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**DECOLONISATION, INTERCULTURALITY,
AND MULTIPLE EPISTEMOLOGIES: HIWI
PEOPLE IN BOLIVARIAN VENEZUELA**

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WITH HONOURS IN ANTHROPOLOGY (*SUMMA CUM LAUDE*)

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Anthropology**



Plate 1. A mural of Chávez welcomes travellers at the Puerto Ayacucho bus terminal.

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Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university.

To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the dissertation itself.

Statement of the Contribution of Others

My partner Mathew Loftus accompanied me for the entirety of fieldwork as a research assistant. I received an APA scholarship from the Australian Government for the first three and a half years of this project. I am grateful to Deth Hatton and Mat Loftus for proofreading the final draft of this thesis and providing editorial and formatting advice.

Abstract

Under the Bolivarian government, Venezuela has undergone extensive changes in political, economic, and social policies designed to decolonise liberal conceptions of politics and economics to construct a direct democracy and a socially just economy. This project involves the recognition that indigenous peoples, such as the Hiwi people I work with, inhabit an intercultural space and that the State needs to address the inherent pluriethnicity of Venezuelan society. The opening up of a discursive and practical space for the creation of new socio-political imaginaries draws upon indigenous peoples' history of resistance and their diverse forms of political-economic organisation. Simultaneously, the government has committed to the promotion of indigenous self-determination, territorial demarcation, and the preservation of cultural knowledge, medicine, language and social organisation.

My primary aim in this thesis is to provide a detailed ethnographic description of Hiwi people living in several communities in Amazonas State, based on fourteen months of participant observation and informal interviews with participants in Venezuela. Through my ethnographic analysis of the contemporary social reality and epistemology of Hiwi people, I explore the effects, contradictions, and possibilities of the State's indigenous policies. The first three chapters focus on Hiwi forms of political, economic, and social organisation, which are positioned in relation to the State's discourse and practices around indigenous self-determination. Chapters Five to Seven constitute an investigation of Hiwi medical beliefs and practices, convivial morality, and epistemology. These forms of knowledge are grounded in particular assumptions about the world and the fundamental elements of Hiwi thought that radically differ from and

are drawn out through intercultural comparison with dominant Western systems of knowledge. I argue that Hiwi people negotiate plural systems of meaning in their everyday lives, drawing simultaneously on Hiwi symbols, meanings, and traditions, as well as the mainstream currents in Venezuelan society. In this way, my participants maintain their Hiwi identity while managing to survive and thrive in a society based on vastly different principles.

This thesis demonstrates how Hiwi social life is predicated on flexibility, cultural adaptability, autonomy, complementarity, and conviviality, a confluence of principles that I call the paradigm of pluralism and difference. This paradigm allows individuals to select among Hiwi and *criollo* meanings that structure their lifeworld in the twenty-first century. I consider how the Hiwi intercultural reality contains the seeds of a possible decolonisation of Western ways of being and knowing, which may precede a more practical decolonisation of political and economic theories and practices. I conclude that decolonisation and indigenous self-determination requires a radical intercultural exchange in which indigenous voices are heard and their political, economic, and cultural systems are respected and maintained in their own right.

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List of Acronyms

AD	<i>Acción Democrática</i>
	Democratic Action
ALBA-TCP	<i>Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América-Tratado de Comercio de los Pueblos</i>
	Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our America- Peoples' Trade Treaty
CAICET	<i>Centro Amazónico de Investigaciones y Control de Enfermedades Tropicales</i>
	Amazonian Centre for Research and Control of Tropical Diseases
CIV	<i>Confederación Indígena de Venezuela</i>
	Indigenous Confederation of Venezuela
COIBA	<i>Confederación de Indígenas Bolivariana de Amazonas</i>
	Bolivarian Indigenous Confederation of Amazonas
CNE	<i>Consejo Nacional Electoral</i>
	National Electoral Council
CODESUR	<i>Comisión para el Desarrollo del Sur</i>
	Southern Development Commission
CONAIE	<i>Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador</i>
	Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador

CONFENAIE	<i>Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígena de Amazonia Ecuatoriana</i>
	Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuadorian Amazonia
CONIVE	<i>Consejo Nacional Indio de Venezuela</i>
	National Indian Council of Venezuela
COPEI	<i>Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente</i>
	Committee for Independent Electoral Political Organisation
CRBV	<i>Constitución de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela</i>
	Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela
CST	<i>Consejos Socialistas de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras</i>
	Socialist Workers' Councils
ECUARUNARI	<i>Confederación de Pueblos de la Nacionalidad Kichwa de Ecuador</i>
	Confederation of Peoples of Kichwa Nationality of Ecuador
FIEB	<i>Federación de Indígenas de Estado Bolívar</i>
	Indigenous Federation of Bolívar State
FONDEN	<i>El Fondo Nacional para el Desarrollo Nacional</i>
	National Development Fund
FTAA	Free Trade Area of the Americas
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IVIC	<i>Instituto Venezolano de Investigaciones Científicas</i>
	Venezuelan Institute of Scientific Research

LOPCI	<i>Ley Organica de Pueblos y Comunidades Indígenas</i>
	Organic Law of Indigenous Peoples and Communities
MAQL	<i>Movimiento Armado Quintín Lames</i>
	Armed Movement Quintín Lames (Colombia)
MAS	<i>Movimiento al Socialismo</i> (Ecuador)
	Movement towards Socialism
MERCOSUR	<i>Mercado Común del Sur</i>
	Common Market of the South
MINPI	<i>Ministerio del Poder Popular para los Pueblos Indígenas</i>
	Ministry of Popular Power for Indigenous Peoples
MUD	<i>Mesa de la Unidad Democrática</i>
	Democratic Unity Roundtable
MVR	<i>Movimiento Quinta (V) República</i>
	Fifth Republic Movement
NGP	<i>Nueva Geometría del Poder</i>
	New Geometry of Power
NTM	<i>Misión Nuevas Tribus</i>
	New Tribes Mission
OPEC	<i>Organización de Países Exportadores de Petróleo</i>
	Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries

ORPIA	<i>Organización Regional de Pueblos Indígenas de Amazonas</i>
	Regional Organisation of Indigenous Peoples of Amazonas
PDVSA	<i>Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A.</i>
	Petroleum of Venezuela, S.A.
PPT	<i>Patria Para Todos</i>
	Fatherland for All
PSUV	<i>Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela</i>
	United Socialist Party of Venezuela
SPE	<i>Empresas de Producción Social</i>
	Social Production Enterprises
UIV	<i>Universidad Indígena de Venezuela</i>
	Indigenous University of Venezuela
UNASUR	<i>Unión de Naciones Suramericanas</i>
	Union of South American Nations

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Plate 2. Children play around a statue of an indigenous man using a blowgun in Puerto Ayacucho.

1. Introduction: Hiwi People, Amazonas, and Intercultural Worlds

This thesis is an ethnographic exploration of the contemporary lifeworld of Hiwi people living in Amazonas State, Venezuela.¹ I argue that everyday life for Hiwi people consists of multiple cultural and epistemological value systems, due to five centuries of Western imperialism. Hiwi people navigate an intercultural world characterised by plural meaning systems within each of the many facets of daily life: politics, economics, medicine, epistemology, and morality. In this project, my primary aim is to investigate the interculturality inherent to Hiwi social reality and how this opens up possibilities for the decolonisation of political-economic and epistemological spheres, within the context of the Bolivarian government's project of Twenty-First Century Socialism and participatory democracy. More specifically, I explore how interculturality is manifested for and negotiated by Hiwi people. What are its roots in Western colonialism and unequal power relations? How do Hiwi people value their own practices and knowledges alongside those derived from Western Europe? Which aspects of a Hiwi cultural complex allow for flexibility, adaptability, and complementarity among plural political-economies and epistemologies within an intercultural world? And finally, what does a Hiwi intercultural world represent for the possibility of decolonial society, culture, and knowledge?

¹ In this thesis, States as federal administrative entities will be capitalised in order to distinguish these units from the general concept of 'state' as a collection of social institutions that form a sovereign governing body that exerts power over a particular territory and citizenship. I note that this definition has been complicated by the blurring of boundaries due to globalisation and the rise of quasi-state institutions (see Sharma and Gupta, 2006).

Since the election of Hugo Frias Chávez in 1998, the Venezuelan State has undergone a profound process of transformation known as the Bolivarian Revolution. *Chavista* government officials and politicians have engaged with the popular classes in an effort to construct a direct democracy, social economy, and pluriethnic society. The opening up of this discursive space has allowed indigenous organisations and supporters of Bolivarianism to shape the new political imaginary that is emerging. State officials and workers have drawn on indigenous imagery to construct a distinctly Latin American form of political, economic, and social organisation. A true intercultural dialogue seems possible. But what would this exchange look like? How far is the Venezuelan State able to disentangle itself from its Western assumptions and open itself to difference? And how can we decolonise our epistemological systems by opening them up to indigenous knowledges?

The violent history of colonisation has profoundly shaped the contemporary social reality of indigenous peoples in Latin America who have been forcefully assimilated into capitalism, nation-state politics, Christian evangelism, biomedical and scientific epistemologies. At the same time, the dominance of white Euro-Americans in the global political-economy and epistemology has marginalised the histories and cultures of indigenous peoples, reducing them to racist stereotypes. This has actively suppressed the practice of indigenous culture, medicine, political-economy, language, and even endangered their physical survival. Indigenous peoples are far from homogenous and have used diverse techniques to adapt to their different social, economic, and political

circumstances. In this thesis, I consider the lifeworld of Hiwi people focusing on two communities along the National Highway in Amazonas State.

Hiwi individuals maintain their indigenous identity and navigate multiple realities that are produced by engaging with the colonial structures that continue to regulate their lives. My main participants are healers and community leaders who retain Hiwi concepts about bodies, health, social relations, political-economic activities, and the environment, while actively participating with capitalism, Venezuelan politics and economics, and Western epistemologies. Although Western understandings of the world are hegemonic, these meanings are not simply imposed on indigenous and minority groups. Rather, I show how Hiwi individuals actively select among and reject aspects of Venezuelan *criollo* culture that they find meaningful according to their own cultural logics. Indigenous individuals ground themselves in traditional understandings of social life and the world, even if these have been altered by the forces of colonisation.

Indigenous experiences of and strategies for engaging with the multitude of new meanings that permeate their lives can only be explored ethnographically, while bearing in mind individuals' self-reflexive interpretations of their thoughts and actions. Indigenous actors negotiate the two worlds of being and knowing with which they are confronted and which involves a huge imbalance of power. Instead of being overwhelmed by the structural inequalities that disadvantage indigenous interpretations they often adapt Western meanings to their own ends, supporting and maintaining their culture through use of these new concepts. Rather than a unidirectional loss of culture, indigenous ways of being are re-evaluated and promoted.

This introduction presents a general description of Amazonas State and a brief ethnographic sketch of Hiwi people based on anthropological literature. I give an account of entering my field site, making the acquaintance of my main participants, Pedro and Clemente, and beginning to explore their intercultural lifeworlds. This brings me to a discussion of the literature around interculturality and decolonisation of political-economies, epistemologies, and the social sciences. My analysis of Hiwi people and intercultural spaces constitutes a unique ethnographic and theoretical contribution to this burgeoning literature and its political momentum. In the final section, I give an outline of each chapter and relate them to my main research question: What makes the Hiwi lifeworld an intercultural one and what are the implications of this for decolonising societies and knowledges?

1.1. Amazonas State and Hiwi People



Figure 1. Map of political-territorial divisions of Amazonas (Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda: Resultados por Entidad Federal y Municipio del Estado Amazonas, 2011:6).

Amazonas State is the southernmost political division of Venezuela and one of the twenty-three states into which Venezuela is divided. It is part of the Guayana geographical region and was a federal territory from 1864 until 1994, when it officially became a federal state. Amazonas is divided into seven municipalities, including Alto Orinoco, Atabapo, Atures, Autana, Manapiare, Maroa, and Rio Negro. It has a surface area of 177.617 Km², which represents 19% of the total national area, but has the smallest population of any state and a very low population density (Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda: Resultados por Entidad Federal y Municipio del Estado Amazonas, 2011:7). The 2011 National Venezuelan Census (Resultados Básicos de

Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda, 2011) lists the entire population of Amazonas as 146,480, double the figure recorded by the 2001 census, with 70% of the population living in the municipality of Atures, where the state capital, Puerto Ayacucho, is located. Amazonas State is home to approximately 27 distinct indigenous ethnic groups and has the largest percentage of indigenous population of any state. In 2011, self-declared indigenous persons represented 2.7% of Venezuela's national population and 52.1% of the population of Amazonas State (Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda: Empadronamiento de la Población Indígena, 2011:17). The national indigenous population appears to have grown substantially in recent decades, from 140,040 in 1982 to 725,128 in 2011 (Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda: Empadronamiento de la Población Indígena, 2011:12). This population increase may be attributed to changes in the state's definition of 'indigenous' people and the political revalorisation of indigeneity under the Bolivarian government.

The 2011 census defines as indigenous "any person born in the national territory who at the time of the census declares belonging to an Indigenous People", even though it supports the criteria of the 1999 Constitution that a person be of indigenous descent and including those born in Venezuela who declare to belong to an indigenous group from another Latin American nation (Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda: Empadronamiento de la Población Indígena, 2011:6). The 2011 census shows that the indigenous population has grown substantially over time, as recorded by fourteen official censuses over more than a century. The 2011 census suggests that differences in indigenous population size are partly due to historical differences in concepts and definitions of indigenous identity, the formulation of questions of ethnic identity, the instruments used for electoral registration, the geographical and temporal coverage of

past censuses and electoral registration (Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda: Empadronamiento de la Población Indígena, 2011:13). As Angosto Ferrández (2012:223) notes, the category of indigenous in censuses has changed over the last century; until 2001 indigenous populations were only recorded in certain regions, with those residing in urban or most rural areas regarded by state officials as less authentic. The state's conception of who qualifies as indigenous is founded on a century-old distinction between civilised and integrated indigenous peoples, and uncivilised and non-integrated indigenous peoples (Angosto Ferrández, 2012:224). This concept evolved into the current division between traditional and non-traditional indigenous peoples, although value is now ascribed to cultural traditions (Angosto Ferrández, 2012:227). The census itself acknowledges that the important role of the processes of "ethnic shame and revitalisation" that become influential at different historical moments (Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda: Empadronamiento de la Población Indígena, 2011:13). Although the concept of indigeneity is still contested by indigenous organisations and the state, it appears, as Angosto Ferrández (2012) explains, that the recent growth in indigenous population to the widening of the state's concept of 'indigenous' to apply to the entire national territory, including urban areas, and allowing self-adscription during a time of indigenous political and cultural revitalisation.

Amazonas is bordered in the north by Bolívar State, in the south by Brazil, in the west by Colombia, and in the east by Brazil and Bolívar State. Amazonas is a hugely variable geographical region, extending from 500 to 2700 metres above sea level and containing dense tropical forests, numerous large rivers, mountains and savannahs. It contains part of the drainage basin of the Orinoco River, as well as important tributaries such as the Ventuari and Negro Rivers, and the western end of the Guiana Highlands. The average

daily temperature varies between 22-35°C, with an average of approximately 26°C and a seasonal variation of only 2-3°C (Estadísticos Básicos Temperaturas y Humedades Relativas Máximas y Mínimas Medias; see also Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda: Resultados por Entidad Federal y Municipio del Estado Amazonas, 2011:8). Summer (*verano*) runs roughly from March to October, winter (*invierno*) runs roughly from November to February, and the rainy season lasts from May to October, although rain is also common at other times.

The economy of Amazonas State is largely based on the exploitation of its forests and natural resources, such as gold, oil, and coltan. The Orinoco Petroleum Belt (*Faja Petrolífera del Orinoco*) at the southern end of the eastern Orinoco River basin contains the world's largest crude oil reserves and the potential wealth of these subsoil resources shape the political and social imaginaries of all Venezuelan citizens (Coronil, 1997). During fieldwork, I heard many rumours of illegal mining and logging in Amazonas, undertaken by immigrants from Colombia and Brazil, hired indigenous workers, and even members of the National Guard. Given its proximity to the Colombian and Brazilian borders, I observed during fieldwork that smuggling is also a common feature of Amazonas' economy: cheap petroleum is taken across the Orinoco River from Venezuela into Colombia, while cheap food, clothing, and other goods are brought across in the other direction. The cooperation of the National Guard is often indispensable to these illicit business ventures and bribery is ubiquitous.

Tourism is also a significant part of the economy (Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda: Resultados por Entidad Federal y Municipio del Estado Amazonas, 2011:8);

the natural beauty of the ‘Land of Magic’ (*Tierra Mágica* in Spanish) draws a large number of Venezuelan tourists, but international tourism is hampered by limited tourist infrastructure, high crime rates, and military-bureaucratic restrictions on travel. The Tourism Office just outside of Puerto Ayacucho Airport is open at various and seemingly irregular hours. On one visit, the staff seemed surprised and slightly bewildered to have international visitors. Eventually, informational pamphlets advertising Amazonas’ main attractions were forthcoming. These include locations in and around Puerto Ayacucho such as, la Casa de Piedra, el Tobogán de la Selva, el Mirador, Balnearios de Pozo Azul y Pozo Cristal, and various indigenous communities offering forest hikes and artisanal craftwork. There are also limited online resources for tourists. For example, an educational government website, Red Escolar Nacional (RENa, n.d.), lists the community of Santo Rosario de Agua Linda, where I worked, as a site of interest for tourists, advertising hikes into the mountains and a bathing area with a small slide or *tobogán* (in Spanish). As I discovered during various trips to indigenous communities, it is quite common for local people to offer—for a negotiable fee—to guide tourists on walks into the forest and to attractive swimming holes. These impromptu tourist services are advertised largely by word of mouth, as with many things in Amazonas.

