups. Two anthropologists external to the curatorship team led the design and analysis of this study.

According to their final report, Wiwa piece was difficult to understand and required the intervention of the mediators for its comprehension and activation. Once people touched the sticks, particularly children, and saw how the system moved as a consequence of their actions, they said they had understood, which was capitalized by mediators to explain the real damages in the territory and the interconnections. The visitor study reported that school teachers expressed its potential as a pedagogical tool for students. Many visitors did not dare to touch the pieces; they seemed to not
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want to transgress the ‘do not touch’ norm of more traditional museums. Also, signage that indicated this particular piece could be manipulated was missing. Nonetheless, when interaction took place among several people, it was effective and encouraged conversations. One of these took place during a mediated tour, while standing in front of Wiwa map, and showing how the incompleteness of the map was understood. After an explanation the mediator gave about how for Indigenous groups’ sacred sites are interconnected, a woman from the Caribbean region said:

*There is something here I do not understand. That’s because there’s something missing. The interconnections must be more complex, they cannot be just as simple as they are shown in that map and they’re not limited to the sacred sites. What I don’t understand here is why I don’t see what they think, as Indigenous People. What you see here is an interpretation with our language about their world, which makes it all look simpler. This cannot be explained because it is their voice that matters, not mine.*

To this, the mediator replied:

*Indeed, the map we worked about with the Wiwa community was much more complex and we know that members of this community could explain it in a much better way than I do and than the map does. But we made this version jointly with communities so that it helps explanation and understanding, because when we were working with the community one of them said, ‘you will never understand the way we see the world’, and that’s exactly what you say. But this is an attempt to show a little bit of how they see the world and show it to all kinds of people who visit this place.*

On the other hand, for many researchers and visitors, the coca plant was a powerful piece in terms of living memory and the conversations it led to. For example, a young woman interviewed by the audience study told a story about the tension that surrounded the plant while a group of students, a teacher and a military man stood together around it:

*At the Book Fair [in Bogotá] I was impressed when I entered in the [...] coca plant [space]. There was a teacher talking to the students, a very smart guy, talking to them about the conflict and that ‘this is not the plant that kills’, but it is the use that is given to it. And there was standing a uniformed military man, he was watching, and listening, and I stayed there only to see his reaction. The guy was very annoyed, and the teacher did not care who the guy was because he knew what he was talking about and reinforced it, and the military man was just like this, like shrinking, but he didn’t leave. I kept looking and said ‘this space is incredible’, I mean, look what it produces.*

Some of the aspects that conditioned visitors’ interpretations were their urban or rural background, their expectations towards what a museum exhibition is and the spacial distribution. In Bogotá, many people did not see the coca plant because they did not recognize it and because it was located in a place interpreted by many as a transit space, but when it caught their attention, most people were amazed to realize that coca is an ordinary green bush. After two weeks without sunlight, the plant’s leaves were turning yellow and every day we were approached by people worried if we were watering and taking good care of it. This showed us the connection that was created between the audiences and the living being they had in front of them (but has been demonized). In Medellín, a greater number of visitors recognized the coca plant; the plant itself was bigger, and the space was
designed differently so people would not take it as a mere corridor. Furthermore, we added a set of pictures of coca peasants and how air fumigations with glyphosate have affected not only coca crops but also subsistence agriculture.

Both in Medellín and in Bogotá we invited people from the territories that were part of the processes that resulted in the pieces of *Voices* to visit the exhibition—most of them victims of the armed conflict and with a rural background—not only to test if they recognized themselves in it but to invite them to become an active part of it. The exhibit turned into a place where urban visitors from the two biggest cities in the country shared experiences with these ‘special guests’, as we sometimes referred to them. For the opening in Bogotá, we invited a group of Wiwa men who led a ritual with CNMH’s members to guarantee success both for the Museum and the exhibition. While visiting it they expressed they felt content but not fully satisfied with a temporary exhibition. They acknowledged the importance of showing to broader audiences the violence that, still in the present, affects their territory.

