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Promoting peace: colectivas, art, and cultural injustice in Mexico

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ABSTRACT

This collaborative research delves into intercultural (in)justice, dignity, and the recognition of non-hegemonic knowledge. Its main objective is to investigate marginalised knowledge in immigration, gender violence, adultism, and minority groups, including indigenous communities. By diving into the significance of informal knowledge-sharing settings this research underscores how vulnerable individuals and collectives showcase their identity holistically. Lastly drawing attention to the importance of fostering safe spaces, interculturality and sharing cognitive practice to counter marginalisation, promoting reconstruction through tools such as hospitality, active listening, and assertive communication.

Esta investigación colaborativa profundiza en la (in)justicia intercultural, la dignidad y el reconocimiento del conocimiento no hegemónico. Su principal objetivo es investigar el conocimiento marginado en la inmigración, la violencia de género, el adultismo y los grupos minoritarios, incluidas las comunidades indígenas. Al profundizar en la importancia de los entornos informales de intercambio de conocimientos, esta investigación subraya cómo los individuos y colectivos vulnerables muestran su identidad de forma holística. Por último, llama la atención sobre la importancia de fomentar espacios seguros, la interculturalidad y el intercambio de prácticas cognitivas para contrarrestar la marginación, promoviendo la reconstrucción a través de herramientas como la hospitalidad, la escucha activa y la comunicación asertiva.

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Introduction and background

The analysis presented in this article is grounded in the results of the Culture for Sustainable and Inclusive Peace Network Plus (CUSP N+) project, which was carried out in Mexico through the collaborative efforts of two academic institutions, Centro Regional de Investigaciones Multidisciplinarias by the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (CRIM-UNAM) and the University of Glasgow, along with Asociación para Leer, Escuchar, Escribir y Recrear A.C. also known as IBBY Mexico, a civil association. The principal objective of this project was to delve into the social transformation of conflict by employing artistic methodologies. Nine cultural colectivas joined this initiative, with a primary focus on utilising artistic practices to promote social cohesion and a

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This article has been corrected with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

culture of peace among vulnerable communities, groups and individuals. In this analysis, attention will be focused on the impact, insights, and results of the CUSP N + work.

During implementation, it had to be noted that the network of actors and actions, as well as their implications, was more extensive than initially planned. Several unexpected factors had a major influence, including sudden loss of funding, and fiscal and tax regulations. At the outset the CUSP N + project faced unexpected budget cuts, leading to persistent institutional derails spanning the nearly three-year project duration and significantly influencing its progress. A notable outcome was the enforced pause and postponed payments, which adversely affected the implementation of planned activities. As a result, certain collectives voiced dissatisfaction, prompting a few to withdraw from the project. This resulted in some mistrust among the remaining participants and increased financial challenges for most of the individuals involved.

To exacerbate the situation, the civil associations in Mexico also experienced income precariousness, albeit under different political margins. In Mexico, civil associations are undergoing a process of devaluation, as stated by presidential policies. As a result, a wide range of fiscal and tax regulations have been renewed to restrict and monitor the resources they can receive and utilise, thus disincentivising donations, diminishing societal involvement, and increasing lack of trust in their management. As a result, the nine colectivas that joined the research have varying tax categorisations, resulting in uneven and multifaceted dynamics in accessing public and private resources. Ultimately, the CUSP N + project structure aligned with existing fiscal policies, aggravating economic vulnerability in conducting community activities through culture. This situation was encountered on the fringes of the project's development, as issuing invoices in a country like Mexico can become contentious within the bureaucratic system. In particular, the scrutiny of expenses for unequal activities becomes relevant, considering that most of the work is voluntary, and personal monetary gain is minimal, or at best, negligible.

In addition to the above, it is important to consider the communal and personal spheres of cultural management practices, particularly in adverse contexts. For example, during the process, personal aspects that were not merely an 'external aspect' of collective work emerged. These aspects were experienced simultaneously during community action, collective research, and their connection with the academic sphere. At the same time, they underwent economic vulnerability that definitively transformed the relationship with the all the objects that were part of the project.

Considering the preceding information, this article acknowledges that inequalities in their diverse manifestations are encountered; they are not solely verifiable and duplicable, but they can also be experienced and expressed first-hand through the lens of restorative justice. As such, a primary goal of this research is to centralise the focus on needs by employing a non-extractive methodological approach to data collection, consistently highlighting the pivotal role of the individual articulating their perspective and fostering a significant affinity. Among the nine colectivas involved in the project, five chose to participate in this initiative.

The paper explores intercultural (in)justice, dignity, and the recognition of non-hegemonic knowledge. It also examines the implications of marginalised knowledge in areas such as immigration, gender violence, adultism, and minority groups like indigenous communities. This is done by analysing how the pursuit of modernity by hegemonies has led to the specialisation of knowledge, disregarding minority cultures and perpetuating institutionalised violence and injustice – whether epistemic or otherwise. The paper emphasises the importance of creating safe spaces, fostering interculturality, and promoting shared cognitive practices to counter marginalisation and encourage reconstruction, including elements like hospitality, active listening, and assertive communication. By challenging the epistemic injustice faced by vulnerable individuals and collectives, the paper underscores the significance of sharing knowledge in a non-academic informal setting and showcasing these alternative interventions across all dimensions.

The first section examines the concept of epistemic injustices within the context of Mexico, focusing on testimonial and hermeneutical injustices as presented by Fricker (2007/2017). The section emphasises the importance of equitable knowledge sharing and recognition of local

epistemologies, all while recognising the obstacles stemming from the coloniality of power and knowledge. The second section presents the testimonies and reflections of four out of the five participating groups in the CUSP N + project and this study. These testimonies stem from collective discussions on epistemic injustice and collective epistemic contributions. The section aims to address how the practices of these colectivas counteract epistemic exclusion, facilitate peacebuilding, and provide resources for marginalised communities to create meaning.

