

# Challenging global citizen deliberation: towards plurinational futures

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# Preface

Epistemic plurality and lived experience are the cornerstones of global deliberation. In an increasingly interconnected world, global citizens' assemblies can offer the tools to bring together individuals 'from all walks of life'. This is meant to ensure a wide range of perspectives, experiences, and forms of knowledge are brought to the table to tackle our world's most complex issues.

Yet, little has been said or done in terms of ensuring the proper inclusion and representation of Indigenous peoples in citizens' assemblies, although their voices remain underrepresented at many stages of governance, including global and multinational institutions. Their inclusion presents many challenges, from practical problems with implementing sortition or simultaneous translation, to more fundamental questions regarding the potential or effective interest of those communities in participating in global deliberation at all.

The Global Citizens' Assembly Network invited Maria Jacinta Xón to reflect on some of those fundamental questions regarding whether, and how, global deliberation with and for Indigenous peoples may be possible, with supporting the support of Lucero Sobrino and coordination by Azucena Morán. This multi-part essay addresses these questions from different angles. Lucero Sobrino shares insights from a concrete case of effective governance led by the Ene River Ashaninka community. Maria Jacinta Xón further reflects on the epistemological and ontological conditions for global deliberation among Indigenous peoples, and the normative value of such form of deliberation over global citizens' assemblies. Azucena Morán brings those insights in dialogue with existing research and literature in global deliberation. This essay breaks new ground for ongoing design and future research, centering the experience of Indigenous communities without shying away from difficult questions for designers and implementers of global deliberation.

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# Introduction

by Azucena Morán.

A growing interest in deliberation has led civil society organizations and academics to transform the existing literature into a real commitment to the deliberative project's implementation and expansion. Increasingly, actors have focused in the potential of deliberative institutions to address issues that transcend borders, not only in theory, but also in practice. Establishing global deliberative forums would mean that decision-making processes would not only be relegated to political representatives or international delegates. Instead, these processes would meaningfully include those most affected by global crises. In this sense, different communities would come together to discuss issues that transcend geographies and generations, such as climate change, war, artificial intelligence, or pandemics.

While these movements develop, in plurinational contexts, the methodologies of some organizations that attempt to establish globally uniform deliberative forums and guidelines are challenged. These contexts stand in contrast to the idea of Nation-State, which foregrounds a single national identity and a colonially plundered territory, even in the aftermath of independence. They rather refer to territories shared among nations that were not recognized by the colonial project and its inheritors—and point us to the need to think beyond global decision-making among Nation-States. In a context often deliberately ignored by deliberative scholars, an important question remains: What are the methodological and normative flaws of current models of deliberative democracy at a truly global level?

What dialogic models would allow the connection and deliberation among contemporary peoples<sup>1</sup>—defined below by María Jacinta Xón as those who “despite the various historic-political moments of expropriation and displacement from their territories, assimilation and acculturation policies

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘contemporary peoples’ will be used throughout the article to acknowledge the communities marked by coloniality throughout the planet—not only within the analysis of oppression, but also of resistance.

imposed by Nation-States... have survived, have become dynamic, and coexist as peoples with identities and political ontologies in permanent resistance to the logic of neoliberal inclusion-exclusion”.

The first exploration, presented by Lucero Sobrino, offers a vision of some current dialogic practices at the plurinational level in the Amazon, based on three interviews and the analysis of public documents. Following this reflection, María Jacinta Xón introduces a normative proposal for the political project of participatory and deliberative democracy, not as a utopia, but as a challenge to think critically about real, ambitious, and already existing collective governance processes – in order to chart new democratic horizons from the deliberative autonomy of contemporary peoples.

María Jacinta Xón’s essay further addresses the tension between ‘deliberation models’ and the epistemic assumptions that underlie them. She proposes to understand global deliberation as a political phenomenon that needs to be rooted in the validity of contemporary peoples’ ontologies. To this end, the author reflects on the current state of dialogue (or, rather, the impossibility of such dialogue) between contemporary peoples, nation-states, and transnational capitals.

The impossibility of creating a dialogical space between these actors occurs because of the current mechanisms of inclusion often implemented by Nation-States. The inclusion of ‘the other’ to deliberate on ‘the political’ often ignores the territorial and epistemic dispossession of contemporary peoples. It also ignores the validity of their ontologies, defined by María Jacinta Xón as ‘the multiple ideas, thoughts, conceptions about life and death, the account of experiences, expectations, etc’.

Facing the impossibility of fair and democratic inclusion of contemporary peoples under the current dominant models of global deliberation, the author offers instead a normative proposal for a governance model based on an initial dialogue that brings *contemporary peoples* in different parts of planet Earth closer to each other.