The State of Amazonas provides the geographical and political background for this thesis and is home to my primary participants, Pedro and Clemente, who belong to the Hiwi ethnic group. Hiwi people, also known commonly as Guahibo people, constitute the largest percentage (26%) of the indigenous population of Amazonas, but only 3.5% of the national indigenous population of Venezuela (Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda: Resultados Primeros de Población Indígena, 2011:12, 10). In 2011, the Hiwi

population of Venezuela reached 23,953 individuals (Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda: Empadronamiento de la Población Indígena, 2011:30), with the majority of these persons living in Amazonas (20,020 individuals), and other substantial populations in the neighbouring States of Apure and Bolívar, where they make up 12% and 4% of the indigenous population respectively (Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda: Resultados Primeros de Población Indígena, 2011:20, 24; Población Indígena por Sexo, según Entidad Federal y Pueblo Indígena, 2011).² Hiwi people also live in Colombia, with relatively large populations located in the departments of Casanare, Meta, Vichada, Arauca, Guaviare, and Guainia.³ Indeed, my main participants, Pedro and Clemente, both emigrated from Colombia in the 1980s and have extensive familial ties to the Meta and Vichada departments. In Colombia, Hiwi people are more commonly known as Sicuani or Sikvani people, who number approximately 22,134 individuals (Ossa, 2011). Some linguists argue that Sikvani people represent a linguistic sub-group of the Hiwi language, along with Cuiba and Guayabero languages (Aikhenvald, 2012:52; Kondo, 1982:39).⁴ Others have posited that Cuiba is a term

² Hiwi people may also be known in the historical literature as Guahibo, Guajibo, Wahibo, Goahibo, Goahiva, Guaigua, Chiricoa, and Guayba people.

³ My attempts to access Colombian census data specific to Hiwi populations in these departments have been fruitless, as no specific data concerning indigenous ethnic groups and their location appears to have been recorded in the 2005 census.

⁴ The earlier view that Guahibo/Hiwi language belonged to the Arawak linguistic family has been largely discounted and any similarities have been ascribed to lexical borrowing rather than linguistic genealogy (Queixalós, 1993). Hiwi/Guahibo languages are now largely regarded as constituting a distinct linguistic family (Aikhenvald, 2012). It has also been suggested, by Jorge Mosonyi (1975), that Guahibo languages are not a linguistic family at all, but rather a single language possessing numerous dialects (Kondo, 1982:39).

usually used by outsiders to refer to the more nomadic groups of Hiwi people, while Guahibo has been applied to more sedentary populations (Fabre, 2005). At the very least, there is a significant overlap between these linguistic variants and ethnic distinctions between these groups do not seem to be clear or significant to Hiwi people themselves. Indeed, older people may call themselves Guahibo or Cuiba, although these terms are now widely considered derogatory due to the historical context of colonisation and racial discrimination in which they were used by *criollo* colonists and authorities. Hiwi or *Jivi* (as written in Spanish) is the preferred contemporary term. It is an auto-denomination in Hiwi language that means ‘people’ (Kondo, 1973:195). This term is used most frequently by my participants to refer to themselves, and in documents produced by the Bolivarian government.

Although most Hiwi people were historically nomadic or semi-nomadic (Wilbert, 1994:164), my participants and their families live in sedentary communities of about 12-25 houses. However, the characteristic mobility of Hiwi people may be seen in recent migrations across the border from Colombia. Indeed, my main participants migrated to Amazonas from Colombia in the 1980s; Pedro left Colombia with his young wife in order to found a new community away from cattle-ranchers, and Clemente left his home to escape a painful romantic rejection and start a new life. The high mobility of Hiwi people during the period of colonisation may account for their ability to survive and even thrive under these harsh conditions.⁵ Morey and Morey (1973; see also Rivero, 1883:21) argue that Hiwi people survived colonisation in the *llanos* area by living in

⁵ As Whitehead notes, uneven rates of survival for indigenous groups in Latin America reveal the often unacknowledged importance of indigenous agency within the historical process of colonisation (1993:286).

small nomadic groups of hunter-gatherers on less productive savannah and smaller streams, thus avoiding contact with colonists and missionaries. By contrast, the other major ethnic group in this region, the Achagua people, who no longer exist, lived in sedentary villages along bigger rivers, and thus were more exposed to military expeditions that consumed local food supplies and enslaved local populations, missionaries, and epidemics of introduced diseases (Morey and Morey, 1973:235). The resulting population loss opened up huge tracts of land in the Orinoco basin; Hiwi people moved onto lands vacated by the dwindling Achagua and probably absorbed the remnants of this people, placing them in a more accessible location for missionaries. Population loss also disrupted the elaborate pre-Columbian economic and political networks among indigenous peoples, forcing them into closer contact with Western markets and missions (Mansutti Rodríguez, 1988:10; Whitehead, 1993:297). By the late 18th century, Hiwi people began to appear more frequent close to missions and along the Orinoco River; they lived in the towns of La Urbana, San Borja, and Atures, at which point, “rebellious Guahibos began to submit to the new social model” (Mansutti Rodríguez, 1988:11). During the 18th and 19th centuries, increasing indigenous dependence on Western tools and manufactured goods facilitated the incorporation of indigenous peoples into the capitalist economic system. Business owners used a system of debt peonage “closely resembling chattel slavery” (Linder, 1999:192) where goods were given to indigenous workers on credit at exorbitant prices which workers could never fully pay off.

By the late 19th century, Hiwi people controlled large areas of land and became more sedentary; some groups had settled on the banks of formerly Achagua controlled rivers and practised agriculture (Morey and Morey, 1973:239). Kondo (2002) makes a

convincing argument against the formerly accepted view of the Hiwi people as a nomadic and purely hunter-gatherer society who have recently learnt agricultural techniques, arguing instead that this form of mobile, non-intensive agriculture is perfectly adapted to the environmental conditions in which they live. Indeed, it is possible that Hiwi people adopted a more nomadic lifestyle as part of a strategy to avoid colonial encroachment.⁶ This interpretation accords with Whitehead's (1993:298) assertion that political power in Amerindian societies is always grounded in the twin principles of group permeability and an innovative adaptativeness in the face of shifting and evolving historical processes. In the 19th Century, Hiwi people were well established in the *llanos*, where they often harassed colonists travelling through their territory and, for this reason, were often persecuted by the state (Morey and Morey, 1973:238). Massacres and violence against indigenous peoples in the region continued into the 20th century, compounded by the penetration of cattle-ranchers into the area and the Colombian *violencia* of the 1940s. As late as 1970, a group of Cuiba people, who speak a language closely related to Hiwi, were killed by cattle-ranchers in Planas in the Department of Meta, Colombia (Sosa, 2000:58). These dangers may have impelled many Hiwi people to move from the *llanos* of Colombia, across the Orinoco River, and onto the less populated and developed lands of Amazonas State, Venezuela.

Early mentions of Hiwi people appear in the accounts of Catholic missionaries, including Gumilla (1745), Gilij ([1780-1784] 1965), Rivero (1883), Marcano (1890, 1891), and early explorers and natural scientists, such as von Humboldt ([1814-1825]

⁶ As Whitehead notes, it is ethnocentric to assume contemporary Amerindian's way of life has remained unchanged and unaffected by historical processes for centuries (Whitehead, 1993:292).

1995:223-225) and Spruce ([1908] 1970:423-428). Many linguists and linguistic anthropologists have documented Hiwi languages and their relationships with other Amerindian languages from the mid-twentieth century to the present, including Paul Rivet (1948), Riena Kondo and Victor Kondo (1967, 1972; 1975; 1976; 1977; 1980, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985b, 1985c, 1985a, 1985d), Robert Morey (1969), Lázaro Herrera and Fabicia Herrera (1979), Francisco Queixalós (1990), Beatriz Guevara and Guillermo Guevara (2000), Alain Fabre (2005), and Miguel Meléndez Lozano (2014). Anthropologists have studied their material culture and economic activities, such as Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff (1944), Paul Kirchhoff (1948), Johannes Wilbert (1963), Riena Kondo (1973), and Marcelino Sosa, a Hiwi man and published author from Colombia (2000). Others have studied Hiwi kinship terminology, such as William Merrifield and Riena Kondo (1985), Robert Morey and Nancy Morey (1974), and Francisco Quiexalós (1980). Many works by anthropologists and missionaries describe Hiwi social organisation, such as Johannes Wilbert (1957), and Robert Morey, Nancy Morey and Donald Metzger (1973), as well as the impact of colonisation and missionisation on Hiwi people, including work by J. Rivero (1883), Gaspar Marcano (1890, 1891), the Moreys (1970; 1973; 1976; 1979), and María Romero Moreno (1980).

Other works by anthropologists describe Hiwi mythology and cosmovision, such as Kondo (1974), Vargas (1974), Morey (1971), Perez (1993) and Guevara (1997). Botanists as well as ecological and medical anthropologists have studied Hiwi botanical knowledge and shamanism, including Spruce ([1908] 1970), Zethelius and Balick (1982), Balick (1979), Lee and Balick (2002), Lucena Salmoral (1970-1971), Rivas (1997), and Rivas and Perrera (1997). Medical scientists and demographers have studied Hiwi mortality and nutrition, such as Hurtado and Hill (1990), Gurven, Hill,

Kaplan, and Lyles (2000), Hill, Hurtado, and Walker (2007). The diversity of this literature speaks to the multifaceted and complex nature of Hiwi life, where every aspect is open to intercultural dialectic with the dominant *criollo* (settler) culture. In addition to this literature, there are several thorough ethnographic monographs by Morey and Metzger (1974), Coppens (1975), and Conaway (1976), which provide a useful historical comparison for my own ethnographic work. I have encountered few recent ethnographic studies of Hiwi people, a lacuna that my thesis addresses by presenting the contemporary life of Hiwi people, who maintain their indigenous identity and navigate the broader currents of Venezuelan society.

1.2. Finding my Field Site: Methodology between the Town and the Forest

After several months spent travelling across Venezuela and Amazonas State and visiting indigenous communities, my partner and I heard from of two Hiwi shamans, important men in the wider Hiwi community and we decided to travel to meet them. Both men live in communities on the National Highway, Santo Rosario and Shalom, which would become the foci of my fieldwork. My partner, who acted as my research assistant, and I met both of these community leaders through word of mouth. Both men are well-respected healers, who are fluent in both Spanish and Hiwi languages. For this reason, I conducted interviews and participant-observation in Spanish, which I speak fairly fluently.⁷ In June 2011, we visited the community of Shalom near Puerto Ayacucho, as we had been informed by many Hiwi people in other communities that a shaman lived

⁷ Hiwi words will be distinguished from Spanish words in the text of this thesis.

here. This community is located on the National Highway north of Puerto Ayacucho, in close proximity to several other Hiwi communities, Piaroa communities, and *criollo* ranches (*fincas*). At the time, the houses were constructed from wooden planks and corrugated metal sheet roofing, usually with a small patio for hammocks and chairs.⁸ In general, families relax outside during the heat of midday and early afternoon, sometimes working on artisanal crafts or grating manioc while chatting amiably with relatives and visitors.



Plate 3. A typical house in Shalom, circa 2011.

We first arrive at Señor Clemente's house on an afternoon in June 2011 and introduce ourselves. He invites us to sit on his packed dirt patio, on plastic chairs that his children

⁸ The community of Shalom replaced these houses with government funded housing by the time of my second fieldtrip in March 2013.

fetch for us. We talk about the community, Hiwi customs, and shamanism. Clemente tells me that my name, Emma, resembles a word in Hiwi language that denotes a light, nutritive rain that is good for crops. He laughs as he tells me this; it seems to be a good sign and we will develop a rapport over the next months. Shalom was founded 2001 by Clemente's immediate family and membership is made up of his consanguinal and affinal relatives. Clemente learned his healing prayers (*oraciones*, Spanish) from his grandfather and father, despite the influence of Evangelicals who discouraged Hiwi people from smoking or consuming hallucinogens. He shows us an exercise book of his prayers, but he says his children show little interest in learning to be a healer. After an hour or so of chatting, we exchange mobile phone numbers and take our leave. This would prove to be the first of many conversations we would have on Clemente's peaceful patio and in the shade of a nearby stand of trees.



Plate 4. Señor Clemente with his maraca and bark-cloth cap, outside his house in 2011.

I hear about my second main participant, Don Pedro, from a Colombian man named Richard, who offers us a lift into town on the back of his ute. He tells us he consulted Pedro on behalf of his nephew who suffered from seizures and whose condition subsequently improved greatly. We take a taxi to the community, about one hour outside of Puerto Ayacucho along the National Highway (*Carretera Nacional*, Spanish). Twenty to thirty houses stretch along the access road which ends at the river known as Agua Linda. Some are built along traditional lines out of wood with moriche

palm-thatched roofs; others are the ubiquitous concrete houses with zinc roofs constructed as part of a government housing project, or some mixture of manufactured and natural materials. During the day, concrete houses are uncomfortably hot owing to the limited number and size of windows. Most families work and cook under the shade of palm thatched patios surrounded by papaya and mango trees, while chickens and dogs scratch among the leaves and fallen fruit.

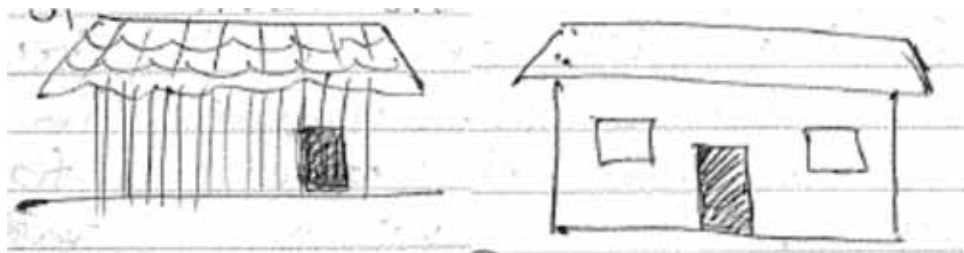


Figure 2. Author's drawings of Santo Rosario houses, from fieldnotes.

Some young boys point us in the direction of Don Pedro's house, a large concrete house painted green with a big concrete patio. Pedro is sitting down at the table, taking a break from work during the heat of the early afternoon. Some young children are playing in the shade of the fruit trees planted around the houses. We introduce ourselves and he invites us in. As we begin to talk about Hiwi shamanism, Pedro asks his teenaged daughter to bring us cups and a medicinal wine made from *manaca* fruit. He is friendly, extremely hospitable and, as we would soon find out, a gregarious and enthusiastic conversationalist. After speaking for an hour we take our leave, promising to return soon and take advantage of his offer to stay in the community's tourist *posada*.



Plate 5. Don Pedro in his backyard.

I became aware of the dynamics of Hiwi life through informal interviews and participant observation, although the full significance of these themes emerged during personal reflection and supervisory meetings following my return to Australia in 2012. As Kapferer posits, fieldwork requires a reflexivity of consciousness, it is a “critical deconstructive act regarding the processes whereby human beings construct or form their realities” (2007:84). The demands of critical reflexivity necessitated a consideration of my position in the field and how I consolidated my relationships with a

vastly different social reality. My presence as foreign researcher made some people uncomfortable and wary, possibly due to the negative view of *gringos* adopted by the Bolivarian government, while others welcomed the opportunity to converse with travellers from distant and intriguing lands who practise different customs. We spoke often to interested parties about Australian flora and fauna, the landscape and its peoples, often using several photography books we had brought to show people our country, friends, and lives in Australia. This helped to contextualise us as persons and was often accompanied everyone by questions about Australian animals they had viewed on the popular National Geographic Channel via satellite TV.

Over the course of fieldwork, we primarily lived in a posada in Puerto Ayacucho, visiting communities for the day or spending the week in Santo Rosario, either staying at the tourist posada or in the spare room of Pedro's family home. We visited the communities frequently, every couple of weeks over the course of fieldwork. We spent the majority of our time staying in Santo Rosario. My partner and I contributed to the household by cooking food we brought from town, providing cash and skills, such as teaching an impromptu English lesson or diagnosing computer problems. Pedro guided us on walks into the forest and to the granite mountains where he taught me the names and uses of various plants and revealed to me an immense ancient rock painting (*pintura rupestre*) of unknown origin that predate the community. On warm afternoons, we would visit with Pedro's family, and other members of the community. We passed the time sitting in the shade of our friend's patios, sharing coffee or cigarettes, discussing the activities of the day and the political developments on the national stage. Evenings were similarly passed in conversation, with Pedro and Hilda sometimes arriving at the posada to chat, or in viewing the news or a telenovela. Hiwi people come

and go as they please; autonomous individuals drifting between the houses of relatives and friends. These casual conversations reflect the slow pace of life in the communities and the intimate warmth of the social ties that structure the Hiwi world.



Plate 6. The author at the rock paintings; only an hour's drive from Puerto Ayacucho, forest encloses the community of Santo Rosario (photo by Daniela Vargas).