The third section explores epistemic justice and collaborative knowledge production by autonomous collectives in their attempt to foster collaborative knowledge production that is free from epistemic injustices, particularly from a decolonial perspective. It examines power dynamics within the framework of institutional violence and horizontal collaboration. The fourth section discusses fostering creative community engagement for alternative education interventions. It highlights the challenges and significance of embracing varied artistic work, community-driven initiatives, and safe spaces for self-expression, while recognising the influence of external aesthetics and biases. The final section briefly revisits the main findings for concluding remarks.

Epistemic injustice: common context in the construction of knowledge in Mexico

Miranda Fricker's work delves into the concept of epistemic injustices, which revolve around withholding knowledge from marginalised individuals and excluding their contributions to socially accepted knowledge, thereby undermining their political agency (2007/2017). Fricker identifies two main forms of epistemic injustice: testimonial injustice, where an individual's capacity to hold knowledge is negated due to their marginalised identity, rendering them an invalid conversational partner; and hermeneutical injustice, which obstructs the understanding and recognition of practices that shape collective meanings within specific social groups. This marginalisation can manifest either systematically or incidentally (Radi, 2022). Additionally, Anderson's perspective (2012) emphasises the expansion of notions of epistemic justice within societal institutions by recognising that injustices arise from entrenched social inequalities rather than solely individual factors, thereby necessitating systemic solutions.

Can horizontal dynamics be discussed within work contexts characterised by imbalances in the system that promotes knowledge production?

Critiques directed towards cultural studies (anthropological, ethnographic, sociological, and artistic) in Mexico revolve around the folklorisation of local and indigenous knowledge, often intertwined with extractive tendencies implicit within science, technology, and humanities project policies. Effective knowledge sharing requires transparent mutual agreements, ensuring equal reciprocity among stakeholders (institution, researcher, community) (Stengers, 2010). In the knowledge production dynamic, researchers affiliated with academic institutions access salaries, incentives for research, and opportunities to present their work. Conversely, communities with a significant role in generating materials lack similar platforms for presenting their cultivated knowledge (Latour, 2021).

This disparity becomes prominent when underscoring the significance of knowledge-sharing spaces for specialists and the public. These platforms offer opportunities for contrasting perspectives, engaging in dialogue, and arguing about epistemic objects resulting from communal efforts. Such significance aligns with Broncano's assertion (2020) that knowledge is a dimension of human agency, representing both individual and collective capacities in ascertaining accurate information and envisaging proposed actionable outcomes.

Two significant consequences emerge from the foregoing discussion. The first pertains to the dialogical dynamics that enable the recognition and articulation of acquired knowledge. Engaging with interdisciplinary knowledge necessitates considering the fusion of horizons (Gadamer & Olasagasti, 1994) for understanding; individuals possess diverse foundations for interpreting the same

situation. Establishing a shared framework is the initial stride in averting hermeneutic injustice. The second revolves around how epistemologies nurtured within communities and local contexts provide a lens for diversity, innovation of methodologies, and assimilation of knowledge. Restricting the outlets for their expression curtails their advancement and obstructs the prospect of others contemplating these experiences (Haraway, 2018; Stengers, 2010).

Preserving local epistemologies within a limited framework of certain discourses and enunciation sites signifies instances of epistemic violence stemming from university dynamics. These occurrences, to varying extents, aim to mitigate potential risks affecting others. Nevertheless, navigating these risks while preserving symmetries inadvertently perpetuates colonial knowledge production practices. Such practices are frequently fuelled by well-meaning intentions or even a lack of professional ethics. More disconcertingly, they might be an inevitable consequence of institutionalising knowledge within specialised spaces.

The political economy of ‘truth’ in contemporary society is marked by two distinct characteristics. The first revolves around the prominence of scientific discourses and institutions, which wield authority in shaping the conditions that facilitate the emergence of truth within specific disciplines. The second pertains to the widespread diffusion of this political economy of truth across the societal fabric, facilitated by educational and informational mechanisms such as universities and media outlets (Foucault, 2000). Observers contend that the formulation of community knowledge initiatives without adequately addressing these dual aspects is a prevalent tendency. This trend not only perpetuates epistemic and hermeneutic injustices but also perpetuates entrenched colonial practices in the realm of knowledge and culture management. Quijano (2014) identifies coloniality as a distinct configuration of power exerted by global capitalism and emphasises that:

The coloniality of power is one of the constitutive elements of the global pattern of capitalist power. It is founded on the imposition of a racial/ethnic classification of the world’s population as a cornerstone of this power pattern, and it operates in every plane, sphere, and dimension, both material and subjective, of everyday existence and on a social scale. It originates and becomes global from the Americas. With the formation of the Americas (Latin America), at the same moment and within the same historical movement, the emerging capitalist power becomes global, its hegemonic centers are located in the regions over the Atlantic—which will later be identified as Europe—and as central axes of its new pattern of domination, coloniality and modernity are also established. (p. 326)

Taking the above into consideration, one could argue that the coloniality of power also embodies a coloniality of knowledge. This perspective arises from the fact that repression has primarily targeted modes of cognition and knowledge production, as well as perspectives, imagery, and other forms of signification (Quijano, 1992, p. 12). This results in an enduring structural imposition which affects solely those who were dispossessed and subjugated during that era.