This proposal draws from a review and analysis of academic literature on the political ontologies of Indigenous peoples. The analysis is also based on endogenous perspectives, such as the situated knowledge of the context in which María Jacinta Xón develops her work, and previous interviews conducted in Maya-K'iche' territories. It also accounts for the participatory-deliberative tradition in the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region, where engagement processes have been introduced since the 1990s at the legislative and constitutional levels — a clear example of how this tradition dialogues with communal governance mechanisms in the Amazon is included in Lucero Sobrino's essay.

María Jacinta Xón's proposal takes the plurinational deliberation described by Lucero Sobrino, not as a starting point, but as an expression of collective governance anchored in contemporary people's communities. This expression of collective governance presents a real horizon to establish an initial dialogue from a diffractive perspective towards their knowledges and doings. In this sense, María Jacinta Xón challenges the current deliberative project, not in an attempt to create a defined model for global deliberation, but as a first step towards the dialogic possibility among contemporary peoples. A model of governance for global deliberation can only be developed through such an initial dialogue.

# Plurinational Deliberation in the Amazon

## Political anchoring in the Ashaninka community assemblies

by Lucero Sobrino.

This essay presents a case study on the communal governance of seventeen Indigenous Ashaninka communities who reside in the Ene River basin of the Peruvian Amazon, represented by the Ene River Ashaninka Central<sup>2</sup> (span. Central Ashaninka del Rio Ene, CARE). I conducted three interviews with CARE members and examined documentary evidence to examine their plurinational deliberation process. The interviewees gave their authorization to participate in the study, to be interviewed and audio-recorded.

CARE brings together seventeen Indigenous Ashaninka communities, with a population of approximately 10,000 residents located around the Ene River basin of the Peruvian Amazon. Since 1944, their efforts, demands, and strategies have focused on peace-building, repopulation, and normalization of life in their communities, following a devastating time of conflict in the Central Jungle. The violence was especially intense and prolonged in the Ene River area, where massacres took place as well as the enslavement of thousands of Ashaninka. CARE's work revolves around upholding the community's right to consultation, which, for them, is the key to good governance. "In the world of Indigenous communities, an assembly has to be built to make decisions," said Angel Pedro, head of CARE.

One of the most important projects promoted through the organization entails the process of rewriting the statutes of the Ene River Ashaninka communities. In Peru, statutes are analogous to the political constitution of a nation-state, and provide an effective instrument of governance that facilitates the control of power and organizes social coexistence. The process of rewriting the statutes "responded to a need to institutionalize and strengthen communal governance

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<sup>2</sup> See: <https://www.facebook.com/careashaninka>

to ensure the development of the community based on its common vision: ‘good living’,” as conveyed by Martin Perch, CARE’s methodology leader.

One way to institutionalize communal governance is to ensure that the internal norms that organize Indigenous communities respond to their social, political, economic, and cultural structure. “Unfortunately, the communal statutes were a copy-and-paste of statutes from peasant communities, whose institutions and structure differ from those of native communities, especially because each has distinct socio-territorial realities,” shared Irupe Cañari, CARE’s legal advisor. Every Indigenous people has a structure, and it is from this structure that the community’s own institutions are born. This is acknowledged in Article 1 of the ILO Convention, which states that the permanence of Indigenous peoples’ own institutions must be respected and guaranteed.

Within this framework, over the course of two years and with the participation of the members of the Ashaninka communities, the communal statutes were rewritten and updated. To ensure that the statutes are a real instrument of governance, a consultation process was undertaken with all seventeen communities, to understand their reality and characteristics. The consultation delved into the social, political, economic and cultural structure of the Ashaninka peoples, providing confirmation that the Ashaninka communities of the Ene River have a common structure because they share a common history due to their persecution during the period of terrorism in Peru (1990-2000). Above all, they share the concept of ‘good living’, or in the Ashaninka language, ‘Kametsa Asaike’. “Kametsa Asaike, to us, represents having a future and a peaceful life where our community can develop,” stated Angel Pedro.

Departing from the common pattern among the Ashaninka communities, a second stage of the consultation was carried out through the ‘dilemma methodology’, in which, based on plausible cases, solutions were outlined and later adapted for the statutes. “In other words, cases were presented in which the members of the assembly had to decide between ethical dilemmas,” explains Irupe Cañari. Note that when we refer to ethical dilemmas, it is expected that the group of people empowered to choose which is the ethically correct path will be divided and eventually disagree; this being a common characteristic of polarized societies where each individual responds to various

external and internal input that often lead to extremely different opinions where there is no common ground. However, in the Ene River Basin, the dilemma methodology was a useful tool, since all members of the community conceptualize 'good living' in the same way.