My relationship with Clemente developed more slowly, because he was wary of outsider's perceptions of shamanism given the Evangelical missionaries reputation for derogatory attitudes to these practices. Over the course of several months, we arranged visits with Clemente, bringing gifts of cigarettes, a machete, and clothing, and discussing the less sensitive areas of the Hiwi lifeworld. Finally, we convinced him of our good intentions in conducting this research and negotiated a fair price to

compensate him for his time and expertise in issues of healing and spirituality. Clemente agreed to allow us to observe a healing ritual and answer questions about his work. Following this enlightening encounter, we accompanied him into Puerto Ayacucho by taxi, so he could file documents with the government. This episode brought home to me the intercultural world in which Hiwi people make their lives. The interculturality of contemporary Venezuela was confirmed for me during encounters with Hiwi people living in Puerto Ayacucho, visiting to access social services and government payments, or working as evangelical missionaries or in the National Guard. My Hiwi participants are related by blood and marriage to members of nearby communities where the majority of the population belong to Hiwi and Piaroa peoples. for example, Pedro's son-in-law Miguel is from the community of Coromoto, south of Puerto Ayacucho. These connections form a network of Hiwi sociality that encompasses the community, surrounding communities, the town of Puerto Ayacucho, and stretch into the national territory of Colombia.



Figure 3. Map of indigenous communities surrounding Shalom and Santo Rosario (Google Earth, 2013).

As the above map shows, the Hiwi communities of Shalom and Santo Rosario are nestled among small farms and other, primarily Piaroa and Hiwi, indigenous communities. The National Highway cuts through this agricultural region, bounded on the west by the Orinoco River and on the east by forests and mountains. Coarse dirt roads connect the more distant communities to the highway and Puerto Ayacucho.

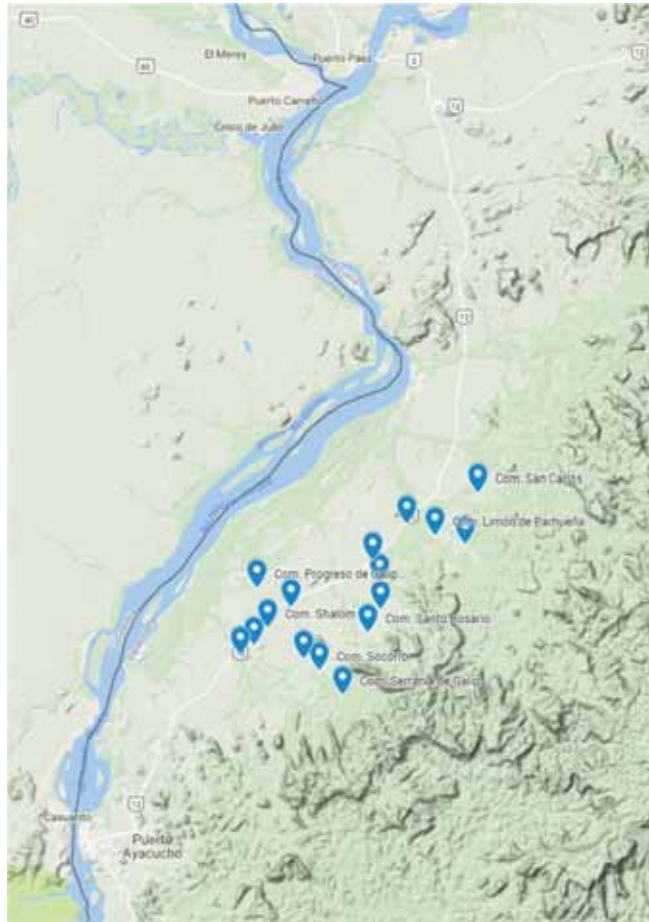


Figure 4. Map of surrounding indigenous communities in relation to Puerto Ayacucho and Puerto Paez (Google Earth, 2013).

In talking to my participants, I was engaged in comprehending the position of Hiwi people in twenty-first century Bolivarian Venezuela. I was primarily interested in the views of my main participants, as respected healers and leaders of their respective communities. As specialists in the workings of Hiwi life, these men's perspectives are sophisticated and informed by the principles of Hiwi shamanism that permeates daily life. They are uniquely positioned to comment on their experiences and interpretations of the intercultural world that they inhabit. In this thesis, I draw out certain themes that were illuminated to me during the course of my many conversations and interactions

with these leaders in an attempt to illustrate the shifting terrain of this particular moment in history. As Comaroff and Comaroff (1992) explain, ethnography is more than a misguided attempt at a verbatim translation. Rather, it is a “historically situated mode of understanding historically situated contexts, each with its own, perhaps radically different, kinds of subjects and subjectivities, objects and objectives” (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992:9-10). To explore the Hiwi lifeworld as it is constantly being socio-historically constituted requires a methodological approach based on informal interviews, which are open enough to allow the conversation to wander across topics of interest to my participants. Clemente and Pedro represent Hiwi subjects with the power to define their cultural world and share with me their experiences as I participate with them in the ebbs and flows of daily life. As Comaroff and Comaroff (1992:8) note, participant-observation reflects the notion that knowledge can never be separated from knower. Along with these men, I am also constituted as a subject and object for them during our ethnographic encounter. Interestingly, I found that this principle also underpins Hiwi ways of seeing and knowing the world, where knowledge is innate, embodied, and dependent on one’s experiences. In light of this, I am only able to position myself as I was perceived: an Australian anthropologist from a middle-class English-speaking background. As such, I undoubtedly committed many *faux pas* in the course of fieldwork, but these, like my language errors, were accepted as I attempted to learn the system of meanings that constitute Hiwi sociality and epistemology. Ultimately, despite my position as Western researcher, I shared something of the same world as my Hiwi participants, with its multiple layers of colonial history, missionaries, the state and diverse indigenous peoples.

Although ethnography has long been associated with imperialism and colonisation, the study of these socio-historically constituted worlds of meaning may also service the growing demands of decolonisation and interculturality. My thesis is an attempt to turn ethnography to this purpose, drawing out the principles that allow for Hiwi mobility and flexibility in facing the intercultural world of Bolivarian Venezuela. It often struck me that the fluidity of Hiwi notions of socio-political organisation, plurality, and individual autonomy provide a template for understanding the others' viewpoints, including my own, as being constituted in different contexts. As Jackson (2010) elaborates, the point of ethnography is not merely to document the Other or even critique society. Rather, its “warrant and worth lie in its power to describe in depth and detail the dynamics of inter-subjective life under a variety of cultural conditions in the hope that one may thereby be led to an understanding of how those rare moments of erasure and effacement occur when self and other are constituted in mutuality and acceptance rather than violence and contempt” (Jackson, 2010:141). In this thesis, I have attempted to discern these moments of mutuality and the cultural framework that provides Hiwi people with a means of navigating the various cultural complexities of Venezuela, revealing the truth of anthropology ultimate postulate: difference is fundamental and even beneficial to human experience. As Jackson eloquently puts it, anthropology reveals that “plurality is not inimical but necessary to our integrity, so inspiring us to accept and celebrate the manifold and contradictory character of existence in the knowledge that any one person embodies the potential to be any other” (Jackson, 2010:141). This lesson was driven home for me during conversations with Clemente and Pedro, who often act as intermediaries between vastly different cultural domains for their families and communities.

Of the two communities, Santo Rosario is the older, founded by Pedro and his wife Hilda in the late 1980s after moving from Colombia. It has a primary school, staffed by a community member who teaches in Hiwi and Spanish, and an evangelical Protestant church where prayer meetings are held. *Evangélicos*, mainly Pentecostals, have increased in number in Venezuela since the 1980s, with these churches organising while the national political and economic order declined (Gacksetter Nichols and Morse, 2010:181). Although some Protestant groups have been accused of illegal entry and mining (Chagnon, 2013:242), the renovation of the church in Santo Rosario paid for by this group is one example of how they aid poorer communities and attract followers. Older children attend high school at the nearby mixed Piaroa and Hiwi community of Puente de Parhueña, where there is also a medical clinic which serves the communities north of Puerto Ayacucho.

Clemente moved from Colombia as a young man because, as he tells it, he had been rejected by a woman he loved. He lived on the Autana River for many years before he and his wife founded Shalom in 2001, a community of about two hundred people living in twenty houses. The community has a water-tank, which reduces the need for community members to walk to the stream to collect water. On my return visit in 2013, the community had received government funding to construct wooden houses of two rooms with concrete bases. One room usually serves as a bedroom, where the whole family sleeps in hammocks or beds. Outdoor toilets and bathrooms are common, as are outdoor sinks for washing clothes and dishes.

The atmosphere in these communities is tranquil and moves to the particular rhythms of Hiwi life. A typical day involves rising at dawn, when the family partakes of breakfast together before the children leave for school and the parents depart for gardens or to work. Everyone returns for lunch, which is often provided by a communal kitchen staffed by community members. The afternoons and evenings are spent in quiet household activities, visiting friends and relatives, or resting in hammocks. Both of these communities are located on the savannahs close to the highway, but with access to nearby rivers for fishing and forests where Hiwi prefer to plant their gardens. A typical household consists of a husband, wife, and children but may also include elderly relatives and potential sons-in-law. Most members of the community are consanguinal or affinal relatives of the founding families. Households commonly keep chickens and dogs, as well as the occasional pig, peccary, iguana, or tortoise. Manioc is the staple food, and older men still weave baskets for carrying and processing the tubers. Men usually clear and burn an area for a garden, while their wives are primarily responsible for weeding, harvesting, and processing the produce which includes legumes, corn, mangoes, and pineapples. Today, fewer families are keeping gardens as they prefer to rely on the cash economy. Wage labour, artisanal crafts, government salaries and stipends provide families with cash to supplement their diet with rice, coffee, and sugar. These basic goods were becoming scarce and government payments were being stalled during my last visit in 2013, and the economic situation has worsened significantly since then. Several people were experimenting with growing coffee bushes, but this process was in its early stages. I suspect these shortages will provoke Hiwi people to plant larger gardens and engage more often in hunting, fishing, and foraging expeditions, which may put pressure on local game populations.

In 2013, men occasionally enter the forest to hunt deer, peccary, and monkeys using traps, shotguns, and dogs. Bows and arrows were once commonly used, children still practise with toy bows and I speculate that their use may recur as shortages of basic goods increase in Venezuela. Children practise fishing with hooks and lines in the nearby rivers, while men and women sometimes walk up to three hours to find a good spot to fish using nylon nets and, very occasionally, fish poison. Wood for construction and medicinal plants may be collected during such ventures into the forest. Motorcycles are a relatively common mode of transport, but private trucks and a community transport cooperative also service communities surrounding Puerto Ayacucho. The National Highway, built in the 1980s, connects these communities to each other, to the town and to the rest of Venezuela.

The road links these peaceful communities to the social, political, and economic networks of wider Venezuelan society. Hiwi people travel from their communities to the town to access medical services, government departments, bank accounts, markets, and businesses. In this social context, Hiwi people study at university, join the National Guard, proselytise as missionaries, work as researchers, drive taxis, run businesses and tend their gardens. In a sense, Hiwi people move through an intercultural space inhabited by multiple indigenous ethnic groups, *criollos*, and immigrants from Europe, Africa, and Asia. This diverse social landscape demands extensive knowledge of the Western political-economic and epistemological systems that dominate Venezuelan society. Puerto Ayacucho is a burgeoning urban centre located on the banks of the Orinoco between the Apures and Maipures rapids. This chaotic city attracts many indigenous people seeking work, health, and educational services, as well as *criollos* and immigrants looking for employment in the military, government, or the many

extractive industries, such as oil, lumber and minerals. Violent crime and illicit drug use is increasingly common in this once sleepy border city. The infrastructure of the city lags behind the needs of its growing population, with many people living without adequate housing or plumbing. Due to Venezuela's huge oil reserves, petrol is heavily subsidised to the point of being very affordable or 'practically a gift' for locals. Automobiles are expensive and difficult to import, meaning the streets are full of old gas-guzzlers, which contribute clouds of exhaust to the tropical miasma of decomposing garbage and rotting vegetation. Stray dogs and cats wander freely through the streets, which are baked by the sun in summer and flooded with water during the rains. This urban outpost stands in stark contrast to the clean tranquillity of the surrounding rainforest and indigenous communities.



Plate 7. Puerto Ayacucho, as seen from Cerro Perico.

My participants live on the edge of this city, forming communities dominated by Hiwi principles of personal autonomy, conviviality, and social harmony. This social sphere is surrounded on all sides by savannahs and forests, rivers and mountains that have long sustained and nourished Hiwi people with their extensive knowledge of natural and spiritual worlds. Hiwi people move into this world of plants, animals, rocks and spirits when they walk to their gardens, hunt, fish, gather fruits, wood, or medicinal plants, or simply for pleasure. This world is the source of Hiwi knowledge, shamanic understandings, and mythology. To see the world from a Hiwi perspective is to see the multiple connections between every plant, animal, human, spirit, and every form of life however diverse. Norman Whitten and Dorothea Whitten (2008) argue something similar for Canelos Quichua people of Ecuador, who inhabit an intercultural space where past and future mingle, reflected in the multiple localities in which they live:

Nayapi Llacta belongs to the world of Amazonian ecology and cosmology; Nueva Esperanza, its modern transformation (but not replacement), belongs to the world of national nucleation, hierarchical bureaucracy, and capitalist enterprise. People live in both systems, both worlds (2008:55).

In my attempt to see this world with Hiwi eyes, I became aware of a kind of interculturality operating within the lives of Hiwi people that foreshadows the possible emergence of a decolonised space for the reimagining of political-economies and epistemologies. In this thesis, I interpret how these dynamics affect every aspect of Hiwi life by drawing on anthropological literature that approaches interculturality, alternative epistemologies, and the potential for decolonisation of our societies and knowledges. This academic interest mirrors social unrest and disaffection in the face of the homogenising forces of neoliberal globalisation, particularly in Latin America.

1.3. Interculturality, Multiple Epistemologies, and Decolonisation

Recent years have seen the rise of a plethora of social movements and activists dissatisfied by the failure of globalisation to make good on its promise of well-being, liberty, prosperity, and freedom. These counter-hegemonic processes rely on alternative knowledges that challenge the epistemological assumptions that underpin globalisation, representative democracy, and neoliberal capitalism. According to Boaventura de Sousa Santos:

In the name of modern science, many alternative knowledges and sciences have been destroyed, and the social groups that used these systems to support their own autonomous paths of development have been humiliated. In short, in the name of science, epistemicide has been committed, and the imperial powers have resorted to it to disarm any resistance of the conquered peoples and social groups (2005:xviii).

This process has a socio-political dimension, as Western sciences have been instrumental in subjugating local communities to the hegemonic and homogenising processes of colonialism, global capitalism, development, and modernisation (de Sousa Santos, 2005:xx). Indeed, as Franz Fanon (1967:33) noted fifty years ago, the work of colonisation is only completed when the colonised acknowledges the supremacy of Western values and internalises them. According to Fanon (1967:34), decolonisation involves the colonised masses rejecting, mocking, and even insulting these values.

Much academic work bemoans the loss or corruption of indigenous cultural practices, knowledge, and beliefs in the face of Western civilisation (see Case et al., 2005). In these terms, indigenous societies are seen as fragile, homeostatic units living in balance with nature, which are threatened by the changes brought by the introduction of historical time by the colonising whites (see Wirsing, 1985). Joanna Overing and Alan Passes describe how the imperialistic and Eurocentric view of early colonisers in South America have constructed an image of native Amazonians as either Noble Savages or Pagan Cannibals, which has until recently continued to affect social theory, “where the gaze is still sufficiently violent to create Natives who are ignorant children, without the intelligence, or even the interest, to engage in conscious reasoning” (2000:11). The history of contact and colonial expansion is presented as the unilateral destruction of the culture and society of the colonised through extermination, deculturation, and assimilation perpetuated by a technologically superior coloniser. Darcy Ribeiro exemplifies this argument when he claims that the dominated societies are “the recipients of civilizing expansion, the process is *historical incorporation*; these peoples suffer the impact of technologically more developed societies and are subjugated by them, losing their autonomy and sometimes having their ethnic character damaged or destroyed” (1970:404). He further argues that the culture of the coloniser remains intact and “authentic”, while the subjugated peoples, unable to preserve or innovate elements of their cultural tradition, become alienated from it and absorb the dominant world-view: a “spurious” culture (Ribeiro, 1970:405; see also Sapir, 1949). This perspective distorts the complicated history of intercultural encounters during colonisation.

In fact, indigenous individuals are not passively moulded by colonial desires and projects. Rather, they actively engage with the complexities of the colonial situation,

which may involve variously adapting to new economic, social, political, and cultural realities, maintaining cultural identities and traditions, and resisting the culturally destructive forces of violence, assimilation, and racism. My Hiwi participants navigate this world of conflicting meanings and unequal power relations, selecting from and adapting both their own beliefs and Western concepts of social behaviour, medicine, religion, political economy, and science. The image of indigenous shamans as the preservers of cultural relics belies their role as mediators between the community and the world, which includes the historical context of colonisation and the reality of broader Venezuelan society. Through listening to my participants and experiencing the rhythms and social dynamics of their daily lives, I learned about the sophistication of not only Hiwi ways of being and knowing, but also their critical engagement with global society, which is always seen from a uniquely Hiwi perspective. Living on the periphery of a growing Venezuelan city, yet embedded within the matrix of family and community life, the people I was privileged to meet had not merely been forcibly incorporated into colonial capitalism and Western hegemony but rather had formulated their own ideas about these pervasive aspects of modern life for themselves based on their own experiences.

Hiwi social reality does not occur in a pristine and isolated past that exists only as a Western imaginary, but rather has, since the beginnings of Spanish intrusion into the llanos in the 1530s, existed alongside, yet without being subsumed by, Western spheres

of influence.⁹ These spheres of meaning include the capitalist economy, the politics and society of the nation-state, Christian religions, biomedicine, science and technology. Robert Tonkinson has argued similarly that colonised peoples, such as Mardu people in Australia's Western Desert, must "struggle ceaselessly to reintegrate their lives around newly negotiated, and often conflicting, understandings of what is happening to them" (2006:230). Individuals select among beliefs and practices and fashion new forms in line with their cultural logic, which results in a "synthesis of indigenous, alien, and newly created elements" that challenges the construction of indigenous peoples as 'traditional' after the point of contact (Tonkinson, 2006:230).