Decolonial praxes: Colectivas mitigating epistemic exclusion, empowering communities, and promoting peacebuilding

Colectivo Algaraza

In 2016, when the proposal of the Colectivo Algaraza was initiated, the need to combine efforts to counteract practices that limit access to a life free from violence was identified, particularly in the municipality of Emiliano Zapata. This municipality has experienced severe structural violence, including being under a Gender-Based Violence Alert (AVGM), historical involvement of organised crime with local government (Peña González & Ramírez Pérez, 2015), and high levels of criminality involving adolescents in conflict with penal law (Tribunal Unitario de Justicia Penal para Adolescentes del Estado de Morelos, 2021).

In the case of the Arquitecto Gerardo Pérez Rodríguez neighbourhood, the incidence of crime has been particularly embraced by the residents. Duyvesteyn (2017) cites as a cause of this phenomenon the discovery that other non-governmental actors serve as capable and adept providers of

governance, acting as alternatives to the absent State and as autonomous ‘governors’ without pretensions or ambitions of state power (Author’s translation). In addition to this, according to the diagnosis of the Colectivo Algaraza, ‘La Gerardo Pérez’ has a history of significant forced displacement and migration. It presents itself as a community with irregular settlements where the right to adequate housing, a vital element that dignifies people’s lives, has not been guaranteed. Moreover, one of the most evident issues is the prevalence of violence within the community. Of particular concern is the normalisation of these acts and their impact on the psychosocial development of children, as well as the financial and social costs that result in harm to the social and economic fabric of communities (Rojas Blanco, 2010).

The Colectivo Algaraza considered that the intervention carried out in this community would facilitate the creation of new and different ways of relating, being, and existing within the community under the principles of nonviolence and peaceful conflict transformation. The ultimate goal is to reconstruct the social fabric from, by, and for the community itself. Given that the community embraces its own customs, celebrates its festivals, speaks its languages, and preserves its traditions, the new generations will encounter an incredible intercultural blend that reaffirms new meanings and new ways of being and living within the community. Therefore, community pedagogies grounded in a popular education and nonviolent approaches, utilising techniques such as peace circles, could serve as catalysts for resilient communities. These pedagogies facilitate horizontal teaching and learning processes where the primary objective is to generate epistemologies of healing and restoration for peaceful co-existence.

The importance of intervening, and doing so from within the community, arises from critique of adultism and paternalistic prevention approaches, which often propose ideas formulated from external perspectives. Consequently, their proposal emphasises the significance of allowing the emergence of initiatives that are nurtured from, for, with, and by the community. This approach embraces the right of girls and boys to participate and, through the right to play, enables them to take ownership of their own peacebuilding endeavours.

Colectiva Palabras que Acompañan

Colectiva Palabras que Acompañan is a project of reading mediation conceived from practical experience in this field. Within this paradigm, reading mediation is seen as a supportive endeavour aimed at fostering meaningful connections between books, words, and migrant communities, as well as historically marginalised populations. These groups often have limited access to reading, oral tradition, and engagement with knowledge as playful experiences, free from the constraints of an academic setting. From this standpoint, reading mediation, rather than being an end in itself, emerges as an invaluable tool and potential asset for enhancing resilient processes within migrant communities and historically marginalised populations. In the context of this project, these communities frequently confront conditions of marginalisation, exclusion, and exposure to intersectional forms of violence.

In this scenario, individuals, families, and migrant groups took a central role, empowered through self-management and agency. With the guidance and support of trained reading mediators, straightforward reading sessions and mediation practices were carried out with migrant communities. The key objective of these activities, revolving around reading, was to evoke new social representations of migrant individuals through their actions within society. This approach upholds their dignity and avoids victimisation, encompassing the voices of migrants and fostering an environment that is less discriminatory and less hostile for them. Therefore, this initiative encouraged migrant individuals to recollect their past, share their feelings, and recount their experiences, providing them with a means to identify and express emotions that are often suppressed. In a context in which society is marred by structural violence, migrant individuals have been systematically exposed to violence and invisibility. Consequently, they experience a deficit in appropriate representation and dignified support throughout their journey.

Simultaneously, a model was developed that emphasises reading as a social practice contributing to strengthening community and familial bonds, fostering critical and independent thinking, and cultivating a culture of ongoing peace construction. This approach reaffirms human dignity, mutual respect, and the acknowledgment of others. From this perspective, reading mediation evolved into a tool to enhance resilience within communities confronted by marginalisation, exclusion, and exposure to diverse forms of violence. Therefore, an important insight has emerged from the course of the activity. The transformation occurring within the space was evident: it shifted from an initial state characterised by prevailing feelings of uncertainty, to participants gradually relaxing, feeling secure and heard, and culminating in the sharing of experiences and emotions among all attendees. This process highlights the potential of creating safe and inclusive spaces for open dialogue and mutual understanding.

Colectiva con Perspectiva

The *Colectiva Letras con Perspectiva* emerged from a certainty and an intuition. The certainty that a book is a code not easily broken. Reading goes beyond memorising vocabulary and author-specific syntax; it also involves sharing a context or conceptual framework to comprehend the book's content. Above all, it requires a willingness to access a world different from our own, a disposition not solely stimulated by access to a physical book on a shelf. Deciphering the code, delving into the book, entails having both epistemic and social resources.