As a result of the consultation, penalties previously adopted in the framework of the Ashaninka customary law, part of their historic culture, became formalized. The new statute structured communal governance into three governing bodies: 1. General Assembly, the highest authority where decisions related to the development of the community are debated. 2. Board of Directors, made up of seven members (one chief, one sub-chief, one treasurer, one secretary, one fiscal, and two representatives) in charge of community management, elected by the General Assembly by a show of hands every three years and, 3. Self-Defense and Development Committees (CADs), which respond to the need for self-protection and defense of the Ene River communities from common crimes and also from drug trafficking, deforestation, and illegal mining. They are also in charge of executing sanctions within the community following violations of the statute.

In addition, an autonomous body named Indigenous Oversight System, composed of members from the CADs and the Board of Directors, is responsible for overseeing public or private sector actions that may violate the collective rights of Indigenous communities. Such Indigenous oversight focuses on five work areas: security, education, territory, health, and economy.

It is important to note that the community's language was used during the process, since the organization that led the consultation process is itself Ashaninka. CARE, a long-standing and established organization, receives funding through the execution of projects that benefit its member communities. The funding that allowed the rewriting of the statutes was part of the project 'Strengthening Indigenous Vigilance<sup>3</sup>,' financed with European Union funds and developed in four regions of the Peruvian Amazon (Cusco, Junin, Loreto and Ucayali). In each region, the project was led by an Indigenous organization; CARE was in charge of implementing the project in Junin. According to CARE,

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<sup>3</sup> See: [https://www.dar.org.pe/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/diptico\\_fortaleciendo.pdf](https://www.dar.org.pe/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/diptico_fortaleciendo.pdf)



funds were mostly used for logistical expenses and legal fees for the registration of the documents in the Peruvian administrative system.

Martin Perch, President of the Ene River's Ashaninka Central, mentions that "the success of the process of rewriting statutes in the Ene basin, would possibly not have been achieved without a previous consensus of what a good life is" among the communities. Ruth Irupe agrees: "The Ashaninka, regardless of our personal differences, still share what the good life is." However, Angel Pedro also stresses that this basic agreement faces new challenges: "Indigenous communities that no longer share the same concept of good living are becoming territories of interest. These communities often go through internal tensions, because having lost the unique concept of good living, they become a community that harbors citizens who want to live better, each having their own idea of good living." In consequence, the system of assemblies described here can possibly only be extrapolated to societies with a previous social consensus that share the same idea of a good life.

The assembly system is not a perfect system; it remains an effective instrument of governance but only if the requirement of sharing the same concept of good living is met. Community governance works, because the common good is always given priority, given that communities share the same sense of what is good and common. It is important to highlight that one enabling feature for the success of these assemblies in the Amazon are the geographical conditions that compel communal life.

Moving forward, transnational deliberation research/practices must reflect on how external and internal drivers lead to the opinions of individuals having common encounters that contribute to the construction of more harmonious and resilient communities. The case study evidences that general assemblies are a model that Indigenous communities hold as part of their communal governance. Part of the success of this model derives from shared visions about the conceptualization of 'good living'.

# A new normative direction for global deliberation

## The political in contemporary people's ontologies

by María Jacinta Xón Riquiac.

A dialogue demands at least two sides. How do these sides communicate within a global deliberation? Adopting a dialogic perspective entails communication, reciprocity, understanding, diversity of subjects, and different arguments shared from their situated communities. These elements constitute the concept of dialogue as an ideal model. We use the term *ontology* to describe the multiple ideas, thoughts, conceptions about life and death, the account of experiences, expectations, etc., that constitute a people and a collective. *Political ontologies* are the stories of peoples and collectives from their own languages, places of being and being, for themselves and for outsiders who seek to listen and learn from an 'ethics of diversity' (D'Ambrosio, 2011). By *contemporary peoples* we mean the Indigenous peoples around the world who, despite various historical political moments of expropriation and displacement from their territories, and policies of assimilation and acculturation imposed by nation states, have survived, have become dynamic and coexist as peoples with identities and political ontologies in permanent resistance to the logic of neoliberal inclusion-exclusion.