To Medellín we invited a couple of Putumayo peasants who, for many years, have been part of a grassroots process that claims food security and, above all, food autonomy. They talked with several school groups in the exhibition about what it was like to be a peasant in a coca-growing region from an alternative perspective to that portrayed in the media. For example, they see coca as an economic option that does not involve drug trafficking, or drugs, or processing with chemicals, but grind the leaves into flour that can be used to bake biscuits, cakes and puddings with high nutritional properties. This is linked to protecting Amazonian foothills native seeds, as well as recovering food recipes and creating new ones with native products—all of which they see as forms of resistance.

6. Conclusion: Challenges at the Museum of Memory

In this article we used our experience as anthropologists, curators and researchers to present what a transdisciplinary and participatory approach to curatorship involved in *Voices for the transformation of Colombia (Voces para transformar a Colombia)*, an exhibition thought of as a symbolic reparation measure to the victims of the armed conflict in the country. We describe the ways that anthropological and ethnographic approaches have been part of our practice as curators, which included the production, collection, dissemination and interpretation of ethnographic data. We reflect on the ‘new ideas and understandings’ this exhibition generated: a participatory approach in the creation of museum storylines, social cartography or cultural mapping, doing fieldwork and editing sound pieces and interviews, and an audience study. Thinking about exhibitions—and by extension museums—as cultural acts and ‘ethnographic sites’, we have shown what roles and interpretations different participants (Indigenous people, peasants, curators, researchers, exhibition visitors) had during the exhibition production and after its set up.

We also reflect on the possibilities offered and the challenges posed in thinking about the role of ethnography as a means to do curatorship and what it means to curate ethnographically. We presented two case studies that focused on territorial conceptions and the consequences that the armed conflict and other forms of violence have inflicted on them. One dedicated to coca leaf harvesting peasants in Putumayo department, in the South of Colombia; the other to an Indigenous group in the North. In the first case, a following step is to transform it into a more general example not linked to one particular place. The relationship between coca economy and armed groups...
territorial control is a much broader geographical and social issue. One more approach to be put into practice by the curatorial team is to do participatory curatorship workshops that focus on coca and provide a new perspective to this nodal case. In the case of the Wiwa piece, the team intends to bring its latest version to the Sierra Nevada in order to test it with traditional Indigenous authorities and younger members of indigenous communities, and see what adjustments need to be made for its exhibition at the Museum. The piece itself may be used more generally to think about ways of representing the territory using maps, for social cartography exercises with exhibition visitors, and particularly with school audiences to do workshops and special mediated visits.

Furthermore, we have contributed views on what anthropologist-cum-curators do when embedded less in academic environments and more in the ‘domain of public engagement’ and the current relationship between ethnography, anthropology and museums in a context of transitional justice and amidst an unfinished armed conflict in Colombia.

References


Notes

1 A virtual visit to the exhibition can be accessed in: http://museodememoria.gov.co/voces-para-transformar/recorrido-virtual/.

2 The exhibition had two versions in 2018. The first one in Bogotá, during the International Book Fair (Feria Internacional del Libro de Bogotá) (April 17-May 2), and the second one in Medellín at the Book and Culture Festival (Festival del Libro y de la Cultura) (September 7-16).

3 An example of this is Zhigoneshi, an Indigenous Communications Collective created in 2002 and based in Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, whose work “Resistencia en la Línea Negra” [Resistance at the Black Line] (2011) was a key source for the understanding of Indigenous territorial conceptions in nodal case Since before dawn, discussed below.

4 For an account of the broad spectrum of studies conducted in museums that employ some type of ethnographic research, see Macdonald, Gerbich, and von Oswald (2018).

5 All these reports can be accessed online (mainly in Spanish) at http://www.centrodememorialhistorica.gov.co/de/informes (accessed 4 February 2020).

6 This team has worked for years with several ethnic groups and indigenous communities around the country inquiring about the damages caused by the armed conflict to their society, culture and territory. For them, the territory is alive and, as so, it is considered as a victim.

7 Coca plants and leaves are sacred for many Andean and Amazonian Indigenous groups, and used for ritualistic reasons and in everyday interaction.

8 This piece can be listened to in the following link: https://archive.org/details/PiezaCMHPutumayoMarzo15.

9 This campaign played on the word ‘mata’ which in Spanish means both ‘plant’ and ‘to kill’ conjugated in the third person.

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