Many indigenous peoples enthusiastically take up technology, challenging the notion that authenticity means purity from outside influences. As Beth Conklin explains:

Authenticity implies integration and wholeness—continuity between past and present, and between societal values and individual agency, and between sign and meaning...This leaves little room for intercultural exchange or creative innovation and locates 'authentic' indigenous actors outside global cultural trends and changing ideas and technologies (1997:715).

Neil Whitehead similarly notes that cultural innovation is crucial to indigenous autonomy and to assume that this inevitably results in the loss of culture is "in itself grossly ethnocentric, notwithstanding the theoretical fallacies involved in the denial of native historical agency" (1993:397). In Overing and Passes' (2000:10) view, the

⁹ I follow Conklin (1997) and Graham (2002) in using 'Western' as a convenient shorthand term to describe socio-cultural, political and economic discourses and practices emerging from the historical context of Europe and North America. This category is always contextually dependent with indistinct boundaries.

decolonisation of anthropology requires us to make subjects of our objects, to respect the intellectual integrity of indigenous people, to listen and value what they say, and to avoid claiming an intelligence and authority that we deny to others.

This thesis investigates the possibility of alternative and decolonised modernities based on intercultural exchanges among diverse peoples. To this end, I explore the intercultural world inhabited by Hiwi people in Amazonas State and reflect on their engagement with Western political-economies and epistemologies. In doing so I am answering Whitten's call for ethnographers to turn their attention to the many intercultural systems in which "the intertwining of modernity and its indigenization, the genesis of alternative modernities and emerging culture are present" (2008:28). Intercultural systems reflect new articulations of the dialectics of modernity, such as the local and the global, which inform and shape one another in new ways that contain the potential for social change.¹⁰ As de Sousa Santos argues, local knowledges hold the key to challenging the hegemony of globalisation: "social emancipation involves a dual movement of de-globalization of the local (*vis-à-vis* hegemonic globalization) and its re-globalization (as part of counter-hegemonic globalization)" (2005:xxvi). Such a movement allows cultural differences to flourish, while the inclusion of common-sense and alternative knowledges enriches the sciences and our conceptions about how we live. This epistemological dialogue "may be the source of a new rationality—a

¹⁰ I define modernity, following Escobar (2010:9), as broadly referring to discourses, practices, political-economic institutions, and social structures consolidated in Europe in last several hundred years, which presuppose and naturalise specific, ontological assumptions including: the dominance of humans over non-humans and of elites over poor, the autonomy of the individual, the value of objective knowledge and science, and the independence of economy from social relations.

rationality comprised of multiple rationalities” (de Sousa Santos, 1992:45). The next section provides an outline of thesis chapters, each of which addresses a facet of the intercultural world inhabited by Hiwi people and the potential for decolonisation.

1.4. Overview of Chapters

The intercultural world of Hiwi people comprises many aspects including politics, economics, medicine, epistemology, and morality. Each chapter of my thesis addresses a particular aspect of this intercultural dynamic from the politics of decolonisation in Latin America to the incorporation of Christian elements of cosmology and morality with Hiwi convivial sociality. Each chapter asks specific questions related to my main research question: How do Hiwi people navigate an intercultural world and what possibilities does this represent for decolonisation? In this section, I provide an overview of each chapter and the sphere of Hiwi life they approach through my intercultural lens.

In Chapter Two, I ask how have interculturality and decolonising political movements in Venezuela emerged at this time and how this relates to similar counterhegemonic processes in Bolivia and Ecuador? To answer this question, I trace the development of indigenous activism and its culmination in the attainment of specific collective indigenous rights in the New Constitution of 1999 (CRBV) and the Organic Law of Indigenous Peoples and Communities (LOPCI) in 2005 under Chávez’s Bolivarian government. These developments were strongly opposed by conservative political elites, but indigenous recognition represents a significant first step towards redressing a colonial history of exploitation, marginalisation, and racism. The opening up of political

space to indigenous peoples suggests the potential decolonisation of the political sphere and the possibility of indigenous self-determination.

To further understand intercultural and decolonising forces, I position Venezuela within a wider political context of decolonial and counterhegemonic movements in other Latin American countries, namely Bolivia and Ecuador. I situate Venezuela within the historical processes of liberal democracy, modernisation, neoliberal development, and the rise of popular social movements, which define the political-economic reality for Hiwi people living in Amazonas. I trace the evolution of the concepts of plurinationalism and interculturality, which shape the current political discourse in Latin America and challenge narrow liberal constructions of national society and state power, political subjectivities and modernity. These processes open up a space for debate about the possibility for a state to recognise the diverse and intercultural nature of its peoples' histories, societies, and cultures, as well as the potential for creating decolonised political-economies that reflect the principles of participatory democracy and social economy.

In Chapter Three, I move on to the specifics of Hiwi political organisation under the Bolivarian government. I ask how Hiwi people negotiate the intercultural nature of local and national politics, oscillating between their own political philosophy and practices and the new communal councils that promote the Bolivarian government's notion of participatory democracy? Do these political structures reflect indigenous principles of autonomy, debate, and consensus as Bolivarian officials claim? Or do communal councils and government ministries for indigenous affairs represent the flattening of a

potential intercultural political system aimed at decolonisation? To explore these questions, I offer an ethnographic description and analysis of the political experiences and understandings of Hiwi individuals in the age of *chavismo*. I suggest that this new movement represents enormous advances for Hiwi and other indigenous peoples in the spheres of political representation, land rights, and political discourse. However, this process is ongoing and has yet to achieve its full potential. A decolonising politics is also hampered by the centralising tendencies of the state and its liberal conceptions of political and economic relations, as well as contradictions in the state's approach to indigenous self-determination.

In this chapter, I describe Hiwi political organisation at the level of the community and draw a comparison with the communal councils. The councils were introduced as part of the Bolivarian Government's 'New Geometry of Power', an attempt to construct a participatory democracy and horizontal decision-making within a pluriethnic and multicultural Venezuelan society. The concepts underpinning this vision for the future remain theoretically open and discursively flexible, requiring further definition through practical actions. The government discourse links this political model to the democratic and consensus-based political organisation attributed to Amerindian indigenous peoples, but relies on a simplistic and homogenising image of indigenous politics. I argue that communal councils do not fully reflect the historical diversity and complexity of indigenous political systems by comparing this model with existing political structures in Hiwi communities where I worked. In these communities, there is evidence of a continuing tradition of loose political organisation and leadership based on consensus and personal alliances. This particularly indigenous mode of socio-political organisation exists within wider networks of the changing political structures of the nation-state. I

also argue that the imposition of a standard model of local government limits the possibilities for indigenous self-determination and decolonisation based on intercultural exchange.

At the national level, indigenous activists and civil society organisations, such as CONIVE, have supported Chávez since his 1998 electoral campaign, because they glimpsed the revolution's potential for gaining rights (Angosto Ferrández, 2008:18; Mansutti Rodríguez, 2000:84). This endorsement was repaid by the Bolivarian government with the constitutional guarantee of indigenous rights to territory, culture, language, medicine, political-economic and social self-determination. Constitutional rights are accompanied by the symbolic valorisation of indigenous peoples in governmental discourse and the creation of new laws and governmental departments to promote indigenous self-development. Some indigenous actors have joined the government in this re-founding of the nation, gaining political capital in their communities. However, this process may contribute to the co-opting of the autonomy of indigenous organisations and activism by the state, leading to increased dependency and centralisation. The incorporation of indigenous politics within the sphere of the state may increase indigenous dependence on state resources, further integrate indigenous communities into state structures, and contribute to political polarisation within indigenous communities. I argue that the flexible and personal nature of Hiwi political organisation offers a possible alternative to oppositional politics and dependence on the state, where Hiwi people continue to organise politically on their own terms and use communal councils primarily to access state resources. In other words, Hiwi people inhabit a complex intercultural political landscape that suggests the possibility of a decolonising political system in which cultural difference is fundamental.

In Chapter Four, I ask how Hiwi people organise their labour and engage in Hiwi forms of economic activity while simultaneously participating within the dominant capitalist economy and amid the introduction of cooperatives to promote socialism? What does this intercultural and plural economic situation represent for the decolonisation of neoliberal economies? To answer these questions, I provide a description of the complex economic reality of Hiwi individuals living in communities close to Puerto Ayacucho. My analysis takes into account the colonial history of assimilating and coercing indigenous peoples into a national capitalist economy. Despite this, specifically Hiwi economic practices, such as *únuma*, a reciprocal form of labour distribution, and subsistence farming, hunting, and fishing are still practised as one aspect of the myriad strategies individuals use to ensure their survival. Many people engage with capitalist forms of labour, production, and capital accumulation to earn cash to buy products they cannot produce themselves, such as sugar and coffee. Hiwi individuals also participate and benefit from the Bolivarian government's recent economic programs, known as 'endogenous development', which includes social welfare, scholarships, and cooperatives. The Bolivarian government is attempting to decolonise the economic sphere by developing a theoretical and practical alternative to neoliberal capitalism: Twenty-First Century Socialism. The Bolivarian government promotes this new economic project as a specifically Latin American form of socialism based on a particular imaginary of indigeneity, including economic practices, historical resistance to capitalist domination, and communal forms of production and labour organisation. The social economy represents a challenge to the interests of global capitalism, fuelled by popular discontent with the neoliberal policies of the 1980s, and legitimises its anti-imperial brand of socialism by appealing to indigenous history of

resistance. This economic project exists alongside capitalist structures, requires time to develop its full potential, and may even threaten the right to economic self-determination promised to indigenous peoples in the Constitution of 1999.

In this chapter, I critically examine the concept of a social economy based on indigenous economic principles and practices as a strategy for decolonising the economy. I use recent theoretical literature, material economic relations, and ethnographic evidence of current Hiwi economic practices to problematise the theoretical underpinnings of the socialist project. This new economy is grounded in a particular notion of indigeneity that may assume homogeneity, an idealised image that fails to capture the reality of the multiple economies in which Hiwi participate to ensure their physical survival and social reproduction. I argue from my ethnographic evidence that the multiplicity of economic strategies and forms of organisation practised by the Hiwi may offer a more nuanced and effective theoretical basis for a pluralistic social economy. This confusion complicates the state's constitutional promise to preserve indigenous economic practices and foster the economic self-determination of indigenous communities.

Collective inalienable land rights for indigenous peoples are essential to the decolonisation of the nation's territory. These rights have yet to be fully instated because they contradict the state's sovereignty over subsoil resources, the revenues of which the government depends upon for domestic social programs and international trade alliances. I suggest that this continued entanglement with global capitalism and the centrality of the hydrocarbon resources to the economy undermines the emergence of an

intercultural and decolonised economic system in which indigenous sovereignty over land and development is guaranteed.

In Chapters Five to Seven, I turn my analysis away from the political-economic sphere of Hiwi life and investigate how Hiwi people manage interculturality in the realms of medical knowledge, morality, and epistemology. In Chapter Five, I ask how Hiwi people navigate plural medical systems with different conceptions of the body, health, and illness and how can this intercultural or intermedical situation open up the possibility of decolonising medical knowledge? To answer this question, I provide a detailed ethnographic description of Hiwi shamanism with its conceptions of the human body, illness, and healing. For Hiwi people, illness is an imbalance of hot, nutritive energies and cold, decomposing energies and can be caused by a combination of environmental, social, natural and spiritual factors. Spirits may infest the body due to failure to comply with social obligations, respect for spirit places or at the behest of distant sorcerers. Such illnesses must be treated by a shaman, who knows the appropriate chants to transfer his nutritive energy into water for the patient to drink and sucks the spirit contamination from the patient's body.

These Hiwi beliefs and practices co-exist in an intermedical space with biomedical models due to the realities of Western imperialism and power inequalities. I present two case studies to demonstrate how Hiwi people select among these different medical resources depending on the context of the illness. These case studies show that Hiwi people may seek biomedical treatment for illnesses considered to be physical in nature, while seeking shamanic services for a spirit-caused illness or as an assertion of

indigenous identity. I argue that Hiwi people treat these two systems as complementary, partially correct, and differently effective knowledges emerging from different social and historical contexts. In my view, this reflects an intermedical dynamic operating in Amazonas, where different medical systems exist in relationship to and may even inform one another. However, the promotion of indigenous medical systems may also obscure the social inequalities and lack of access to biomedical resources in poor, rural areas of Venezuela. I argue that medicine is an intercultural phenomenon for Hiwi people, who select among biomedical and shamanic models of illness and health. This indicates the possibility of a decolonised medicine, where different medical systems are valued equally and take into account the many factors influencing health and illness.

In the Chapter Six, I turn to a discussion of Hiwi morality as expressed in mythology and sorcery as well as the incorporation of aspects of Christian cosmology. In this chapter, I ask how Hiwi manage intercultural aspects of morality and cosmology, given the extensive history and ongoing influence of missionary contact and what this indicates about plural moralities and complementary cosmologies? To answer this question, I first present two myths about the origins of agricultural plants and of two large rapids in the Orinoco River. Hiwi people draw comparisons between mythological figures and Christian figures, emphasising similarities between the two traditions that structure their moral life. I argue that this Hiwi ability to hold two moral and cosmological traditions in a complementary, rather than antagonistic, relationship is a product of the flexibility and cultural adaptability of Hiwi mythological beliefs. I also argue that these myths reflect the principles of Hiwi morality, grounded in sociality, harmony, conviviality, and positive emotions of love, generosity, and respect, as well as the dangers of transgressing these morals. Morality is contrasted with the expression of

negative emotions, such as jealousy, anger, and selfishness, which create disharmony in social relations, and may cause illness through the practice of sorcery. I then discuss sorcery as an expression of this negative side of Hiwi morality. Sorcery attacks are blamed on negative emotions, such as jealousy and anger, or the failure to uphold social obligations and harmonious kinship relations. A sorcerer may command a spirit to enter the body of a person and cause sickness that can only be healed by a shaman, who reasserts harmony in both the individual body and social body. These beliefs remain despite centuries of missionisation, reflecting their importance to Hiwi conceptions of morality and convivial sociality. Hiwi people maintain that these beliefs are complementary to their Christian beliefs, revealing that moral and cosmological beliefs are open to intercultural influences and indicating that decolonisation does not necessarily involve the repudiation of Christian beliefs that have been meaningfully incorporated into Hiwi lives. Rather, these beliefs may be maintained as complementary to Hiwi notions of morality and cosmology.

In Chapter Seven, I turn to a discussion of epistemology in general. In this chapter, I ask what epistemological assumptions about the nature of the world are held by Hiwi people and how Hiwi beliefs about spirits and emotional experiences relate to the epistemological values attributed to science and technology? How does this open up the sciences to an intercultural exchange with alternative knowledges and contribute to a decolonial system of knowledge in which subjective modes of knowing are valued? To answer this question, I describe Hiwi epistemological standards, which assume the existence of spirits and value subjective ways of knowing, such as emotions, dreams, and visions. I provide examples from Hiwi mythology, life experiences, and interviews that demonstrate how subjective modes of knowing are valued and even privileged in a

Hiwi lifeworld. In this view, knowledge is conceived as a spirit that is experienced by the senses, lodges in the body, and becomes embodied in practice. Indeed, Hiwi shamanism contains the assumption that knowledge learned during altered states of consciousness, such as dreams and visions, is more valuable than knowledge gained in ordinary life. However, this knowledge, which often represents the integration of emotion and reason, must be reinserted into everyday life. Later in this chapter, I argue that Hiwi epistemology is founded on vastly different assumptions than a scientific worldview based on Cartesian duality. Unlike science, a Hiwi epistemology possesses the advantage of the possible integration of emotion with reason, subjective with objective, and unconscious with conscious. I conclude that the study of indigenous epistemologies, such as that of Hiwi people, opens up the path for a dialogue between science and alternative knowledges that may lead to the decolonisation of knowledge and enrich our concepts of good living.

In Chapter Eight, I draw out and synthesise the overarching themes of my thesis: decolonisation, interculturality, and multiple epistemologies. I discuss how the previous chapters have explored how Hiwi people navigate intercultural dynamics operating in every aspect of their lives, from national politics and economics to the Western systems of knowledges contained in medicine, epistemology, and morality. These chapters explore how Hiwi social life is predicated on flexibility, cultural adaptability, autonomy, complementarity, and conviviality, a confluence of principles that I call the paradigm of pluralism and difference. This paradigm allows individuals to select among Hiwi and *criollo* meanings that structure their lifeworld in the twenty-first century. In this synthesis, I consider how the Hiwi intercultural reality contains the seeds of a possible decolonisation of Western ways of being and knowing, which may precede a

more practical decolonisation of political and economic theories and practices. I argue that the existence of intercultural worlds suggests that human beings are fully capable of living in a world of alternative knowledges that would enrich our societies, cultures, and knowledges. I posit that a decolonial world in which social, cultural, and political differences are valued within the dynamics of an ongoing intercultural exchange offers an empowering alternative to the collapse of meaning and freedom at this late stage of neoliberal globalisation.