According to Statista (2022), Acapulco ranks as the second most dangerous city worldwide in terms of homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants. The issue of femicide persists consistently, exacerbated by the presence of numerous organised crime groups and the impunity surrounding their crimes. The deeply ingrained culture of machismo further contributes to the normalisation of femicidal violence in the region. An example of this can be seen in the local media, which consistently features news about acts of gender-based violence. Similarly, within the local literary production, stories with female characters in contexts of violence are often created, seemingly portraying violence as an everyday occurrence. Another illustration of the context's violence involves gunfights, the sound of gunshots, streets closed owing to violent incidents, and friends falling victim to forced disappearances. These experiences are integral to the daily lives of Acapulco's residents. Feeling fearful and sensing personal lives threatened have become commonplace. Amid the array of violences experienced, gender-based violence stands out as one of the most intricate to comprehend, report, and address.

Currently, the municipal government of Acapulco and the State of Guerrero are led by women who have openly expressed their commitment to working towards eliminating violence against women. However, it is also evident that despite their positions of political power, they themselves fall victim to gender-based violence. This might be due to the deeply ingrained macho culture or perhaps because more women need to recognise this issue and prevent its perpetuation. In other words, the normalisation of gender-based violence impacts women of all ages and social groups, as there is a lack of concepts and resources to identify, report, and confront it.

Given the aforementioned, the *colectiva* deems it urgent to promote reflection on the context of violence experienced by women in Acapulco, Guerrero. Their goal is to facilitate discussions about women's representation in literature and the media. Their aim is for women to consider the various dimensions of gender-based violence, its impact on bodies, language, families, and symbolic spaces, and to critically examine the construction of stereotypes. The envisioned tool to address the confined spaces where violence has left its mark is literature authored by other women. Through stories and beloved characters created by Latin American women writers, the objective is to stimulate contemplation about their individual circumstances and nonviolent alternatives. Consequently, establishing gender-focused reading circles will respectfully and meaningfully contribute to infusing significance and resources into the prevention of gender-based exclusion and violence.

As mentioned earlier, the colectiva's driving intuition is related to the centrality that the female body has acquired in social reflection with a gender perspective. This is why the colectiva proposed the explicit incorporation of women's bodies into reading. If the practice of collective reading involves observing what is felt in the body, can new ways of reading, learning, and communicating what is read be discovered? Reading based on bodily experience, creating a safe space for participants' expression and dialogue, and collaboratively enhancing and expanding epistemic and socio-emotional resources were among their main objectives.

Specialised literature discusses situated hermeneutical inequality, which occurs when an individual or group is incapable of understanding a social experience and/or making it communicatively intelligible. Drawing from the colectiva's work within the contexts of violence in Acapulco and other territories of Guerrero, they assert that the normalisation of gender-related violence hinders the construction of concepts and meanings that would enable victims to identify, report, and prevent it. Hermeneutical injustice is unjust primarily because it arises from the arbitrarily disadvantaged participation of certain social groups in practices that yield collective meanings. Marginalisation can be systematic or incidental, contingent on its scope and duration. When rooted in negative identity biases – such as those experienced by racially marginalised women in sexist and racist contexts – it is undoubtedly persistent and pervasive (Radi, 2022).

In the colectiva's sessions, participants engaged with their emotions and ideas in response to various forms of violence presented in literary texts authored by other women. Themes encompassed sexual abuse, forced motherhood, symbolic violence against female bodies, criminal violence in territories, and diverse languages that have excluded and violated women. Both in-person and virtual formats provided a secure space for participants to converse and discover new concepts, cognitive resources, and emotional tools to reinterpret their experiences of violence. In the in-person modality, this was achieved through somatic practices, while in the virtual setting, dialogue, drawing, and various forms of collective listening and validation were employed. This collective validation of subjective, bodily, and emotional experiences stood as a crucial contribution within the activities. The act of communalising subjectivity and using it to enrich the dialogue space constitutes a significant epistemic practice, as it is within this sphere that social meanings are engendered.

When formulating and implementing the project, it was recognised that addressing inequalities stemming from conditions of epistemic injustice and exclusion requires collective action. Hence the ultimate goal of the initiative was to establish a diverse group of female readers from different ages and social groups, unified by their shared desire to engage with diverse worlds and make them their own through reading and embodiment. Moreover, this group aimed to organise community actions to strengthen their resources and mitigate the social disadvantages of living in violent contexts. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that while there was a core of women with a more consistent presence in the sessions, there were also young participants who came and went. As such, there remains a significant journey ahead to further integrate and solidify the Colectiva Letras con Perspectiva.

Taller Sentir Naturaleza

This initiative was established with the purpose of stimulating reflections, emotions, and personal and collective processes among children about nature. Its goal goes beyond merely promoting and encouraging nature conservation; it strives to deepen children's awareness and recognition of their inherent connection with the natural world. The workshop aims to transcend the binary notion of human-nature relationships and instead fosters a profound sense of *nature sensing* (sentir naturaleza). Utilising stop-motion animation as a pedagogical tool, the workshop empowers communities to collaboratively craft stories. These stories are then transformed into short films conveying the concept of symbiosis, drawing inspiration from Donna Haraway's tale 'The Children of Compost'.

Recognising the existence of a wounded world, where our interactions with nature are mediated by dominant and extractive logics in the Capitalocene era, 'staying with the trouble' involves envisioning solutions and potential futures to instil a sense of hope and agency among children. This

initiative draws from Donna Haraway's ideas as compiled in her book 'Staying with the Trouble' (2016), wherein she envisions a future in which children enter into symbiosis with other organisms to foster sensory empathy and survival instincts. A symbiote is a fusion of two distinct beings that mutually aid, care for, and protect each other indefinitely. Consequently, the question posed to the children is: *what story would you tell if you were a symbiote?*

The activities with children began with a sensitisation to the themes through tailored presentations, curated screenings of short films, playful-emotional exercises (such as field trips, mapping symbiotic relationships, dance, listening moments, choral dynamics), and introductory animation exercises (morph and exploration of techniques). Following this sensitisation, the children were guided through the process of creating an animated short film using the 'cut out' technique with paper cutouts. The entire creative process is undertaken collectively, including crafting the story, storyboard, characters, settings, props, frame-by-frame animation, recording incidental sounds, dialogues, and narration. The culmination of the workshop involved a screening where they witnessed the outcome of their efforts.