In this present reflection, the 'utopian' model - the model that is dreamed - of a global deliberation, constitutes one side of the dialogue, which serves as the basis for a respectful conversation: an endogenous interlocution between native peoples, necessary and perhaps novel. A communication between different contemporary peoples interested not only in the inclusion of their categories as exoticizing elements in the speeches and reports of the spokespersons of neoliberal capitals; concepts that, expropriated from Indigenous peoples, are often used as 'colorful' elements to disguise the social impact of exclusion. In this utopian model of global conversation based on the principle of an ethics of diversity, the challenge is the generation of a politically consensual discourse that should politicize collectively owned categories, with the goal of

transforming them into strategic, political and economic demands and responses that have positive impacts for aboriginal peoples in their multi-territorial daily lives. That is to say, the construction of a dialogue as a global political action of diverse ontologies that allow to develop a collective front of claims, demands, and follow-up of processes and commitments, led before the excluding otherness, in its form of State, human rights, and international commercial rights.

The other side of this dialogue as a global political action of the peoples of the world is the impossibility and limitation of how national and international legal frameworks function and act. The language and procedures of national and international legal action require the intermediation of specialists, if and only if they are legal professionals. In many cases and in many countries, the tools created for collective participation, are conditioned to be sterile, such as good faith consultations (Mazariegos Rodas, 2014: 12). A permanent reality for Indigenous peoples is that they are included in order to be excluded from decisions that will determine the present and future of their territories and their community lives. These logics of inclusion-exclusion (Agamben 1998) refer to the fact that many public policies that deploy a discourse of inclusion, participation, and respect for the oppositional positions of Indigenous peoples, are actually a contradiction of inclusion due to their bureaucracy, regulations, specialized language, etc., so that they continue to be exclusionary practices.

In many cases, inclusive discourses at both the national and international levels become mechanisms applied by institutions to affirm rights while denying them the rights that are theoretically guaranteed. Through these appropriate legal frameworks, or due process, this back side represses and criminalizes peoples who lead counter-historical resistance, expropriates them, dispossesses them of their territories, their ontologies and epistemologies, all within the logics of the preeminence of a legal framework.

Who dialogues, and how, even in an ideal model, in the endogenous and in the ontological -being- and epistemological -doing- otherness?

On the front side of the ideal dialogic model or endogenous dialogue, native peoples dialogue among themselves, from their contemporary realities of ontological and epistemic diffraction, realities that are unique, particular, diverse, collective, and glocal. *Diffraction* is a concept that describes the process of a wave in winding movement as it encounters an element hindering its passage, where the reaction of the wave is to split and seek openings through which to enter or skirt around the sides. Such dialogues from the ontological endogenous diffraction would make it possible to bring together, from a diversity of fronts, counter-hegemonic political discourses with pluri-territorial narratives that appropriate the fissures of the institutionality that excludes them. Narratives that, only if constructed by voices with legitimate representation, could be appropriated, defended and demanded by collective mechanisms in resistance; diffraction as a political strategy in the face of the neoliberal voracity that destroys the life of the territories.

The strategy/methodology for endogenous diffractive dialogue is a challenge in itself. Being representative, the narrative of such discourse must position a 'social text' that is enforceable as a collective demand. A social text refers here to the collective appropriation of the political meaning of the discourse that takes a position, far from being a metaphor of the social that reduces historical realities and diverse contemporary experiences to the page of a book (Spivak, 1997:249). The social text, according to Spivak, should not be cited only as an individual reflection that runs the risk of expropriating the sources of endogenous knowledge and turning them into categories that, appropriated and resignified, justify domination, exploitation, territorial displacements - as has happened with 'good living', an irony of political correctness.

Is it possible to think of a methodology/strategy that would allow an exercise of what Lucero Sobrino - in the case study that precedes this essay - calls 'communal governance,' which would make viable at the same time the integration of the context with the text, the demands and collective actions, to influence political decisions? The communal and communitarian dimensions in the interviews presented in Sobrino's case study, are in themselves the basic principle of representation, the assembly decision for the common welfare. The communal governance described in the case study considers the common good as the primary motivation of the collectives in the Peruvian Amazon, the

assembly decisions are the result of the shared collective sense of what is good and what is common. More than to provide answers, this essay is a written reflection on whether local, micro-localized exercises of decision-making in communitarian assemblies, are possible as regional and global political strategies. Would it be possible 'to return questions and demand political answers to economic policies' (van Dijk & Mendizábal, 1999:10) departing from the legitimacy of diverse socio-cultural and pluri-territorial representation, or not?

The following three sections will reflect on the possibility of other endogenous multi-territorial conversations and actions that use the fissures of the economic and political power system to take political actions, re-signifying the everyday, the endogenous. The conceptual framework that defines political ontologies as mechanisms of possible alliances between peoples and human beings of the world that, based on the ethics of diversity, can procure the wellbeing of life on Earth.