2. Decolonising the Liberal Political-Economy: Interculturality and Plurinational Possibilities in Latin America

Hiwi people have lived through many radical changes in the meaning and value of indigenous peoples within the national society of Venezuela. Since the election of Hugo Chávez and his Bolivarian government in 1998, many changes have occurred in the structural relations between the Venezuelan state and civil society, especially with indigenous peoples. Indigenous activism has achieved constitutional recognition, specific collective rights, and symbolic valorisation of their contribution to the national patrimony, but practical benefits are slow to materialise. Such institutional recognition is not a final victory, but rather an important new phase in an ongoing historically constituted negotiation between the indigenous and nonindigenous, subaltern and dominant people, and coloniser and native. These developments reflect indigenous activism that has shaped the political scene in Venezuela by introducing the concepts of plurinationality and interculturality into discussions of indigenous peoples' place in the national society. This discourse has become aligned with broader counter-hegemonic processes emerging in Venezuela and across Latin America. Amid strong opposition from political elites and private enterprises, many Latin American nation-states have recently approved new Constitutions and constituent assemblies, which represent decolonial re-imaginings of political, social, and economic structures. Some of these redress colonial exclusion, racism, and exploitation of indigenous peoples. This collection of social and political movements has been classified as the New Left by political observers and social scientists. In this chapter, I draw on some of these authors, including anthropologist Arturo Escobar (2010), who specialises in the politics of

difference, Edgardo Lander (2007) and Miguel Contreras (2007), who are Venezuelan sociologists with an interest in alternative modernities and social movements, and Steve Ellner (2008, 2012), who studies Venezuelan economic and political history, specialising in the *chavismo*. I juxtapose these perspectives with that of Jorge Castañeda (2005; 2006), a Mexican politician and academic who favours non-revolutionary and more conservative forms of social democracy over populist social movements.

Unlike Bolivia and Ecuador, indigenous peoples are a small minority in Venezuela, 2.7%, of the population (Resultados Básicos de Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda, 2011), but the decolonising potential of plurinationality benefits the entire society by opening up new horizons of political engagement for the people. Despite their different histories of indigenous mobilisation and demographics, Bolivia and Ecuador have been selected for comparison because of the meaningful similarities in the discourses and practices of their New Left movements, reflected in the close ties and agreements between their political leaders. The pluriethnic project is intimately connected to the Bolivarian Revolution, headed by Hugo Chávez and his party, MVR (Fifth Republic Movement), and supported by an organisation of leftist political parties, many of which joined a coalition, PSUV (United Socialist Party of Venezuela) in 2007, and the electoral alliance, *Gran Polo Patriótico* (Great Patriotic Pole) in 2011. Chávez death was announced on the fifth of March 2013 after a battle with cancer and his nominated successor and former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Vice President, Nicolás Maduro won in the subsequent presidential election with a narrow margin. The death of the charismatic Comandante cast a shadow over my second fieldwork trip, but the general mood among his supporters was hopeful for the future of Bolivarianism and confident that Maduro would continue the movement. The preamble to the CRBV

describes Venezuelan society as “democratic, participatory and self-reliant, multiethnic and pluricultural society in a just, federal and decentralized State that embodies the values of freedom, independence, peace, solidarity, the common good, the nation's territorial integrity, comity and the rule of law for this and future generations” (Constitución de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, 1999).

In this chapter, I ask how and why interculturality and decolonising political movements have emerged at this point in Venezuela's history and how this relates to similar counterhegemonic processes in Bolivia and Ecuador. To answer this question, I first explore how indigenous activists achieved constitutional and symbolic recognition by the Bolivarian government in 1999. My discussion is informed by commentary from anthropologists working with indigenous peoples in Venezuela, such as Daisy Barreto (2011), Jacqueline Clarac (2001), Alexánder Mansutti Rodríguez (2000), and Luis Angosto Ferrández (2008; 2010). Informed by the work of Nancy Postero (2010, 2013) and Anaïd Flesken (2013), I trace the evolution of the concepts of plurinationalism and interculturality within Latin American indigenous activism, and how they shape the political discourse of the New Left in Latin America. The concepts of plurinationality and intercultural exchange provide a useful framework for understanding the new political reality in which Hiwi individuals situate themselves and engage with historically constituted spheres of knowledge and practice. In the second section, I position this indigenous movement within the context of the New Left in Latin America, a new political imaginary that emerged as a reaction to the harshness of neoliberal reforms of the 1980s and 1990s. This political project champions participatory democracy and an economy based on social justice and collectivism, often drawing on an imaginary of indigeneity. In the third section, I place Venezuela within a

regional context to highlight both the broader similarities and specific characteristics of Bolivarian government and indigenous activism in Venezuela. I investigate how these movements challenge narrow liberal constructions of national society, state power, political subjectivities and modernity.

2.1. The Constitution of 1999: Indigenous Activism and the Symbolic Recognition of Indigenous Peoples

The achievements of Venezuelan indigenous activists in recent years are extraordinary and would have been impossible without the Bolivarian Revolution of Hugo Chávez, which ushered in dramatic changes to Venezuela's political landscape. The New Constitution of 1999 (CRBV), Law of Demarcation and Guarantee of Indigenous Lands and Habitats (2001), and the Organic Law of Indigenous Peoples and Communities (LOPCI) represent huge advances in the legal recognition and protection of indigenous rights to health services, bicultural education, linguistic and cultural diversity, traditional medicine, political and economic participation, lands, and customary law. Yet, as Barreto notes, this process continues to fall short of complete success due to "deafness and arrogance" of the Bolivarian state (2011:261). Many rights have proved difficult to translate into practical terms and most indigenous communities still await recognition of rights to territory and to use natural resources, while living without sufficient access to public amenities such as schools and medical clinics. These remain issues that indigenous activists openly protest despite the recent successes of constitutional and symbolic recognition. In this section, I describe the process of achieving constitutional and symbolic recognition of indigenous peoples in recent years

in Venezuela to provide a national political context that frames the intercultural lifeworld of Hiwi people.

The campaigning of indigenous organisations during the 1990s increased national awareness of indigenous issues and came to fruition on the 25 March 1999, when president Chávez created a National Constituent Assembly to draft a new Venezuelan constitution and submit this to a public referendum. The decree reserved three places for indigenous representatives. These officials, Noelí Pocaterra (Wayuu), José Luis González (Pemon) and Guillermo Guevara (Hiwi), were elected by indigenous groups at a meeting of representatives of all groups in Ciudad Bolívar. Official support and constitutional recognition has brought the indigenous “discussion to the forefront through marches, demonstrations, and conferences” (Gacksetter Nichols and Morse, 2010:101). There was extensive media coverage of the events of 1999 and, although the national population failed to understand the complexities of indigenous politics, this exposure at least raised awareness of indigenous issues.

The process of constitutional recognition for indigenous peoples faced opposition among political elites. The Supreme Court of Justice ordered National Electoral Council (CNE) to change the decree, by removing the special characterisation of these representatives as ‘original’ and voiding the election in Ciudad Bolívar (Clarac, 2001:363). This represented an attack on the indigenous rights movement fuelled by longstanding fears among state officials and elites that indigenous autonomy and territorial rights would limit state control of natural resources, threaten national integrity (Mansutti Rodríguez, 2000:83), or, in extreme cases, lead to indigenous secession.

These fears are largely unfounded, as indigenous activists proclaim their patriotism by drawing on their status as native Venezuelans and promote inclusive social change (Angosto Ferrández, 2010:101; Mosonyi, 2007:188). Angosto Ferrández (2010:102) notes how some neoliberal proponents hide their defence of free market and private property under a professed nationalism, which is threatened by collective indigenous rights. From the left, some have argued that such identity politics may divert and confuse the project of social change, while proponents of recognition argue for paying the historical debt and levelling out the continent (Angosto Ferrández, 2010:103). In this way, ideology restricted the discussion about indigenous recognition during Constituent Assembly, apart from its relation to state power and political groups.

Three hundred and twenty indigenous delegates went to the National Assembly to protest the CNE refusal to recognise the elected officials. Simultaneously, indigenous groups with ties to two traditional political parties, Democratic Action (AD) and the Committee for Independent Electoral Political Organisation (COPEI), boycotted the decreed referendum of the Constituent Assembly and petitioned CNE for justice. Indigenous groups on both sides of the disagreement threatened to take CNE to court, initiating a process of negotiation between the CNE and indigenous groups, which ended with the CNE recognizing CONIVE as the only national organization of indigenous peoples capable of organising an indigenous election at the national level and providing financial aid for CONIVE to hold another electoral congress in which CNE was solely an observer (Clarac, 2001:364). The same officials were eventually elected to the National Constituent Assembly, and in 2000 were elected to the National Assembly, where they fought immediately for territorial demarcation, indigenous education, and land tenancy. During the National Constituent Assembly, indigenous

groups and allies resisted assaults of AD and COPEI who refused to recognise indigenous rights which were being enshrined in the new Constitution. The interests of these powerful elites made it difficult to obtain real benefits (Clarac, 2001:365). The *chavista* government made concessions to right-wing factions related to indigenous land rights and use of resources in these territories (Barreto, 2011). Although some state officials genuinely desired to grant rights long denied to indigenous peoples they were restricted by need for foreign investment agreements (Clarac, 2001:366).

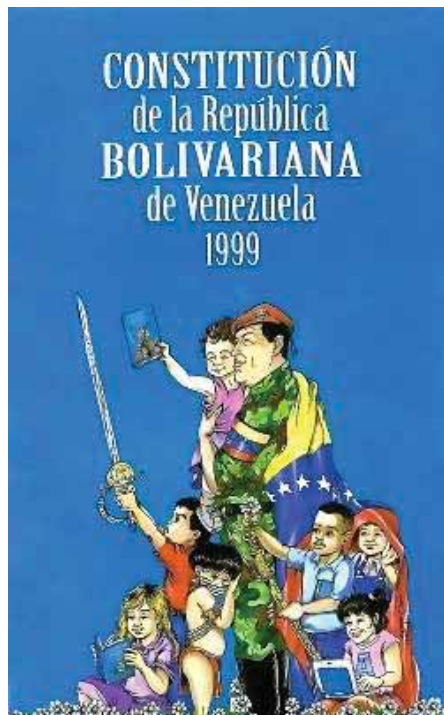


Figure 5. The 1999 Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 2013 Government Edition.

Ultimately, the New Constitution of 1999 is based on an ethos of equality, multiethnicity, and pluriculturalism. It recognises indigenous languages as official

national languages and land rights as “collective, inalienable, and non-transferable” (Gacksetter Nichols and Morse, 2010:100). This represents a substantial improvement on the old constitution which granted no formal specific rights to indigenous peoples. Although they were recognised as an exception, they had rights of citizenship and as indigenous peoples “their only right was a responsibility: to integrate themselves into the life of the nation” (Mansutti Rodríguez, 2000:94). The Constitution also contains “considerable ambiguities with respect to indigenous rights” (Barreto, 2011:262), especially those that potentially contradict state power, as a result of lobbying by strong military and nationalist groups within the Constituent Assembly. This was the first sign of the many contradictions inherent in the Bolivarian government’s relation to indigenous peoples. These complexities will be examined further in Chapters Eight and Nine.

Constitutional recognition has been accompanied by the symbolic valorisation of indigenous history, cultures, and societies as part of the national patrimony. The Bolivarian government excels in the symbolic recognition of indigenous peoples, which forms a large part of their political rhetoric. This is reflected in the transformation of Day of the Races (*Día de la Raza*), a national holiday commemorating the European ‘discovery’ of the Americas and first landing of Christopher Columbus on the 12th October 1492 (Angosto Ferrández, 2008:15). In 2002, Chávez issued a presidential decree changing the name of this celebration to Day of Indigenous Resistance (*Día de la Resistencia*) as a symbolic rejection of colonial values and recognition that the colonisation of South America came at the cost of the lives and freedom of its indigenous population. This day now acknowledges the indigenous struggles against colonial oppression and celebrates the vision of Venezuela as a ‘multiethnic’ and

‘pluricultural’ nation expressed in the Preamble to the 1999 Constitution. In addition, place names have been renamed to reflect their indigenous heritage and Chávez proudly identified himself as indigenous (Cuiva and Yaruro), “reinforcing the identifying connection between Hugo Chávez and persons bound to indigenous movements within the country and the continent” (Angosto Ferrández, 2008:16).



Plate 8. Indigenous activist Noeli Pocaterra and Hugo Chávez (*Noeli Pocaterra: Chávez fue un Verdadero Aliado de la Causa Indígena*, 2013).

Angosto Ferrández (2008) dubs this symbolic discourse of indigeneity *guaicaipurismo* after the most praised hero of indigenous resistance to the Spanish. Although this hero was little valued by the state before 1999, the Bolivarian government erected an altar to Guaicaipuro in the National Pantheon, placing him firmly within the “sanctuary of

constructors of nationality” (Angosto Ferrández, 2008:14).¹¹ This plurality of symbolism is possible because the Bolivarian movement is defined by its flexible matrix, rather than a definite theoretical corpus, and is able to respond to diverse popular demands/currents within anti- neoliberalism. Chávez added multiculturalism to this matrix and opened concrete negotiations with indigenous leaders, especially CONIVE. As Angosto Ferrández explains:

Guaicaipurismo, complement of *bolivarianismo*, neither supposes a dogmatic theoretical corpus (and from here its flexible efficacy) and serves as a source of symbolic and discursive production of political agents tied to the revolutionary project (2008:14).

Angosto Ferrández (2008) argues that *guaicaipurismo* inspires the praxis of government agents working to transform national ideology who, in dialogue with indigenous activists and social actors, also construct and modify this discourse.

Indigenous culture is now officially celebrated as Venezuela’s national patrimony, which reflects a positive shift in relations between indigenous peoples and the state. Intercultural communication and official recognition of the violent oppression of indigenous peoples by the Venezuelan state and society is essential to the development of specific indigenous rights. While important, the revalorisation of indigenous cultures is just a first step towards free indigenous self-determination and development, which must be backed up by official policies and the government’s continuing commitment to intercultural dialogue. Indeed, symbolic recognition is complemented by various

¹¹ It should be noted that Guaicaipuro is one of the three ‘*potencias*’ within the widespread religion of Marialionza and, as such, was an icon of popular significance prior to the state rewriting of history.

constitutional and legal protections for indigenous peoples, stemming from the drafting of the new CRBV. LOPCI represents the first unified and comprehensive indigenous legal policy in Venezuelan history and addresses indigenous rights to education, medicine, territory, customary law, and culture. Yet, Barreto notes that the indigenous policy of the Bolivarian government is often contradictory: indigenous groups have gained many rights, but these have been “inconsistently implemented and do not substitute for a real and effective public policy for indigenous peoples” (2011:263). Official recognition and legal rights has not solved the many problems still facing indigenous peoples in Venezuela, including malnutrition, poor housing, lack of access to medical services and education, economic marginalisation, and racism. Some indigenous groups have even seen conditions worsen in areas such as infant mortality, infectious diseases, malnutrition, illiteracy, school dropout, unemployment, urban migration, and, particularly, ongoing severe environmental destruction in ancestral lands (Barreto, 2011:262).

Territorial demarcation was a central demand for indigenous activists at the Constituent Assembly, because the security of collective lands “constitute[s] indispensable provisions and [are] irreplaceable for permanence, promotion, and full self-regulated (cultural, social, economic and political) participation of the same [indigenous peoples] in regional and national dynamics” (Clarac N., 2003:264). The CRBV stipulated the demarcation of indigenous territories and the establishment of laws to regulate indigenous rights within two years. To accomplish this, the Law of Demarcation and Guarantee of Indigenous Lands and Habitats was established in 2001, which included the creation of the National Commission of Demarcation of the Lands and Habitats of Indigenous Peoples and Communités to develop definitions of criteria and regulate

procedures for the demarcation of indigenous lands (Bello, 2011:39-40). The Commission spanned various ministries and included eight indigenous representatives, as well as organs designated by the President, and stipulated the responsibility of the state for land demarcation (Bello, 2011:40). In 2010, the Commission was reformed by Presidential Decree, which introduced new procedural norms and transferred ministerial control from the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources to MINPI (Bello, 2011:42). These changes were rejected by regional indigenous organisations and CONIVE, largely due to the violation of two principles of the 1999 Constitution: adequate citizen participation and consultation with implicated communities. There were fears that the new norms would conflict with previously established procedures, complicating the national process of demarcation and restricting the power of indigenous representatives to that of mere spokespeople (Bello, 2011:43). A revised Decree was issued in 2011; MINPI retained control of the demarcation process, while the Executive Vice-Presidency was established as overseer of the general process, and the Commission received new functions for recommending policies within demarcated areas on issues of health, education, alimentation, production and housing (Bello, 2011:44). Some groups objected that this revision was also made without consultation and participation, despite the good intentions of the Vice-Presidency in furthering indigenous rights (Bello, 2011:44).

At the time of writing, the National Commission for the Demarcation of Indigenous People's Land and Habitat has yet to complete the process of demarcation. The process is hampered by bureaucratic confusion, lack of funding, and the lack of government support for indigenous communities who bear the onus of proving land rights (Zent et al., 2003:321). Both of these constitutional promises have been widely criticised by

indigenous activists for failing to meet their deadlines. This reveals both the erosive political effect of failing to meet constitutional obligations and the unpreparedness of the state apparatus and the Bolivarian government for indigenous land demarcation (Angosto Ferrández, 2010:104). Nonetheless, indigenous activism has carved out a place in the political discourse of the New Left and continues to shape its emerging political imaginary and practises.

2.2. Indigenous Activism and the New Left in Latin America

In this section, I turn to a comparative analysis of New Left movements in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador to explore how they relate to indigenous activism in Latin America. Indigenous resistance to colonisation has taken many forms throughout Latin American history, including armed resistance, land occupations, escaping from forced labour, use of courts to challenge invaders, and millenarian movements (Benavides Vanegas, 2012; Wright and Hill, 1986; Linder, 1999). These forms of resistance were necessary due to the political exclusion of indigenous peoples and in some cases enabled indigenous inclusion, as in the case of the MAQL (Armed Movement Quintín Lames) which played a pivotal role in the recognition of indigenous rights in the 1991 Colombian Constitution (Benavides Vanegas, 2012). Indigenous activism has profoundly influenced the eruption of New Left movements in Latin America.