Each workshop was tailored to the specific needs of each location where they were intended to be conducted, and was customised to address the themes and issues that a community, civil association, cultural centre, or independent project wished to explore, with a primary focus on our relationship with nature as human beings. This colectiva operates through institutional support to ensure that communities can access the workshop at no cost. Depending on the available budget and desired topics, shorter workshops are offered, which may involve small animation exercises and the creation of optical toys. Additionally, training sessions are provided to teachers, cultural promoters, and individuals interested in utilising cinema as a pedagogical tool.

Colectivo Leyendo y Pedaleando: Among Films and Books for a Culture of Peace

For this initiative the proximity to the migrant population, the children and adolescents who attend the market, their parents' workplace, led the colectiva to recognise the urgency and necessity of establishing a sociocultural and playful space for engagement and dialogue. This endeavour contributed to fostering a culture of peace and facilitating better integration with the environment of the community. Given the absence from formal educational spaces due to the mobility challenges faced by the migrant population and the local children affected by confinement policies, these gatherings serve as safe spaces in their personal and social development. Therefore, it was deemed necessary to provide children and adolescents with tools that enable them to confront the challenges they are navigating, both in terms of mobility from hostile environments and within the local context, which has been compounded by the confinement measures they have experienced.

The tricycle with a canopy, the emblem of this initiative, is regarded as a versatile tool and multi-purpose device that has enabled the transportation of reading and cinematic spaces throughout the city, and is essential to the conceptualisation of the activities. Its effectiveness and versatility are reflected in its popularity within the city and the region. This eco-friendly vehicle serves various roles, such as transporting cargo and passengers, used by semi-informal waste collectors, street vendors selling shaved ice, snacks, fresh beverages, ice creams, peeled oranges, charcoal-grilled meat and sausage tacos, tamales, and more. Its integration into daily life, combined with its utilisation for transporting books and film, has made it a beloved choice among the public.

Meanwhile, the other initiative in this project, 'Luz María Chapela' Reading Room, identified, through the construction of knowledge within unrecognised spaces, that communities organise themselves to establish these spaces as their own, whether physical or symbolic. This is achieved through the use of words, with hospitality, sisterhood, attentive listening, and dialogue. At times it may appear that they are conforming to the norms of their time, yet these spaces resemble the supportive nature of indigenous communities. These communities gathered around a table instead

of a campfire, sharing stories and enriching them with their experiences. This is how resistance took shape, how men, women, and children continued to share their wisdom through words, in informal, non-academic, and normalised spaces, with a fresh perspective on interculturality.

Both initiatives share a common focus on reading spaces and the book as a refuge and meeting point for nurturing creativity and imagination. Simultaneously, they aim to promote their activities through social media platforms, encouraging participation through voluntary efforts.

Exploring epistemic justice and collaborative knowledge production by autonomous collectives

It is indeed a significant challenge for academia, civil society, and collectives to foster collaborative knowledge production that is free from epistemic injustices - especially from a perspective of decoloniality, examining power dynamics within the framework of institutional violence and horizontal collaboration.

In the case of Colectivo Algazara, there is a particular effort to address conditions of inequality and propose alternative forms of epistemic justice. A clear example of this is the identification of all participants as a knowledge community, where not only are testimonial and hermeneutic violence avoided and extraction of community production through collectives and collaborations with individuals prevented, but a critical analysis of marginalised knowledge is also integrated to acknowledge disparities. This nomenclature encounters resistance and expectations, as envisioning co-investigation as a proposition to break the cycle of epistemic injustice questions such collaboration, aiming for a more horizontal, respectful, and just approach.

Villoro (1982/2008) introduces and defines the concept of an epistemic community as follows:

Determined by a specific level of production in their society, which grants them access to certain data through particular technical means, based on an amount of accumulated information, a set of viable theories and interpretations, considering the development achieved by the knowledge of the era, all within a common conceptual framework. (p. 148)

When discussing knowledge production, initial references often point to scientists or the institutions of 'science'. The sociologist Merton (1973) serves as a crucial point of reference for addressing the idealised ethos believed to be required during knowledge production: disinterestedness, organised skepticism, universalism, and communism (not associated with political ideology). These rational attitudes towards all knowledge construction ensure objectivity. However, these attitudes stem from the history of science institutionalisation, encompassing support programmes, promotion, publication, peer review, and reward and punishment systems that establish a valid approach to creating knowledge. These practices are primarily associated with universities, which carry approval, social prestige, and government recognition.

The ethos identified by Merton serves as a pivotal point for delving into the examination of how science advances within the context of its normativity and social expectations. From this viewpoint, its development and innovation are more intertwined with political and economic interests than with purely epistemic practices. This leads to inquiry into which groups possess entry to scientific culture and can embark on the essential steps to generate knowledge that is socially acknowledged and accepted. Succinctly put, the answer lies in those who are part of the scientific culture and community, individuals occupying roles within educational establishments, and those responsible for the administration and allocation of financial resources.