### **1. Territorial enunciation as a methodology for global dialogue**

The question about the forms and processes of global deliberation are valid if what is sought are answers to the political problems posed to contemporary peoples. For instance, can those who are systematically excluded from the system that determines legal frameworks, deliberate on what is legal and what is punishable, who can be punished and why? Human rights frameworks have on their side the subjectivity of ethics and commercial law, the penal system, a whole archetype of inclusion-exclusion.

Hence, it is key that communal governance - as stated by Lucero Sobrino in the case study - should encompass contemporary geopolitical, counter-historical, resistance, and presence conditions, even in inclusion-exclusion; that is, what community life demands and allows to fractionate in diffraction before facing the system. Considering that the community encompasses bodies of people who need self-management, organization and administration of the political, economic, work/service to satisfy their basic needs, all based on assembly decisions under endogenous conditions and agreements: "The assembly system

is not a perfect system; it remains an effective instrument of governance but only if the requirement of sharing the same concept of good living is met” (Sobrino, *ut supra*).

An example of a territorial enunciation/voice/narrative/representation as an exercise of ‘political action’ was the case of the Guardians of Lake Atitlán, the *Colectivo Comunidad Tz'unun ya'*. In Guatemala, in 2019, the government of Jimmy Morales together with the ‘Friends of the Lake’ Association, promoted the construction of a mega sewage collector. The project would run along the entire edge of the lake to be channeled into a stream of water towards the south coast, which would generate ‘clean’ energy along the way through small hydroelectric plants. The goal, according to the proposal, was to clean Lake Atitlán of cyanobacteria.

Since 2009, cyanobacteria in the lake had been the subject of a tabloid advertising campaign led by Jimmy Morales’ government, warning of the rapid and eminent death of Lake Atitlán. Since that year, Tz'utujil, K'iche' and Kaqchikel women from the municipalities around the lake organized to collect inorganic garbage from the lake’s beaches. After 15 years, in San Pedro la Laguna, the Tz'utujil women of the *Colectivo Comunidad Tz'unun ya'* autonomously continue to clean the beaches of Lake Atitlán on a monthly basis.

Their motivation for self-management focuses on the care of ‘Grandmother Lake’. From the perspective of the *Tz'unun ya'* Community Collective, caring for the lake is a collective responsibility, so denouncing industrial production and irresponsible solid waste management that harm Grandmother Lake is to denounce those causing her agony. Because of this firm collective conviction, based on ancestral ontology and epistemology, they decided that a political act of justice was needed for Grandmother Lake, which would return the garbage collected on the beaches of the lake to its manufacturers in a single day at the end of the month: “we wanted to return the garbage, and those who collect it needed to participate” (González Cortés, 2023).

On October 24, 2022, a hundred women lake guardians from the *Tz'unun ya'* Community Collective traveled to the capital of Guatemala, walking several

kilometers, carrying baskets full of collected garbage and returning it in front of the Chamber of Commerce of Guatemala (span. CCG), a building that symbolizes the economic power of the non-Indigenous elites. The logistics were organized with the economic and technical contributions of the local population: “we sought to make women’s work visible because it was totally invisible” (González Cortés, 2023).

The Collective feared potential retaliations of criminalization towards the collectors, something that is common in a country like Guatemala, where the justice system is a mechanism of repression towards Indigenous peoples who try to protect their territories. “What action should we take to avoid being criminalized? Let’s say it’s an artistic action!” (González Cortés, 2023). So it was done. The return of the garbage was reported by the media as a contemporary art performance, but the guardians of the lake and the Indigenous community know that it was an unsubmitive and counter-historical collective political action, a political diffraction, one that reminded the corporate system of its omission of responsibility for the impact of the disposables they manufacture.

This is how an exercise of communal governance should constitute one of the honest objectives of a deliberation with global representation of native peoples. This exercise should contemplate the integration of the context of different communities with the text, the demands and the collective actions. The aim would be to influence the political decisions that respond to the questions, demands, and economic policies that affect the peoples of the world in their territories. The people who participate should be those who are elected by their own assemblies. These people would then participate in a collective deliberation at the national or international level, and should report back to their assembly - for example, in the case cited, to the lake guardians of the Tz'unun ya' Community Collective.