The discourse of the New Left involves a re-imagining of colonial history and its noble figures which allows recognition of marginalised peoples, such as indigenous and Afro-descendent peoples, and builds on their “legacy of resistance previously excluded from the official historical record” (Ellner, 2012:107). Twenty-First Century Socialism draws

on the discourse of plurinationality, interculturality, and pluriethnicity advocated by indigenous movements in Ecuador, Bolivia, and Venezuela. Ellner (2012:107) traces the intellectual precepts of Twenty-First Century Socialism to José Carlos Mariátegui (2007), a Peruvian intellectual who advocated a specifically Indo-American socialism based on indigenous collectivism and recognition of the interrelation of race and class under colonialism.

Ramos (2002) traces the development the current indigenous movement to the post-World War II establishment of international conventions to protect human and minority rights, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). The 1947 International Pact for Civil and Political Rights protected minorities' rights, defined as non-dominant groups within a nation who possess distinct ethnic, religious, and linguistic traditions, based on republican assumption of the universal human nature and rights of individuals. Minorities were required to remain loyal to the state. As Ramos notes:

The contradiction inherent in this definition—for loyalty to the state and loyalty to one's tradition are rarely in harmony—raised so many problems and objections that the subcommission abandoned the quest for an all-encompassing definition of 'minority' and concentrated on protective measures (2002:253).

The first congress of the Indians of Venezuela was held in 1969; opening the door to a reconsideration of the role of indigenous peoples in Venezuela. In the 1970s, Venezuela was one of the first countries in Latin America to witness a new form of indigenous activism, which asserted that indigenous groups are ethnic minorities with the right to develop their own socio-cultural identity, without social isolation. This developed in

response to the Venezuelan state's treatment of indigenous peoples as a problem. Clarac explains that indigenous peoples were perceived as an obstacle to modernity that needed to be resolved by:

diluting their indianness in the breast of modern national collectivity. That is to say, the indigenous ('the poor aborigine or indian') should transform themselves into another being (with another culture) in order to aim for and benefit from the condition of Venezuelan citizenry with full rights and responsibilities (2003:260).

Critical to this new movement was the notion that indigenous culture is part of the national patrimony, which belongs to all Venezuelans (Mosonyi, 1972). This led to a new framework in indigenous matters, such as interculturality, self-management, ecodevelopment, and ethnodevelopment, accompanied by a surge in regional and national indigenous movements, land rights, economic organisations, intercultural education, ethnocultural promotion (Clarac N., 2003:261). Practical activities included radio broadcasts in indigenous languages promoted by the Council for the Development of the Southern Zone (CODESUR), indigenous liaisons for this institution and the National Agrarian Institute, bilingual education, rational plans for development and initiatives to revitalise languages and culture. Anthropologists were involved in this but also members of the indigenous population, particularly Guahiro people.

According to Clarac (2001), the rapid increase in indigenous political consciousness in the 1970s and 1980s was due to the intensive development programs in Latin America which threatened indigenous territories with environmental catastrophe and numerous social problems. This allowed them to achieve "a consciousness ever more clear of their interests as social subjects and political actors facing the interests of other social

subjects and political actors (the ‘*criollos*’) within the same nation” (Clarac, 2001:339). Warren and Jackson note that this new movement was characterised by the establishment of national and transnational indigenous organisations aiming to influence wider politics, the strategic use of international human rights law, the introduction of the concept of culture as an important resource, and demands to end marginalisation and poverty (Warren and Jackson, 2002:1). The indigenous movement of the 1990s was also tied to a global environmental discourse in which Amazonians are seen as ‘natural conservationists’ whose “traditional resource management practices embody Western environmentalist values of ecosystem preservation, sustainability, and appropriate technology”, and that their authentic traditions will continue to shape their future use of resources (Conklin, 1997:721). This environmental discourse made indigenous struggles over land more appealing to world audiences and international support released indigenous movements from dependence on local government. National governments were sensitive to foreign perceptions and pressures, lending indigenous movements political capital to demand land rights.

Schaefer (2009) argues that the interrelation of class and ethnic identity as a political strategy in Bolivia and Ecuador began in the corporatist era of the beginning of the twentieth century, rather than being forged in the 1980s and 1990s as a reaction to neoliberal globalising forces. The state co-opted and de-radicalised worker’s and peasant’s unions by inserting them into the state structures, simultaneously increasing the state’s legitimacy as the people’s representative by conceding to certain demands (Schaefer, 2009:402). In Bolivia, indigenous identity was subsumed by *campesino* identity after the 1952 revolution in order to create an integrated nation through assimilation of different cultural-ethnic identities into the category of *mestizo*

campesino (Flesken, 2013:338; Tapia, 2007). Increased education services allowed indigenous intellectuals to form *katarismo*, a movement which promoted revolution by merging class and indigenous interests and became influential in local unions and political mobilisations in the 1970s (Schaefer, 2009:406).

Although the indigenous identity of many unions was obscured by national class discourse, the weakness of state institutions allowed indigenous communities to gain significant control over their territories and local government; they were able to integrate their local political projects into the national modernising project and access state services (Schaefer, 2009:403). Neoliberalism involved dismantling the corporatist structures that allowed this autonomy, slashing social services and reforming land laws that granted autonomy to local groups, prompting indigenous groups to ally with leftist groups to advocate for an inclusive state based on social solidarity (Schaefer, 2009:403).

Indigeneity re-emerged as a powerful way of claiming citizenship and rights in the 1980s and 1990s due to the salience of international indigenous rights movements (Postero, 2013:109). At the same time neoliberal reforms involving the privatisation of mines and resources drained labour union power and created conditions for a new industry based on coca. A new solidarity emerged which defied the imperialism of the US' War on Drugs and increased intercultural awareness by arguing coca was a sacred crop for Andeans. Indigenous movements quickly became disillusioned with multicultural neoliberalism of the 1990s, which recognised cultural rights, but failed to fulfil its promise of native titling and increased indigenous electoral representation.

Faced with economic crisis and privatisation of national resources, a new form of oppositional politics arose that cut across ethnic and class lines and provided an alternative vision of the nation based on nationalisation and participation (Schaefer, 2009:407).

Key concepts used by these indigenous social movements have been interculturality and plurinationalism. Walsh (2009:71) defines a plurinational state as one that officially recognises the long-negated reality of ethnic-cultural diversity within the national population. She distinguishes this from interculturality, a socio-political project that addresses persisting structural racism in politics, economics, and society in order to consolidate an inclusive democracy based on the recognition of historical differences between cultural-ethnic groups, such as indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants, who possess their own institutions and ontologies, logics and knowledges (Walsh, 2009:79-80). This goes further than liberal economic and multicultural reforms introduced in the region in the 1990s which granted local communities more political representation, but in Postero's view "was a top-down effort by the neoliberal state to incorporate indigenous peoples into the national project as responsible and docile neoliberal subjects" (2010:22). In contrast interculturality "allows imagining and opening of pathways towards a different society based on respect, mutual legitimacy, equity, symmetry and equality *where difference is the constitutive element and not merely a simple addition*" (Walsh, 2009:79, my emphasis).

In Ecuador, the creation of CONAIE in 1986 unified pre-existing highland and lowland indigenous organisations CONFENIAE and ECUARUNARI. CONAIE proposed the

sovereignty of indigenous nations, many inclusive material and cultural reforms based on the collective ownership of land and resources, the direct participation of politically and economically marginalised social sectors, and the cultural heterogeneity of Ecuador. As Andolina reveals, it was by:

Drawing on beliefs about the positive aspects of pre-Colombian societies and contemporary criticisms of colonial rule by anticolonial movements, indigenous organisations prioritised ethnic identities of ‘nationalities’ while retaining traditions of class and popular struggles (2003:727).

Jameson (2011:64) argues that the continuing centrality of the indigenous movement in Ecuadorian politics is due to its advocacy of the plurinational state. Plurinationalism represents an alternative to capitalism; it is a rallying point and rationale for the indigenous movement. Specifically, it involves community control of territory through the creation of a parallel political structures, the *comuna* and *cabildo* (local council), which promote popular participation in decision-making, development, and resource extraction (Jameson, 2011:65). More generally plurinationalism is defined as recognition of diversity, transformation of state and hegemonic power, and requires an interculturality or respect for different peoples, which is necessary for true democracy (Becker, 2011:55).

In Ecuador, CONAIE was central to the promotion of plurinationality as an inclusive political concept and advocating for its inclusion in the 2007 Constitution. CONAIE has been involved in large scale protests since the 1990s, which increased awareness of indigenous issues. In response to an agrarian development law in 1994, they organised a nation-wide protest that forced the government to consult with a special commission, composed of 50% indigenous membership (Andolina, 2003:729). CONAIE entered

politics through institutional means, to create participatory democracy, but this also diffused their strength as an organisation. Lucio Gutiérrez was elected president in 2003 and contributed to the demobilisation of the powerful indigenous organisation, CONAIE, with which he formed a coalition predicated on a shared anti-neoliberal agenda and subsequently betrayed by privatising resources and liberalising labour relations (Fernández, 2008:9). Pachakutik declared its independence of this coalition, resulting in the removal of its ministers and the failure of the indigenous movement to affect economic policy implementation (Jameson, 2011:68).

Despite such challenges, Jameson argues that CONAIE's long-term strategy of focusing on plurinationalism has proved successful. He argues that:

Having obtained formal acceptance of the plurinational state, the indigenous movement can use the implications of that acceptance to support policies that respond to indigenous demands and to do so as a 'government' of the nationalities (Jameson, 2011:70).

Widespread support of plurinationalism is reflected in Correa's presidential victory in Ecuador 2006, whose campaign included policies that echoed those of the indigenous movement such as rejection of a free-trade pact with US, removal of a US airbase, and a reassessment of the national debt (Jameson, 2011:69). Correa won a majority of seats in the constituent assembly and built a new movement, *Alianza País*, a diverse grouping of social activists, academics, and NGO leaders (Becker, 2011:49). Acosta, the head of the Constituent Assembly, pledged to work towards *sumak kawsay*, the Kichwa concept of living well. This involves replacing exploitative development models with a system of sustainable and harmonious relations between humanity and nature, and the promotion of cultural diversity (Becker, 2011:50). However, the left has criticised Correa's

government for his liberal, individualistic politics and centralised, even authoritarian command structures, which oppose social movements' desire for collective indigenous rights (Becker, 2011:51).

The case of Bolivia reveals that the use of indigenous imagery in political discourse may be problematic. This is because of essentialising tendencies within identity politics, which obscure diversity within indigenous populations, and the power of the state to represent indigenous peoples. *Movimiento al Socialismo* (MAS) perpetuates a particular and essentialised image of indigeneity, depicted as rural, Quechua, and anti-capitalist, which marginalises other indigenous and non-indigenous populations, creating new social hierarchies based on differential access to state resources (Flesken, 2013:342). The concept of indigeneity is a political tool the meaning of which must be negotiated with the state. The Morales government presents itself as representative of nation and indigenous peoples (Postero, 2013:113). The election of Morales is represented as the return of *pachakuti*, the indigenous era; his informal inauguration took place at the sacred site of *Tiwanaku*, which was “seen to endow Morales’ presidency with symbolic legitimacy and to highlight his historic role as first indigenous president” (Flesken, 2013:343).

Indigeneity has been transformed from a language of resistance into “a language of governance, a legitimating discourse for the state, *and also* a language of rights, employed by citizens demanding access to state resources” (Postero, 2013:114). Contrary to scholarly expectations, “the politicization of indigeneity has not achieved a clearer demarcation of ethnic categories; if anything, their newly-found political

relevance may have increased, rather than decreased, the contestation of boundaries” (Flesken, 2013:334). The concept of indigeneity is open to interpretation and use by diverse indigenous political actors, both rural and urban, those with more or less access to state resources. This ongoing negotiation is critical to unsettling ever more dominant state models of indigeneity (Postero, 2013:116). Most unsettling is the ever-widening gap between the political recognition and the practical attainment of indigenous rights. As Flesken notes “Indigeneity may have changed politically and sociologically but not with regard to the economic reality” (2013:346). Indigenous peoples in Latin America have generally experienced a standstill or even decline in their quality of life, especially in health, education, and continuing violation of collective land rights (Clarac N., 2003:262). The autonomy of Latin American indigenous movements has been challenged by their vulnerability to co-optation by governments. These issues will be considered more fully in Chapter Three.

Indigenous proposals for plurinationality have been interpreted by elites as “threatening state sovereignty, *mestizo* nationalism, and market based development” (Andolina, 2003:728). Proponents of plurinationalism promote the political-economic inclusion of historically marginalised groups to redress systematic discrimination and benefit all citizens without creating a state within a state or granting undue special rights (Becker, 2011:54). The next section examines the processes by which indigenous peoples in Venezuela gained constitutional recognition through political activism. This reveals the concrete strategies of indigenous peoples and continuing challenges represented by political-economic elites.

2.3. The Populist New Left: Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador

As I have shown, indigenous activism has played a central role in recent Latin American politics and *guaiçapurismo* has become an important strand in the Bolivarian government's discourse and commitment to promoting a pluriethnic society. The issues of interculturality and decolonisation connect to many debates emerging in mainstream Latin American politics. These New Left governments have strong support among various indigenous and non-indigenous civil society organisations and social movements, leading commentators to designate this phenomenon as populist and nationalistic. This critique risks diminishing the importance of the agency of the people in challenging neoliberal policies and establishing more direct forms of democracy. In this section, I position indigenous political movements and the populist New Left within the broader intellectual debates about neoliberalism and democracy to show the centrality of these concepts to the construction of new political imaginaries in Latin America.

In the 1980s and 1990s, foreign debt crises precipitated broad neoliberal economic reforms undertaken by Latin American governments and in line with the Washington Consensus¹². These reforms aimed to reduce the economic role of state, increase the power of markets, and create macro-economic stability by liberalising trade and capital flows, privatising state assets, deregulating markets and reforming labour relations.

¹² The term 'Washington Consensus' was coined in 1989 by economist John Williamson. It refers to neoliberal economic policy directives formulated by the Washington D.C.-based organisations, such as US Treasury Department, World Bank, and IMF, which are imposed on underdeveloped nations facing economic crisis. It may also refer more generally to market-oriented or neoliberal approach to economic matters.

Despite strengthening exports, foreign investment and multiculturalism, these reforms also increased unemployment and labour informality, weakened national production, caused ecological devastation, and increased poverty and inequality. The consequences of global neoliberalism may be seen in chronic-structural unemployment, flexibilisation and precarisation of labour, feminisation of poverty, subordinate migration, displacement of neo-colonial wars, growing inequality, increasing cultural discrimination (ghettoisation/walls), acceleration of ecological devastation and increasing concentration and oligopolisation of private property (Contreras, 2007:211).

While recognising that New Left movements in Latin America are currently more successful in rhetoric than practice, Escobar (2010:6) characterises the counter-hegemonic processes as generally involving the deepening of participative democracy, turning away from neoliberal forms of political-economy, fostering pluricultural and plurinational states, and establishing more ecologically sustainable development models. New governments generally reinstate the importance of the state in economy (redistribution), renationalisation of public companies, especially energy resources, and changes to social imaginaries and desires, such as individualism and consumerism (2010:8).

In Venezuela and Bolivia, strong majorities elected leftist parties into government in 1998 and 2005 respectively, while in Ecuador, Pachakutik became a powerful presence on the political landscape that has since declined. New governments have established constituent assemblies and new constitutions to revitalise and re-found democracy. Cameron (2009) argues that the diversity of left-wing governments in Latin America is

due to the particular circumstances in which they arise, but in general are possible due to disillusionment with neoliberalism, distrust of liberal democracy, and waning US influence. As Beasley-Murray, Cameron, and Hershberg explain:

The current 'left turn' in Latin America is best described as a multiplicity of disparate efforts to reopen or re-found the constitutional order or social pact. It is more than another of the swings of the political pendulum for which the region is notorious (2009:320).

These New Left governments possess many characteristics in common. All three Latin American governments are led by charismatic leaders who were elected with the support of popular social movements reacting to the economic inequality created by neo-liberal reforms mandated by IMF, the privatisation of natural resources and the political exclusion of the popular classes. As Ellner (2012:98-99) notes, these three nations promote radical democratic principles of direct participation, incorporation of social movements, public works by local councils, strengthening the national executive, and opposition to liberal democratic institutions. Radical democracy incorporates majority rule in legislative decision-making, ensured by referendums and recall elections, in opposition to the liberal democratic principle of consensus between governing and opposing parties. Instead, a strong national executive writes the political agenda without input from the opposition and presents it to the public for approval as an all-or-nothing proposal. Radical democracy is predicated on the replacement of representative institutions by direct participation of the people, reflected in the abolition of National Venezuelan Congress, the pinnacle of representative democracy, by referendum in 1999, and creation of National Constituent Assembly (Ellner, 2008:61). The Assembly approved a new Constitution supported the creation of a National Assembly as the primary instrument of legislative power.

Such political movements constitute a ‘New Left,’ which draws on socialist and indigenous models of political-economy, rejects free-market capitalism, and is known as Socialism of the Twenty-First Century. Twenty-First Century Socialism is based in a strong moral and ethical commitment to social well-being and solidarity, drawn largely from communitarian ideals of Catholic and Protestant theology (Ellner, 2012:106). The New Left is only loosely based on previous socialisms from Europe. Ellner (2012:101) distinguishes this New Left from other communist and social-democratic nations by its electoral democracy, party competition, lack of vanguard working class party and the intensity of political conflict. As we shall see in the next section, Twenty-First Century Socialism also draws explicitly from indigenous forms of political-economic organisation and the history of indigenous resistance.