Within all the aforementioned spaces, the question arises: Where is the epistemic practice of local communities situated? Specifically, where is the epistemic practice of those who are part of this project situated? None of the participants are affiliated with universities; some receive monthly salaries while others (the colectivas and certain collaborators) lack a system of rules, prescriptions, or rewards to drive (if that is indeed the path) their work. Can it be ascertained that their cultural and epistemic practices are progressing in any direction?

Initially, the project's design emerged from a heuristic that led participants to believe in the potential for progress as a knowledge community. Leveraging their experience as facilitators, they were able to devise strategies to work towards this objective.

The project accepted by CUSP was founded on several justifications. Firstly, there was a recognised need for systematic analysis, reflection, and assessment to gain deeper insights into the transformative influence of the approaches employed, facilitating their potential expansion across various settings. Secondly, it aimed to evaluate the accessibility and influence of cultural interventions with community groups facing heightened vulnerability. Lastly, the project sought to enhance comprehension and utilisation of technology and digital platforms for these interventions, thus contributing to the sustainability of the *colectivas* involved.

This proposal effectively addresses issues related to literacy, intercultural communication, and the promotion of the arts, offering valuable contributions to mitigate conflicts and violence that hinder economic development within communities. Strategies employed to achieve developmental impact encompass consultation and dialogue through a community of inquiry approach, alongside community-based initiatives aimed at enhancing wellbeing, such as sourcing book donations and establishing mobile libraries.

However, in the process of designing such proposals, strong undercurrents of affection and personal interests are at play. This is due to the sense of belonging that develops around a project with implications for enhancing quality of life for a local segment of the Mexican population. This context offers benefits that promote empathy, a willingness to redesign activities, and the flexibility to adjust objectives as the project unfolds within the community. Nevertheless, it can also lead to ambitious goal-setting and internal pressures, driven by the urgency to fulfil contractual obligations that provide support for the project.

The previously mentioned aspect highlighted a consideration that had not been accounted for in the establishment of the knowledge community. It became evident that community involvement was not the sole crucial component of a project of this magnitude. An administrative and fiscal dimension exists that does not always allow for flexibility, demanding justification for expenses. Additionally, the reasoning behind various types of acquisitions or their valuations must also be elucidated. As previously discussed, fiscal policies introduce challenges that necessitate careful navigation. Individuals working in administrative capacities within organisations like IBBY Mexico become part of the framework that incorporates community learning. It was imperative for collaborators in these roles to be briefed about the project, comprehend the situation, and embrace a receptive stance to address inquiries, grievances, and concerns while extending support whenever feasible. This dynamic was prompted by the realisation that the auditing processes of independent cultural collectives adhere to norms that cast the operational environment in a precarious light. These collectives often operate through voluntary efforts or rely on donations and exchanges. Not all participants in this domain can easily furnish invoices to gain access to resources for cultural undertakings. This becomes even more challenging when dealing with modest amounts. Frequently, there is a lack of provision for categories such as salaries or administrative costs, and if such provisions exist, they tend to be restricted, thereby amplifying the fragility of these endeavours. Faced with these challenges, the revisited question from earlier paragraphs is: Can it be asserted that their cultural and epistemic practices are advancing significantly?

The knowledge this project aimed to produce carries implications distinct from those involving testing hypotheses, constructing predictive models, or stipulating standardised methods. The kind of knowledge nurtured in endeavours such as this project likely involves crafting experiences, environments, narratives, and speculations on how to weave practices for improved living (Haraway, 2016; Stengers, 2010). It is evident that communal progress toward an enhanced ecology of communal practices can be achieved (Stengers, 2010). However, it is also clear that contexts increasingly demand more concerted efforts, given that knowledge production often intertwines with cultural practices that can run counter to communal ideals.

Kellogg (2006) and Ziman (1996) have provided an intriguing depiction of the current state of science, characterising it as post-academic – an environment that addresses localised issues, promotes transdisciplinarity, but also cultivates overspecialisation and, paradoxically, the privatisation of knowledge, driven by the multiple funding sources that can shape interests in sharing discoveries. Therefore, the present analysis confines its portrayal to the fact that knowledge production has expanded into other sectors, encompassing the private, civil association, business, and industrial domains. In this instance an advantage arises from the capacity to assemble researchers from universities in Mexico and the UK, along with members of a civil association and community organisers, aiming to initiate a dialogue and discover solutions to local issues. This naturally results in the infusion of diverse perspectives, in contrast to the scenario if the research were solely directed by specialists from a specific region.

However, this situation also presents challenges, including depersonalisation. In a project spanning individuals across the globe, it becomes an intricate challenge for all involved parties to become acquainted and informed about each other's contributions. *Can a knowledge community flourish without its members being cognisant of one another and their individual contributions to the shared objective?* This question is rhetorical, yet it also underscores another concern: overspecialisation. The modes of knowledge production in these frameworks tend to establish roles like principal investigators, co-investigators, technicians, project leaders, evaluation and monitoring coordinators, and more. This dynamic raises concern in community-oriented projects, as these hierarchies frequently hinge on academic credentials, publication records, or personal relationship management.

In the realm of knowledge production, another aspect to consider with regard to role overspecialisation is the connection between specialised roles and their impact on accessing knowledge and decision-making authority. In a knowledge community, individuals occupying certain roles, often chosen based on qualifications aligning with institutional norms, might not share the same experiential landscape. For instance, in the context of this project, the dynamics of relationships were influenced by multiple factors. First, those who managed to meet the fiscal prerequisites gained access to project resources, thereby influencing their engagement. Second, the participation of colectiva members in the study and discussion sessions, spanning a year, was inconsistent owing to various workloads and personal commitments. Consequently, representatives were appointed or rotations were instituted to manage these challenges and ensure that responsibilities were fulfilled effectively.