Is it possible to think about global deliberation? How can we imagine a dialogic process as an ideal model for deliberation at the global level? How can we understand the strengthening of governance beyond an exogenous view that departs from a place of interlocution that considers itself as the bearer of ‘truth’ and civilization, that conceives native peoples as ‘colorfully exotic’, noble and submissive in the face of the systematic expropriation of their territories, rather

than conversing from an ethic of diversity with contemporary peoples? Can representation be the beginning of knowledge exchange—of diffracting towards the knowledge of contemporary peoples? How can we create strategic alliances to exchange tools between peoples, between diverse but possibly complementary ontologies? What mechanisms can be effective for the access and dissemination of massive local, national and international information, to create coordinated, informed, appropriate actions and legitimize actions that force the prevailing system and its institutions to give objective answers to the demands of the peoples of the world?

But who should provide answers to these questions? This is perhaps the initial question posed as an invitation to reflect on the urgency of initiating possible processes of local and global conversations, which can allow for the existence of political strategies with local and multi-territorial legitimacy to create legitimate global fronts among contemporary peoples.

## **2. Collective political narratives as a methodology for global deliberation**

The methodological challenge of global deliberation also consists in escaping from an ethnographic or technocratic procedure defined by social sciences disciplines and their specialists. The process of learning to learn - as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2016) calls it - is based on its own ontology, one that connects the context with the text and the outcome; demands from collective actions must depart from an experience of research and systematization “from within/from outside” (Tuhiwai Smith, 2016:3). Proposals, feelings, existing knowledges, all supported, defended by pluri-territorial assemblies in different corners of the planet that collectively demand them. Otherwise, the enunciations of their ontologies - that is, of the narratives and discourses that are important for them to position - will result in expropriated discursive categories that fill reports, feed discourses of ‘social impact’ that convenient only for exogenous actors, and that justify economic policies that perpetuate the subordination and expropriation of their territories.

The narrative of the West, as an economic, political, socio-cultural, and academic disciplinary system, is that the inclusion of discourses of the social, of



minorities, of the need to stop the devastation of life, trivialized as climate change, is an altruistic form of inclusion. However, the reality in these circuits of power is the appropriation, resignification, and trivialization of categories presented by native peoples and Afro-descendants in their political discourses of their ontologies and epistemologies, as they become justifications for bureaucracies of unconsciousness that sustain hierarchies of administration of tax-exempt budgets. Transnational corporations, foundations, banks and loans, non-governmental organizations, and governmental institutions become mechanisms of domination that do not dialogue and much less respond to the demands of Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples.

The realization of a dialogue 'of us' and 'about us' is a process that should combine communal governance, the political sense of pluri-territorial counter-historicization, the hacking of digital tools for information, appropriation, identification, and defense of the collective political discourse of Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples. For this exercise to succeed, in a first moment, the academy and its specialists could provide a systematization service validated by the native and afro-descendant peoples in dialogic logics of mutual respect and strategic alliances, with a common interest: to save the life of the planet. In a second moment, the systematized information should be shared by producing communication formats such as podcasts, ads, etc., to be shared in social networks, in such a way that the contributions, realities, diversities, demands for answers, particular and collective resistances, can be known, appropriated, and defended by the native and Afro-descendant peoples from their multiple local territories.

The possibility of a collective political narrative must come from a jointly constructed mechanism that politically situates narratives about the contradiction of neoliberal capitalism in the contemporary realities of peoples and the West, as an inescapable global reality that extinguishes lives. Especially so, when considering that power is a series of institutions and authorized hierarchical relational assemblages from which narratives, decisions, and actions activate and perpetuate the dominant systems that kill life.

### **3. Beyond a Methodology: the ontological challenges of global deliberation**

It is important to acknowledge that the contemporary realities of Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples are constructed as diverse possibilities for their members. Religious diversity, sexual diversity, economic and social mobility, poverty and extreme poverty, disciplinary professionalization, migratory flows, ethnic vindication processes, age differences, racialization, etc., are complementary and contradictory variables that shape their current realities. The methodological and strategic proposal for the construction of a political dialogue, holding communal governance as a principle of representation, as a possible exercise, must include a diversity of stories, experiences and multiple resistances, as an essential complementary ensemble. Ideally, collectives and the individuals that make them should identify and appropriate the stakes and demands in the political discourses and demand objective, viable and culturally relevant answers.

To understand the political as collective for Indigenous peoples' territories, questioning the constructions of the world, of what is in the world, of how we relate to those elements in the world, are fundamental reflections that begin in a very personal way. How do we conceive the world, what is in the world, how do we relate to life? Through a series of questions that must have an endogenous answer we can build a political discourse that includes the diffraction of the ontologies and epistemologies of so-called 'othered' peoples. To annually feed water springs with salt, incense, alcohol, meat, flowers, for example. Before touching, moving, cutting, relating to other life (human, plant, water, salt, wood, stone, air, etc.), we must place our breath between our hands and offer it as a greeting. The intention is to warn other forms of life - in a universal language - that we are also life that will interact with their being.