Venezuela experienced a political-economic crisis in the 1980s and 1990s due to falling oil prices, inefficiency, and corruption which reduced the ability of the state to effectively respond to the population’s economic demands and led to the decline of major political parties, AD and COPEI (Lander, 2007:67; Escobar, 2010:13).¹³ To manage the economic crisis, the state instigated a series of neoliberal reforms in the 1980s: opening the oil industry to foreign investment, privatising the telephone company CANTV, and slashing social spending. This exacerbated existing socio-economic inequality, poverty, and the political exclusion of popular sectors,

¹³ The discovery of large oil reserves in Maracaibo in the early twentieth century led to a centralised society in which the State and its political elites played a central economic and political role (Betancourt, 1979; Lander, 2007:66).

contributing to a significant loss of legitimacy for the state. The high levels of political disillusionment among the population are reflected in the *Caracazo* of 1989, the failed coup attempt of 1992, and the ousting of President Carlos Andrés Pérez on corruption charges.

In 1998, Hugo Frías Chávez was elected president with a strong multi-party alliance attracted by his party's plan for radical social, political, and economic changes. Indigenous activists glimpsed the possibility of greater rights and initially displayed strong support for *chavismo*. Chávez's Bolivarian Revolution promises to reverse ingrained socio-economic exclusion by deepening direct, participative, and protagonistic democracy through increased involvement of social organisations and popular sectors in policy decision-making and project execution. To achieve this, the Venezuelan state has needed to construct instruments of popular participation, such as communal councils and cooperatives, due to the lack of existing structures. The role of the state continues to be important and is based on its historical role as a centralised distributor of the oil wealth that is the rightfully property of its citizens (Coronil, 1997). Rosen (2013) characterises *chavismo* or the Bolivarian movement along four dimensions: social welfare policies (*misiones*); participatory structures of communes and cooperatives; foreign policy of regional cooperation; and successful electoral machinery that returned Chávez to the presidency. This has also been accompanied by the nationalisation of the oil industry and other primary industries. Chávez's rejection of a working class vanguard, partly caused by the weakened and informal nature of the Venezuelan working class under neoliberalism, has opened up space for social movements representing more marginalised groups to work with the state to promote change (Ellner, 2012:106,109). As in Bolivia, this has led to the heterogeneous, often

conflictive but also productive, composition of government supporters, questioning the concept of the unity of the 'multitude' of many groups with diverse interests (Ellner, 2012:109).

New Left governments have established constituent assemblies as an attempt to re-found democracy in recognition of the fact that neoliberal reforms were undemocratically constitutionalised through trade agreements (Cameron, 2009:340). Chávez used constituent assemblies to bypass the executive branch and congresses that he could not control to draft a new constitution (Cameron, 2009:342). This may be interpreted as the power of the constituent rising up against the constituted power of the state. In jail after the failed coup, Chávez decided to use constituent power against the constituted government rather than attempt to succeed within the broken party system, winning the election on the promise of a constituent assembly which could dissolve all forms of representative democracy (Cameron, 2009:340). This represents a tension in liberal democracy, where the people (*demos*) are the source of all legitimate authority but authority is immediately consolidated in constituted power of the state. The abuse of power by the majority is not the central dilemma in Latin America, rather the perception is that an elite minority dominates political institutions and undermines the will of the poor majority (Cameron, 2009:340). However, the creation of new political systems linked directly to the Presidential Committee may also serve to reinforce the centrality and power of the state.

In Ecuador, constitutional reform has been far more directly controlled by grass-roots organisations than Venezuela, where the state retained control of the process (Andolina,

2003:732). This is reflected in the increasing prevalence of people's assemblies in Ecuador since 1997 and the Constitutional Assembly of 1997-1998, which was the result of the government's legitimacy crisis and ousting of President Abdalá Bucaram in February of 1997 (Andolina, 2003:721). Effectively forming "counter-public spaces, these assemblies empowered their participants to debate issues openly, challenge state authority and demand immediate accountability" (Andolina, 2003:736). These spaces, like the communal councils in Venezuela, are alternatives to the liberal democratic institutions of electoral representation and majority rule. Unlike Venezuela, these assemblies represent grass-roots organisation in opposition to a hostile state, rather than public spaces created by the state for the people. The Ecuadorian state's attempt to control and defuse the proposed Constituent Assembly in 1997 by using a universal voting criteria was thwarted by an alternative Constituent Assembly organised by CONAIE which raised issues of diversity, accountability, and participation (Andolina, 2003:742). Accompanied by protests and the election of Pachakutik as the third largest force in the official assembly, these issues were written into the Constitutional draft. As in Venezuela, Ecuadorian popular movements sought to complement liberal democratic institutions with direct participation, rather than completely displacing them. Although the political power of Pachakutik has been undermined slightly, I argue that the significance of social movements in shaping politics is further embodied in the 2008 Constitution, promulgated by President Correa, which granted ecosystem rights, civil union for homosexual couples, and advanced indigenous rights (see Partlow and Küffner, 2008).

The emergence of more direct forms of democracy in Latin America has been criticised by political observers on the Right for attacking neoliberalism and promoting a deceitful

form of populism. Even conservative left-wing commentators, such as Castañeda (2005), minimise the importance of anti-neoliberal agendas in Latin America, claiming such objectives are unfeasible and that more achievable goals should be prioritised. He acknowledges that Chávez expresses a “certain popular sentiment against exclusion, racism and impoverishment” but does not consider him truly left-wing (Castañeda, 2005:141). Castañeda (2006) disingenuously posits that policies founded in participatory democracy, social justice, wealth redistribution and national sovereignty over resources, are incompatible with macroeconomic stability, governmental efficacy, creation of wealth and international trade. Further, he distinguishes between populist and social-democratic governments among Latin America’s left, which creates, as Cameron (2009:333) notes, a false dichotomy pitting closed-minded, strident, irresponsible and statist populists against reasonable, modern, open-minded, democratic and cooperative (with the US) social democrats.

Cameron (2009) demonstrates that this dichotomy obscures the role of indigenous movements and the failure of neoliberalism. This narrative was put forward initially as part of a neoliberal strategy to link markets and democracy. Legitimacy is stripped from populists, who are derided as illiberal and anti-market, and rewards the less radical social democrats who maintain a favourable stance towards neoliberal capitalism and its beneficiaries in US and Europe. This construction is implicitly grounded in liberal ideas, which casts the left’s rejection of representative democracy and free markets as ‘bad’ and social democrats, who only want to regulate markets and protect popular interests within existing government institutions (Cameron, 2009:339). According to Cameron:

The left is most likely to be radical, personalist, even militarist where the party system has collapsed, where mechanisms of representation (including clientelism) have broken down, where courts are held in contempt by the public, where corruption and cronyism are rampant, and where legislative institutions are seen as ineffectual or worse (2009:339).

Populism is not only a left-wing tradition, it is a “Janus-faced tradition that is never unambiguously reactionary or progressive” (Cameron, 2009:334). Chávez was a populist, whose radical nationalism has military origins and was elected as President following a failed coup attempt, a personalistic leader who uses state power to address inequality on behalf of a broad population base, who attacks the old ‘oligarchy’ and uses popular mobilisation under state guidance against the opposition. In contrast, Morales was swept to power by grassroots indigenous movements to address socio-economic and ethnic inequalities (Cameron, 2009:334). These social movements flourish in similar circumstances to populism (collapse of party system and weak institutions), but this system relies on new social actors rather than the relationship between the people and the populist leader (Cameron, 2009:335). Social movements are often based on horizontal organisational structures and autonomy, rather than the patron-client relations, which characterise populism (Cameron, 2009:336). As Beasley-Murray, Cameron and Hershberg note:

Dichotomising the Left into radical populists and social democrats conveniently reproduces the old cleavage between revolution and reform within the new context of democracy and globalisation (2009:324).

Social democracy builds on liberal institutions while populism rejects them in favour of the will of the people. Populism has been criticised by those who consider the people irrational and easily manipulated, an Other opposed to modern rationality whose

political involvement threatens representative institutions and must be silenced (Motta, 2011:29). In academic models predicated on liberal normatives, the people are the enemy of institutionalised democracy and their political agency is negated (Motta, 2011:30). Populism is associated with import-substitution industrialisation, a charismatic leader with mass followers, a discourse focused on *el pueblo* and a particular support base (Motta, 2011:29). There are two views of the Bolivarian government as populist; one sees the masses as an illiberal force and *chavismo* as negative and authoritarian due to the lack of party structures and liberal institutions, the other view avoids these liberal biases and sees populism as “a historically contingent set of practices within a political project that is under construction” (Motta, 2011:31). In the former view, populism may be defined as direct linkages between supporters and a charismatic leader, leading to a highly uninstitutionalised party formation, based on a democratic discourse that promises to exercise the will of the people against corrupt elites (Hawkins, 2003:1138-1139; Jansen, 2011:84). Indeed, the charismatic nature of populist leaders, such as Chávez, has led to charges of personalism that some scholars perceive as an impediment to the development of party organisation (Ellner, 2005:169). *Chavismo’s* tendency to create parallel participatory mechanisms has often bypassed traditional representative democratic institutions and principles, such as “the separation of powers, pluralism, and accountability”, although the people have embraced the rhetoric of popular participation (de la Torre, 2013:41).

Hawkins argues that Chávez’s democratic discourse has paradoxically led to a lessening of the rights of minorities and the popular will may “undermine the institutions of government that provide checks and balances and ensure democratic contestation” (2003:1140). For example, Chávez was an important driving force in the early years of

government decision-making within the party and even created the Bolivarian Circles, as a base level civil society organisation, which ultimately answers to the President (Hawkins, 2003:1151-1153). *Chavistas* have also shown a *laisse faire* attitude with democratic regulations: using control of electoral rules in the Constituent Assembly in 1999 and employing state resources to support the Constitutional Referendum, curtailing private media and calling out journalists who published negative accounts of the Revolution (Hawkins, 2003:1156). After Venezuelan opposition parties united in 2008 to form the Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD), Capriles became a potential threat to the government and Chávez and Maduro have both mobilised supporters against the opposition in the street (de la Torre, 2013:41)

However, this minimalist view of *chavismo* as populist often ignores substantial political processes and delegitimises the experiences and knowledge of the popular classes (Motta, 2011:32). This critique of populism relies on a liberal conceptualisation that the hierarchical power relations of representative democracy and a market economy are the natural and logical means of organising society, which positions popular subjects as the Other, who is then silenced and ignored (Motta, 2011:28-29). But those commentators who reject the long-standing association of populism with “demagoguery and opportunism” note the potential for populist movements to rise up during moments of social, economic, and political crises in order to bring about social change (Ellner, 2005:160-161). As Motta explains, distrust of liberal politics and political parties in Venezuela is a “rational and logical response” to political exclusion and corruption under *puntofijismo* and calls for direct democracy stems from their struggle for basic rights in based on local community organisation and liberation theology (Motta, 2011:36). Motta

criticises those constructions of populism, such as those of Hawkins and Casteñeda, where Chávez's populism is dismissed as undemocratic and semiauthoritarian due to its lack of liberal institutionalisation and party regulations and liberal fears of "mass mobilization and direct, participatory political practices" (Motta, 2011:31). She claims that popular-class agency is diminished and reduced to a manipulation by the elite, a conceptualisation that has contributed to discussions of power relations and politics in Latin America (Motta, 2011:30). Motta (2011:32) further argues that this position neglects the transformation of state/society relations in Venezuela and the role of popular classes who actively participate in *Chavismo*. In her view, Chávez's discourse directly challenges the "traditional exclusionary dynamics of public politics in which elites provide solutions and "lead" the passive masses", instead proposing the creation of a political discourse among equals where the "masses become subjects capable of articulating and participating in the development of solutions to the inequalities of Venezuelan society" (Motta, 2011:33). Clearly, right-wing commentators use the term populism to dismiss the agency of indigenous peoples and popular classes as irrational and easily led by a charismatic, deceitful leader. However, indigenous peoples and the popular class are demonstrating their political consciousness and will by agitating for equality and democracy.

Similarly, in Bolivia, peasant and indigenous peoples unified to create interethnic social organisations to represent their interests and negotiate with the government (Tapia, 2007:49). This political discourse merged class and ethnic interests to protest the privatisation of national water and gas resources, which was seen as the exploitation of Bolivian patrimony by transnational corporations (Flesken, 2013:341). Evo Morales' MAS government won the national election in 2005 by promising to establish a

participatory democracy including (mostly indigenous) social movements, to reverse neoliberal policies, and to promote national sovereignty free of US imperialism and capitalism, including the production of coca and control of natural resources (Postero, 2010:24). Tendencies towards the nationalisation of resources and political recognition of workers' unions have been present since 1952 (Tapia, 2007:57), but this new trend reflected the importance of indigeneity as a novel basis for nationalism and a way for the state to legitimise its actions. Morales' party includes often productive tensions between several heterogeneous tendencies: an idealised image of communitarian Andean indigeneity, which is seen as a solution to problems of capitalism; an old Marxism committed to creating a state strong enough to redistribute wealth and protect social movements; and a populist movement that demands a radical redefinition of traditional elitist political system (Postero, 2010:25-26).

In Ecuador, indigenous organisation CONAIE sought an alternative to neoliberalism and increased indigenous participation in government, forming a successful electoral coalition in 1996 known as Pachakutik (Plurinational Unity Movement for a New Country), with other social movements, such as women's rights, human rights, and labour movements. This social movement alliance coalesces around CONAIE's ideology of a plurinational state: "a bottom-up, participatory system rooted in consensus, cultural and social diversity, protection of the environment and human rights, and development that meets basic needs and generates self-sufficiency" (Andolina, 2003:732). Social movements organised wide-spread protests in 1997 which were influential in ousting President Abdalá Bucaram for corruption and his hard-line neoliberal reforms, and campaigning for a constituent assembly. Elected members of Pachakutik established people's assemblies to oversee local government and participate

in development projects (Andolina, 2003:730). This put CONAIE in a position to negotiate with the government, but it proved difficult to apply a unified communitarian economy within a partisan system. As Jameson explains:

Thus the CONAIE had moved from developing a conceptual framework for a plurinational economy to being a player at the national level, negotiating on specific concessions, but the increase in its power and credibility had been accompanied by a loss of coherence (2011:67).

The radical democratic revolutions in these three countries have experienced gradual but constant radicalisation, using political momentum to introduce new reforms to deepen the revolutionary process (Ellner, 2012:102). As I have shown, Latin America is undergoing profound changes in its political-economic imaginary, which constitutes the regional context in which my study of an intercultural Hiwi lifeworld takes place. My thesis contributes to the debates about plurinationalism and interculturality that are inextricably intertwined with ongoing indigenous activism and the rise of the New Left.

2.4. Conclusions

I began this chapter with a discussion of the participation of indigenous activists in the drafting of Venezuela's New Constitution in 1999, which recognised the specific, collective rights of indigenous peoples, and in the revalorisation of indigenous history and culture. This process was opposed by conservative elements in the Venezuelan government, but eventually led to the state's recognition of CONIVE as a legitimate body for indigenous politics. I then positioned this event within regional politics by considering the increasingly important role of indigenous activism in Latin American politics and the rise of the New Left. I have shown that the rise of Leftist social

movements and political parties in the area draws heavily on concepts from indigenous activism, such as plurinationalism and interculturality. I have argued that these principles underpin the popular support of New Left movements that promote racial equality and inclusive democracy. I then argued that this recent recognition of cultural, social, and historical differences opens up political and legislative space for the re-imagining of Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela as pluralistic societies with participatory democracies and economies based in solidarity. I turned to a comparative analysis of the role of indigenous activism in the New Left movements of these three countries to highlight the centrality of a decolonising logic to political debates in the region. I then considered various right-wing critiques of the New Left as populist, which often devalue the agency and political consciousness of indigenous peoples and the popular classes by dismissing them as irrational and easily led. In fact, indigenous peoples are heavily invested in achieving rights and redressing their historical marginalisation in politics and economics. This chapter functions as an introduction to the regional politics of Latin America and the role of indigenous activism in the emergence of social and political movements advocating intercultural and potentially decolonial political-economies. I have provided a broad context in which to position my ethnography of Hiwi lifeworlds and my thesis contributes to debates about these movements and the political-economic imaginaries that they promote.

3. Hiwi Community Politics in the Age of *Chavismo*: Communal Councils, Indigenous Politics, and Polarisation

The Bolivarian government expresses a commitment to constructing a participatory and protagonistic democracy to better serve a pluriethnic and multicultural Venezuelan society.¹⁴ The concepts underpinning this vision for the future remain theoretically open and discursively flexible, requiring further definition through practical actions (García-Guadilla, 2008:129; Angosto Ferrández, 2008:14). In this chapter, I ask how Hiwi people navigate the intercultural space of local and national politics, and how do Hiwi people maintain their own political philosophy and practices given the introduction of communal councils that promote the Bolivarian government's notion of participatory democracy? Do these political structures reflect indigenous principles of autonomy, debate, and consensus as Bolivarian officials claim? Or do communal councils and government ministries for indigenous affairs represent the flattening of a potential intercultural political system aimed at decolonisation?