On the other hand, while emphasising that each colectiva accessed project-managed resources, these funds constituted merely a small portion allocated to material acquisition or activity coordination. The majority of study and discussion endeavours were voluntary in nature, a hallmark of community-driven cultural and knowledge endeavours in Mexico. This voluntariness stems from a collective determination to shoulder responsibilities and allocate roles, although this does not undermine the fact that the environment remains fragile and precarious. In this scenario, something that ought to be supported and necessitates individual input perseveres solely due to unwavering dedication and local consensus.

Fostering creative community engagement for alternative education interventions

In alternative education interventions within communities, unique experiences are often initiated that spark creative processes, provide safe spaces for expression, and introduce teaching methods distinct from formal schooling. However, once an intervention comes to an end, the connection with the community frequently diminishes. This recurring issue of lack of follow-up or ongoing support in community work is rooted in institutional designs limited by time and financial constraints.

Another manifestation of this discontinuity arises when colectivas do not witness the realisation of their collaborative work within their own community. This scenario carries inherent risks,

primarily due to the demands of post-production work and the feasibility of returning to the community. Nevertheless, the significance of this presentation should not be underestimated, as it serves as the culmination of the creative journey behind an audiovisual production.

The majority of art workshops tend to target children, leaving many adults without opportunities to engage in creative spaces. Limited options exist for adults to explore their personal artistic expressions and share what holds significance for them. It becomes apparent that numerous creative processes within daily life deserve acknowledgment, encompassing activities like nurturing, cooking, tending to the land, and household repairs. In the context of Tzinacapan, a plethora of creative activities flourishes. Numerous individuals partake as dancers, in stewardship roles, music performances, crafting arrangements, and garment creation. Of particular note, backstrap weaving and embroidery manifest a profound identity-affirming creativity, as these garments act as repositories of stories and representations.

In the domains of art and academia, diverse categorisations are utilised, stemming from critiques or even the creative processes themselves. These categorisations frequently reflect Western viewpoints, segregating art from craftsmanship or organising expressions according to artistic movements. Additionally, there is often an undue focus on written knowledge, aligning with academic ideals of analysis and outcomes. However, within the lived experiences of numerous creators, the act of creation adheres to its distinct inner logic that circumvents these classifications, even though they may at times impede the creative journey.

In the realm of art and creativity, there exist individuals who craft paintings or music without the formalities of technical training. Remarkably, they are capable of producing exquisite and impactful works, often owing to their role as pioneers of their own artistic logic. Within this collective, engaging in visual arts with both children and individuals who are not exclusively focused on the arts emphasises the importance of nurturing doodles and guiding the exploration of personal styles. The approach involves commencing from doodles rather than relying on templates, tracings, or standardised shapes. This practice not only entails embracing accidental elements and seemingly mismatched components, but also embraces the coexistence of characters shaped by vastly distinct artistic approaches within the same creative endeavour.

It is crucial to clarify that absolute artistic identities are nonexistent. The pervasive influences and biases ingrained in various aspects of life, such as the schematic drawing techniques acquired at a young age during primary school, are impossible to fully deconstruct or unlearn.

To safeguard this collective from being influenced by external commercial film aesthetics or pre-existing sources, they were encouraged to bring textile garments bearing depictions of animals, flowers, and narratives like the planting process. Extracting certain elements from these textiles, with their symbolic significance, served as inspiration for the style of characters and backgrounds in their animated film.

Yet another disparity observed among collective creation groups pertains to the pace of work. The flexibility inherent in facilitating workshops within alternative education spaces necessitates recognising that each workshop constitutes a distinct experience for every participant. Thus, expecting uniform outcomes from all participants is unrealistic. During the workshop conducted at Radio Tsinaka, some adults dedicated considerable effort to completing a background within a single session, while others concentrated on re-translating phrases between Nahuatl and Spanish to craft succinct dialogues.

When overseeing workshops in visual arts, maintaining a focus on community-driven objectives is of utmost importance. Straying from this path can result in experiences being reduced to mere 'labor processes', where central ideas are dictated by workshop facilitators rather than originating from the community. This approach bears colonialist implications, aligning with the theory of the cinematic author, which starkly contrasts with the principles underpinning community-driven creative practices.

In the realm of community cinema, the concept revolves around collective creation, where every voice participates equally, decisions are made through consensus, and the ultimate goal is to

produce audiovisual material that does not mimic external influences. Instead it aims to facilitate the sharing of community concerns, identity, ways of living, and ways of doing. This encompasses reflecting their music, stories, experiences, and grievances. In this context, the role of Taller Sentir Naturaleza is to provide the tools they are familiar with for storytelling and using technical equipment or artistic materials, all while respecting existing local modes of narrative, visual art, and expression in general. This goal may be unattainable, yet it should govern the approach. Considering narrative beyond the formulaic structures of scriptwriting studies is a challenge that fades away when hearing oral traditions in Nahuatl, reminding us of the diversity in storytelling methods.

To achieve the communal construction of safe spaces for expression, horizontal learning dynamics, attentive listening, collaboration with individuals who already possess established community trust, and a flexible and adaptable vision are required. The aspiration is that all participants can draw nourishment from collective knowledge and community experiences, as well as from what the collective prepares and lives throughout the process. An instance is found in Tzinacapan, where such collaborative practices are an integral part of daily life – committee meetings, communal work events, stewardship responsibilities, and cooperative production. As emphasised by Taller Sentir Naturaleza, it is crucial to highlight the connection between belonging, caring for our bodies, and our relationship with the land. As part of their sensitisation efforts, they conducted a mapping and emotion-based exercise. Participants in their workshops shared their needs for and methods of self-care, especially as defenders of the land, requiring spaces for reflection and rest to sustain their efforts. Finding refuge in natural territories to care for ourselves and others remains essential.