Globally, around and in relation to native peoples and Afro-descendants, individuals and collectives exist and seek each other with intentions of approximation in the fight against stereotypes that divide or are internalized. Collectives that seek a reflexive approach from disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, philosophy, and their methods, or from the firm conviction that life on the planet and of the planet Earth must exist in well-being - these collectives approach the knowledges and doings of Indigenous peoples. This reflexive approach is called the 'ontological turn' (Escobar, 2007). This body of literature questions the positivist ontological assumptions that separate the

natural and the material, as well as the social and the spiritual (Rist, 2006), while separating culture and nature, and the human from the non-human. Authors of these proposals are primarily concerned with science and technology and actor-network theory (Latour 1993, 2007; Stengers, 2000; Mol, 2000; Mol, 1999; Law and Mol, 2002), studies on multispecies ethnography (Haraway, 2008; Kirksey and Helreich, 2010; Kohn, 2013), perspectival multinaturalism (Viveiros de Castro, 1998), and the ecology of others (Descola, 2013).

This situation brings us back to an issue of permanent concern for ‘Subaltern Studies’, one that tells us of the impossibility of dividing the world into opposing totalities: the elites and the subaltern. Instead, they point out that contemporary realities result from a web of historical, political, economic power; relations that form the passive curtain of the national-international. From this perspective, what elements would allow the voice of native peoples and afro-descendants to persuade a system and its power? The work in multidisciplinary teams, the presence and narratives of multi-territorial peoples can create diffraction in the system, so that ontologically political or politically ontological narratives can question the powers that kill life.

#### **4. A diffractive perspective towards the ontologies of contemporary peoples: a new meaning for global deliberation**

Thinking, then, about political ontologies coincides in its intentions with some of the concerns present in subaltern studies, specifically when those studies reflect that changes in relations within a system of economic, social and political power must begin from the ‘insurgent’ or the ‘subaltern’. They further maintain that social, political and economic changes in the systems of power, take place in networks of confrontations rather than in linear transitions, those perceived in history as networks of domination and exploitation, rather than modes of production (Rivera Cusicanqui and Barragán, 1997).

Mario Blaser explains that the political and relational ontologies of Indigenous peoples can be understood in three different and simultaneous registers. The first register, he says, refers to any way of understanding the world implicitly or explicitly, which explains “what kinds of things exist or can exist, what are

the conditions of their existence, their relations of dependence, etc.” (2019: 72). Citing Scott and Marshall (2005), the author further notes that “this inventory of kinds of beings and their relations is an ontology” (Blaser, 2019: 72). Blaser’s second register of ontologies has to do with arguments adopted from science and technology studies, mainly in actor-network theory: “ontologies do not precede mundane practices but rather take their shape through practices involving humans and non-humans” (Ibid. 2019: 72). The author’s third register refers to an ethnographic corpus that connects the myths and ordinariness of the subjects for whom it makes sense; “in this sense, ontologies also manifest themselves as narratives in which assumptions about what kinds of things can exist and their possible relations are more directly visible” (Ibid. 2019: 72).

Blaser stresses two important points in the use of the category of ‘ontology’. The first is the existence of a multiplicity of ways of establishing and distributing what exists and their mutual relations. The second is that the term ‘ontology’ helps to provincialize modern ontology (or naturalism), which considers nature to be the antithesis of the human. According to Blaser, the second register makes the notion of multiple ontologies more complex, because it prevents the error of confusing ontology with a mental map of the world. In this register, an ontology is a way of making the world, it is a way of enacting reality. Reality, according to the ontological perspective defined by Blaser, is a material-semiotic formulation of reality, as proposed by the actor-network theory. This avoids, says the author, “the assumption that there is a reality out there and representations (or perspectives) about it that are more or less accurate” (Blaser, 2019: 72). In this formulation, reality is conceived as made up of natural elements on the one hand, and cultural elements on the other. A reality made up of facts and their representations.

Departing from this understanding, Blaser underlines that political ontology implies, at the same time, a political sensibility, a problem, and a modality of critical analysis. He complements this understanding by saying that “this notion of ontology where ontological multiplicity, multiple ontologies, and the performativity of narratives are intermingled with one another, constitutes the ground on which the project of a political ontology rests” (2019: 75).

Arturo Escobar considers that political ontologies must be relational, for him it is about a dense network of interrelations and materiality, “a relational ontology can be defined as one in which nothing (neither humans nor non-humans) pre-exists the relationships that constitute us. We all exist because everything exists” (2013: 29). And, in addition, they must have an engagement with the pluriverse, “a set of worlds in partial connection with each other, and all acting and unfolding without ceasing” (Escobar, 2013: 34). On this idea, Marisol de la Cadena considers that the perseverance of relational worlds demonstrates that there is always something in all these worlds that ‘exceeds’ the influence of the modern. In this perspective, the components of relational ontologies resist definition and reduction to the modern, this represents the elemental resistances of political ontology and ontological political practice (De la Cadena, 2015; Escobar, 2013: 34).

Aura Cruz brings two key points to the fore to reflect about Arturo Escobar’s proposals, which are central to this exercise of endogenous research in dialogue with the body of literature exogenous to contemporary peoples. Cruz refutes Escobar on the basis of two objections: on the one hand, she says, “a contradiction between autonomy and relationality will be detected if we want to think of the possibility of an ontological interweaving that makes possible the emergence of unpublished ontologies” (Cruz, 2021: 3), that is, ontologies that are beyond known and existing identities. The second objection is made against to the claim that “the epistemic way is that by which relations between worlds can be built, specifically through the translation of knowledge” (Cruz, 2021: 3).

We agree with Cruz when she states that exercises of endogenous multi-territorial conversation, of situated history, of approximation between political ontologies, of representation from communal governance, that the dialogue with disciplinary theoretical bodies and their specialists, must all be necessarily done by dismantling concepts and the egos of representation and interpretation of their institutions and experts.

In this way, the ontologies of contemporary peoples, in spite of being current and dynamic, of being everyday political languages, their capacity to make evident urgent realities of the danger to life in the territories and in of all that is on Earth, should be more than a fashion of the politically correct and exotic. The

approach to these ontologies should persuade interlocutors located in the power system to listen, because the answers to the well-being of lives must be committed and global.

# Conclusion

by Azucena Morán.

In the Latin American context, despite its historical application in leftist, communitarian and progressive projects, the strengthening of local and national governance through deliberation and citizen participation has been gradually incorporated into the decision-making institutions of the region's colonial-neoliberal state. Meanwhile, in Europe, academic literature and practices of deliberative democracy have been oriented towards the random selection of citizens and the economic remuneration of participation as a means to achieve inclusive and equitable deliberation. This has generated dialogue processes that have been key in an increasingly polarized Western reality, but at the same time has implied the conceptual and normative restriction of deliberative practices, making them increasingly costly and 'difficult' to implement, justify, and sustain in most parts of planet Earth.

Given the apparent dissonance in the current state of the deliberative-participatory project, what might global deliberation mean beyond the 'inclusion of otherness' in decision-making processes?

In the first section, Lucero Sobrino describes the assemblies of the Ashaninka peoples in the Amazon as the basis of the dialogue created between Indigenous nations and the institutional instruments of the nation-state. This diffraction towards assembly decision-making represents "the basic principle of representation" in the words of María Jacinta Xón. However, this representation exists not only by fractioning toward a dominant system—as would be the case, for example, of the nation-state that recognizes (or not) the deliberative and territorial autonomy of Indigenous nations—but also by existing in "contemporary resistance and presence".

In this sense, dialogue with different contemporary peoples, understood as a first step towards the possibility of global deliberation, should not resort to the inclusion of "exoticizing elements in the speeches and reports of the

spokespersons of neoliberal capitals; concepts that, expropriated from Indigenous peoples, are often used as ‘colorful’ elements to disguise the social impact of exclusion” (Xón Riquiac, *ut supra*). On the contrary, the diffraction towards the knowledges and doings of contemporary peoples needs to be a normative horizon for global deliberation. It needs to exist in dialogue, in resistance, and in the presence of the ontologies and collective life of the different communities that deliberative democrats attempt to bring into dialogue. A visible example of such diffraction was described by María Jacinta Xón, when the Tz'unun ya' Community Collective returned the garbage it found in Abuela Lago to the Guatemalan Chamber of Commerce (CCG), “a building that symbolizes the economic power of the non-Indigenous elites”.

A real dialogue, serving as the basis for a possible global deliberation, will then be one that is anchored in the governance mechanisms of contemporary peoples—and, necessarily, one that recognizes in turn their praxis of resistance and assumes the historical and contemporary responsibilities of dominant institutions. A new normative direction for global deliberation will then be one that succeeds in breaking the dialogical impossibility between contemporary peoples, transnational capital, and nation-states. This will be able to occur, not through mechanisms of inclusion-exclusion, but through the validity of the ontologies of contemporary peoples.



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