Concluding remarks

In the exploration of work contexts where an imbalance within a system encourages knowledge production, a cognitive exercise emerges, aimed at providing space for the individuals steering cultural intervention projects. This contemplative endeavour bears significance, for within work groups or civil associations, the understanding often eludes those involved that they themselves are integral parts of the communities they seek to serve. Those guiding local initiatives frequently find themselves enmeshed within a distinct facet of the very same hermeneutic and testimonial violence.

Navigating this landscape is a delicate balance. On the one hand, it is an intricate challenge to reconcile personal and collective emotions when these must be translated into bureaucratic protocols or harmonised with languages and expressions befitting the formality of public and private institutions. On the other hand, it is a challenge to pause and recognise, both as a collective unit and as individual agents, the subtle manifestations of experienced violence. The cultural work landscape in Mexico is characterised by scarce avenues for adequately remunerated labour, minimal investment, and a reliance on voluntary contributions. This amalgamation embodies both community dedication and ethical considerations intertwined with a sense of resignation: ‘Well, something is better than nothing’.

The identification of specific needs within their respective populations by the collectives mentioned in this document is not a random occurrence. Much of this discernment arises from their direct interactions with the contributing factors, individuals, and root causes of the challenges. The notion of establishing a distance between a body undergoing various forms of violence and the reality that this very body is steeped in an institutional cultural management framework and a knowledge production paradigm that predominantly draws from the assimilation and adoption of academic scientific practices or private industry standards, is inherently implausible.

Prior to the development and execution of a cultural intervention project that seeks to transform conflict situations into secure environments for self-expression, attentive listening, and dialogue, effective communication stands as a primary necessity within the CUSP N + Mexico project team, mirroring its significance in interactions with individuals within the communities of operation.

According to the document ‘Cultural Mediation Strategies in Emergencies: Reading and Writing as Symbolic Refuges Volume 1’ by the CERALC (Regional Centre for the Promotion of Books in Latin America and the Caribbean), the utilisation of cultural intervention founded on metaphorical constructs and intercultural exchanges offers the potential to bridge inequalities, combat discriminatory practices, and counteract xenophobic inclinations. This methodology not only accentuates the cultural facet of migration but also sets the stage for constructive initiatives in coexistence that uphold human rights principles (Arizpe et al., 2022).

The aforementioned propositions hold significance, as these spaces provide platforms to engage in discussions about lived experiences, thereby allowing individuals to vocalise their insecurities and fears. Creating an alternative outlet for navigating adversity, anger, and pain is pivotal to sustaining avenues for play, thought, and creative expression. It is pertinent, however, to underscore that this approach should extend to the working teams endeavouring to organise and drive such metaphorical initiatives. Acknowledging that the individuals involved in a project are indivisible from those for whom communal objectives are sought is crucial. Adopting this perspective in project implementation could potentially reshape work methodologies, influencing the validation of knowledge and its formats or expressive mechanisms. The endeavour to investigate cultural practices and their management for social intervention loses significance if art is not granted the same validation as knowledge found in scientific spheres.

The narratives that mould individuals transcend the narratives consumed through diverse media outlets. The act of narration, storytelling, and comprehension is deeply rooted in the shared experience of coexisting within a given space. Within the communal living environment, references intermingle and flow, forming connections that bind us within a common framework. These references encompass local fauna and flora, trades, and the inhabitants of the space, as well as circulating anecdotes and myths. All of these elements constitute traditions that remain interconnected with the global context we concurrently inhabit. While we, humans, are all products of our localities, we also participate in a global realm governed by established constructs: knowledge, technique, authority, norms, and more. Our local practices stand as a foundation upon which we bestow meaning on the evolving knowledge we acquire and the intricate relationships we cultivate.

When delving into the narratives that mould us, the discourse delves into how even the stories consumed through media outlets experience a profound reassessment. These media sources can function as conduits that bring communities together. For instance, within a single book, a multitude of perspectives and epistemic realms can be accessed by socially engaging with its content through dialogue, testimonies, memories, and other references that are open to emotions and knowledge.

In the exploration of their projects, each collective and the localities in which they were implemented establish an ecosystem of practices, references, and agreements, echoing what Goodman (1978) coined as ‘ways of worldmaking’. This pluralistic approach to knowledge is inherently ‘genuinely radical’, offering a pathway to recognition that a community’s construction of knowledge is not merely an additional rendition of the world, but rather a domain endowed with the complete validity and significance of an epistemic and ontological world. Goodman’s radical pragmatism in acknowledging pluralism is particularly notable as it challenges the narrative of a single correct version of the world, thereby implying a singular accurate mode of understanding and existence. Goodman (1978) expounds:

The world dissolves into its versions, and the construction of these versions doesn’t demand correspondence with an external state of affairs, nor does it happen *ex nihilo*. Versions are built upon preceding versions with varying degrees of initial credibility. (p. 94).

The practices that provide the foundation of knowledge are nurtured by interconnections that genuinely epitomise spaces of existence and comprehension. Nonetheless, the acknowledgment of these epistemic and ontological worlds, as identified thus far by the collective, remains incomplete. Why? Because if the pursuit of a sustainable culture through academic and national interlinkages is

the aim, it necessitates steering clear of perpetuating institutional imbalances. Furthermore, this aspiration will not materialise without the means to effectively communicate to the public the knowledge being generated and the inherent authenticity of these modes of existence and thought.

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