To answer these questions, I describe a continuing Hiwi tradition of fluid political organisation where leadership is based on consensus, respect, and personal relationships. This particularly indigenous mode of socio-political organisation exists within wider networks of interethnic interactions and the changing political structures of the nation-state. I compare this particularly Hiwi form of politics at the community level and draw a comparison with the 'New Geometry of Power' at the local level: communal

¹⁴ Protagonistic (*protagonista*) is used in Bolivarian discourse and policy. It refers to the leading role played by the people in the Bolivarian political imaginary.

councils. I examine the Bolivarian political project as a product of indigenous activism and an imaginary of indigeneity. Finally, I discuss the possibilities for indigenous self-determination within these new political structures on both national and local levels. To advance my argument, I draw on the work of anthropologist Angosto Ferrández (2008; 2010) and political scientists who study Venezuelan politics, including Sara Motta (2011), Dario Azzellini (2013), María García-Guadilla (2008), and Ellner (2008, 2012, 2013).

On the local level, the Venezuelan government's radical democratic project introduces new political structures to promote its core principles of horizontal decision-making and direct democracy. Known as the New Geometry of Power, these structures include communal councils (*consejos comunales*) that decide community issues at a local level and communes (*comunas*) that are formed from aggregated communal councils. The government discourse links this political model to the democratic and consensus-based political organisation attributed to Amerindian indigenous peoples, but relies on a simplistic and homogenising image of indigenous politics. I argue that communal councils do not reflect the historical diversity and complexity of indigenous political systems by comparing this model with existing political structures in Hiwi communities where I conducted research. The imposition of a state-sanctioned standard form of political organisation is problematic for various reasons. The introduction of a political system based on foreign political concepts fundamentally contradicts the state's constitutional commitment to indigenous self-determination and the preservation of indigenous social institutions. This model may increase indigenous dependence on state structures and contribute to political polarisation within indigenous communities. The

fluid and personal nature of Hiwi social organisation offers a potential alternative to oppositional politics and dependence on the state.

At the national level, indigenous activists and civil society organisations, such as CONIVE, have supported Chávez since his 1998 electoral campaign, because they glimpsed the revolution's potential for gaining rights (Angosto Ferrández, 2008:18; Mansutti Rodríguez, 2000:84). This endorsement was repaid by the Bolivarian government with the constitutional guarantee of indigenous rights to territory, culture, language, medicine, political-economic and social self-determination. Constitutional rights are accompanied by the symbolic valorisation of indigenous peoples in government discourse and the creation of new laws and governmental departments to promote indigenous self-development. Some indigenous actors have joined the government in this refounding of the nation, gaining political capital in their communities. However, this process may contribute to the co-opting of the autonomy of indigenous organisations and activism by the state, leading to increased dependency and centralisation.

3.1. Hiwi Socio-Political Organisation

Hiwi social and political organisation is based on complex kinship relations and personal political alliances. The earliest ethnographic sources describe the primary unit of social organisation for Hiwi people as the immediate family: a husband and wife and their children (Wilbert, 1957:97). The nuclear family continues to the most basic social unit, reflected in the organisation of Hiwi communities into separate residences for each couple and their children, with the possible addition of an elderly grandparent. A group

of closely related individuals forms the centre of a local band associated with a community in which most members are affinal or consanguinal relatives. Morey and Metzger characterise the local band as:

a group based in large part on classificatory, irregular kinship ties, economic needs and opportunities, and fluid and informal social relationships (highly individualized and personal social ties formed between and among individuals and nuclear families). It is, then, a mobile, flexible unit; and the relationships between the members are multiple, complex, and continually changing (1973:86).

Morey and Metzger (1973) describe this band as being loosely affiliated with a territory, but subject to migration due to game depletion, shifting cultivation, or factionalism. Hiwi people were historically nomadic or semi-nomadic, and this characteristic mobility was key to the group's survival during centuries of colonisation. Wilbert (1994:164) suggests that Hiwi mobility is grounded in the lack of strict territoriality and the belief that all Hiwi people are related that allows individuals to form new alliances wherever they go. The communities I work with have been established for many years and were sedentary, apart from occasional hunting, fishing, or foraging trips to the forest. Membership is fluid and structured by personal and kinship relationships within the community: members may leave for better economic opportunities, marriage, or divorce.

Wilbert states that the Hiwi have no "institutional chieftainship," but in every village there is a headman with limited authority, whose status is enhanced if he is also a shaman (1957:97). This is true today. Pedro and Clemente are the founders and *capitanes* of their communities and their status as healers contributes to the respect they

are accorded. Political leaders gain prestige through social and shamanic knowledge, but this power depends on the consent and support of other community members. Pedro and Clemente lead through consensus and prestige, guiding community decisions through informal discussion and rhetoric. Men are more likely to speak at community assemblies, while women discuss issues privately with their husbands. This is changing as women become more involved in community politics, with some women even becoming *capitanes*. For example, I observed women participating in an informal meeting at Santo Rosario prior to the 2013 general elections. Hiwi women are often present when outsiders, such as I, visit the communities, but they usually remain in the background with the children and allow the men to greet and engage with visitors. Women do, however, actively listen to these conversations, occasionally interrupting the men to provide information or correct them in some matter. During a meeting at the Indigenous University of Venezuela (UIV), one female student addressed the meeting as a representative of the dozen or so women who attend the facility. Due to the focus on equal and direct participation at this meeting, each indigenous ethnic group was represented by a spokesperson, who welcomed the visitors on behalf of the others. These observations reveal that Hiwi women, and indigenous women in general, participate in community discussions, either by contributing to conversations with their husbands or by directly participating at public meetings. For Hiwi people, community life is an ongoing negotiation among equals with differing views, where the opinions of well-respected and knowledgeable men and women carry extra weight.

Hiwi political organisation reveals many characteristics in common with other Amazonian peoples. Autonomous individuals participate in an egalitarian politics and must be somehow forged into a collective whole working towards similar ends. Overing

(2000) describes the role of Amazonian leaders in maintaining high morale among the community through the use of humour. This is significant because community leaders cannot order or coerce people, rather, they choose to join and follow a leader. Overing argues that:

it is precisely through these ludic skills that the leader *enables* collectivity among an otherwise vehemently anarchic people. It is the leader who, in large part through his skills for merriment, for jesting, clowning and dancing, provides the impetus, and even possibility, for these people to fulfil their desire of collective togetherness, or union (2000:67).

For Hiwi people, the political is embedded in everyday personal relationships. The informality and fluidity of Hiwi politics is compatible with the concepts of pluriethnicity and plurinationalism. These notions are an expression of indigenous worldviews and forms of political organisations, put forward by indigenous activists as an alternative to liberal democracy. In this view, the life of the individual is closely related to the life of community, decisions are made by discussion and consensus of all adults determined by shared culture, but also by indigenous forms of decision-making. Schaefer characterises this as:

a shared process of deliberate initiative through which the community decides on how to organise the joint process of economic, social, and cultural (re-production)—a shared surpassing of the actual marked by foresight and intentionality that holds the community together in a political project and thus puts it into a positive relationship with the future (2009:401).

For Schaefer, indigenous activism is not the politicisation of ethnic or cultural identities, but rather, the “extension of communal political concerns to the level of a state which,

for good or ill, was the site on which the nature of local engagements with modernity must be contested” (2009:401). This activism has driven the development of participatory structures, such as the communal councils, which are linked to indigenous self-determination in government discourse.

I observed this indigenous form of decision-making on an interethnic level at the Indigenous University of Venezuela. A community leader and his wife had travelled from a Sanema community to speak to the organisers and students about a new hydroelectric dam that the government was planning to build in their territory. The meeting was held in the evening within the circular confines of the main building, underneath colourful murals depicting indigenous men and women in traditional dress and body paint. Students and teachers sat around the edge of the open space on woven palm mats. The man spoke first in his own language, followed by his wife, while a young student translated their statements in to Spanish. They petitioned the university for help in blocking the government’s planned development, asking why a former student of the university had agreed to the dam during the government’s consultation with indigenous communities. In their view, this student had no right to agree to the dam on their behalf and they had not given their consent. Following their impassioned speeches, a representative of each indigenous ethnic group, Hiwi, Piaroa, Sanema, Yekwana and Pemon, spoke to the meeting, welcoming the visitors and pledging their support. Following this, the Sanema man and his wife thanked the university and expressed hopes of resolving the issue with their support. José Korta, the Jesuit priest who helped found the university, also spoke of supporting the claims of the visiting couple, before taking the opportunity to read and explain parts of the New Constitution concerning citizenship as it relates to indigenous peoples. This meeting crystallised for

me the egalitarianism of indigenous political organisation, where each group is represented and everyone has the right to speak. The individuals involved are autonomous, but bound by the collective formed by the university and their compassion for others to reach a consensus that is favourable to everyone. This episode also shows how indigenous actors engage with new political instruments, such as the CRBV, in order to assert their rights to territory and consultation. Thus, state structures are not perceived as entirely an imposition, and may indeed be used to further the purposes of indigenous actors, although this process may be shaped by indigenous forms of political organisation.

Hiwi people now engage directly with Venezuelan state structures through communal councils and government employment at both the national and regional level. New institutions, constitutional protections, and political representation are perceived by Hiwi individuals as a radical break with the past, when they had no rights as citizens or political representation: many lacked official documentation, which complicated border-crossings, were forced to migrate to find employment, had no access to education or health services, and were excluded from engaging with the political-economic realm due to the long-standing clientelistic relations under the *Punto Fijo* pact.¹⁵

Before indigenous people didn't have any rights, no identity papers, no way to access benefits from the government...Before they had no right to speak out, express themselves, they [*criollos*] only wanted indigenous people for

¹⁵ This pact signed by the three major parties, Acción Democrática, COPEI, and Unión Republicana Democrática in 1958 to protect Venezuela's budding democracy, which ultimately restricted political power to the two major parties, who formed a bipartite system (see Hellinger, 2003).

their labour. This was a terrible time; they paid indigenous workers barely enough to buy food. — Pedro

The Hiwi communities where my main participants make their homes are located on the National Highway just north of the regional city of Puerto Ayacucho. These communities are easily accessible to government officials and social welfare programs. Hiwi individuals engage with human representatives of the political sphere, experience political discourse through the media, and participate in electoral politics. Many younger Hiwi people are employed by state and national governments, or receive social welfare, university stipends, and small loans. This represents a huge increase in indigenous integration into the economic and political national life due to indigenous mobilisation over the last three decades. Hiwi people are often keen to engage with these new political and economic realities to improve their situation, taking advantage of government social welfare programs.

These communities access government funding for local projects using the communal councils, which greatly increases their ability to direct their own economic development and improve living conditions. The elected representatives of each communal council petition the National Commission with plans for community projects that are decided collectively, such as an aqueduct to bring underground water to Santo Rosario, which suffers from lack of water in summer when the river is low. This bureaucratic process is lengthy, but if approved, the money is deposited in a communal bank account and the community purchases the necessary materials and labour. Shalom received government funding to buy building materials and construct new houses for the community. Indigenous communities may provide their own labour according to indigenous work practices, such as the *únuma*. This indicates that Hiwi people engage with new political

and economic possibilities under the Bolivarian Revolution, although this process is tempered by Hiwi ways of organising.

Indigenous endorsement of the government is explicitly tied to the promise of the government to provide houses and services, protect their rights and provide them with a dignified life (*vida digna*). Pedro explicitly acknowledges the relation between the recent availability of government resources and indigenous support:

Indigenous people are like children who will follow you around, happy and playing, because you give them a sweet (*caramelo*). — Pedro

Under the Bolivarian government, economic investment in indigenous development has been unprecedented. Extensive social welfare policies aim to improve literacy, public health services, education, housing, and security. These policies are particularly appreciated by indigenous peoples who have long suffered due to a lack of basic services. In Santo Rosario, Mission Vivienda has committed to building 15 new houses and another program provides a Communal Kitchen to which the government supplies ingredients and provides a salary for the cooks. Aid has also taken the form of funding for community development projects and manufactured goods, such as boat motors, washing machines, refrigerators, and generators. Hiwi people desire these material benefits and are adept at accessing them through new political structures, such as social welfare programs, while maintaining Hiwi ways of organising life in the community. Indeed, these structures may reinforce the political dominance of some families. In Santo Rosario, many of the elected positions for engagement with the government are filled with members of the founding family; Pedro's wife Hilda works in the communal kitchen and his son-in-law Miguel is the health promoter, who engages

with the government to organise community health issues, such as pesticide sprayings to control the malarial mosquito population.

3.2. The New Geometry of Power: Communal Councils

In Venezuela, the construction of a more direct and participatory democracy began with the creation of community or civil society organisations. In 1999, Technical Water Roundtables were established to organise the use of shared water mains among neighbouring communities (de la Torre, 2013:31). Further measures were introduced to promote direct participation among the popular classes; in 2001, Chávez supported the creation of Bolivarian Circles, groups of seven to fifteen people who were encouraged to organise supporters, engage with Bolivarian ideology, mediate on local issues, and perpetuate the revolutionary process (de la Torre, 2013:31). A few years later, the Circles reached a membership of 2.2 million and, until their decline in 2004, represented one of the most important manifestations of *chavismo*, reflected in their central role in protesting Chávez's temporary removal from office in 2002 (Hawkins and Hansen, 2006:103). In 2002, the Bolivarian government set up Urban Land Committees to provide people living in self-built dwellings in poor areas with collective land rights (de la Torre, 2013:31). Approximately 6,000 committees had been founded by 2006 (García-Guadilla, 2007:48). The aim of these organisations was to promote direct participation in community affairs, shape new political subjectivities, and advance the Bolivarian Revolution. Although the success of these objectives has been debated, they have performed important work in the community (Ramirez, 2005; Spanakos, 2011).

The Bolivarian project of participatory democracy reached its most important manifestation in the creation of thousands of communal councils, dictated by the Law of Communal Councils (2006) and the Organic Law of Public Planning and Popular Power among others. These councils aim to improve “living conditions through self-management of social services and government-funded projects”, and to further the political reorganisation of the nation by creating a ‘New Geometry of Power’ located firmly in the popular sectors (Escobar, 2010:15). Councils aim to increase the democratic participation of the Venezuelan population in the socio-economic and political life of the nation by granting the design, control, and oversight of development projects to the local community.

Communal councils began forming in 2005 as a bottom-up strategy and were quickly endorsed by the President as an answer to demands from parts of the government for more localised state institutions to directly manage public policies and community projects (Motta, 2011:36). Members of Presidential Committee of Popular Participation explain to the community the purpose, objectives and organization of a council, and then authorise the official establishment of a council, which is obligated to follow the legal framework closely. A community is defined as 200-400 families in urban areas, less in rural areas and even less in indigenous communities. Matters are decided in the citizen’s assembly, where anyone over 15 may participate and an executive work committee staffed by elected and unpaid representatives (*vocero/as*) who enact community projects (Motta, 2011:36-37). The council acts as intermediary and executor of the laws developed by the Citizen’s Assembly and the local community. Communes represent a higher level of popular participation, with local communal councils joining together to form communes in a specific territory: over 200 under construction in 2013

(Azzellini, 2013:27). Communes do not align with political-administrative spaces but rather reflect the socio-cultural-economic space and thus form a ‘New Geometry of Power’ (Azzellini, 2013:27).

Chavismo represents a radical break with the past traditions of Venezuelan politics: “Ordinary people become the key agents of politics and authority, delegation is secondary to participation, and the idea that the centralized state is the only way of organizing power is questioned” (Motta, 2011:42). Azzellini (2013) understands the political-economic transformation of Venezuela as the result of tension between the constituted power of state institutions and constituent power: “the legitimate collective creative capacity of human beings expressed in movements and in the organized social base to create something new without having to derive it from something previously existing” (Azzellini, 2013:25). Constituent power is the ultimate source of revolutionary transformation, “a broad process of constructing the new, an act of creation and invention” and is embodied in the communal councils, in popular power, and in the idea of the communal state (Azzellini, 2013:26). The emerging communal state will heal the rift between the economic, social, and political—civil and political society—while preventing the over-centralisation and bureaucratisation that characterise former socialisms (Azzellini, 2013:26).

The tension between state structures and grassroots organisations, between constituted and constituent power may be necessary to the revolutionary process. Ellner argues that a synthesis of popular social movements and statist party structures is necessary, although these threads compete within Chávez’s PSUV (Ellner, 2008). However,

intense polarisation and political confrontations have “impeded the development of independent organisations and autonomous structures for decision-making that was basic to radical democracy” (Ellner, 2008:62). Impartiality in public institutions has proved impossible and the constitutional premise of participatory democracy has failed to be translated into viable procedures, but *chavistas* of the base and independents remain strongly supportive (Ellner, 2008:62). Ellner (2008:53) argues that, in recent years, the government has seen popular power as more of a complement to representative government than the supreme source of decision-making due to intense political polarisation which precludes the impartiality required for some official posts.

Communal councils were expected to bypass traditional state structures and distribute power in a participatory manner, although critics argue that old political practices of clientelism and state centrality are reproduced in them (Motta, 2011:37). Communal Councils were initially in competition with and dependent on the funds of local representative authorities. As García-Guadilla notes, the function of the Councils overlapped and conflicted with municipal governments, but after 2006 they were overseen by the Presidential Commissions of Popular Power, creating direct links to Chávez (2008:127). They became a “non-representative structure of direct participation that exists parallel to the elected representative bodies of constituted power” and are directly funded by the national government (Azzellini, 2013:27). Ellner (2012:101) notes that representative democratic institutions have remained at many levels of government and regional officials are pursuing the power to authorise communal councils as well as the Presidential Committee.

Academic debate about the communal councils has focused on their relative autonomy or dependence on the state, its resources, and political parties. Escobar locates the primary tension as between “the need to foster autonomous organizations and the tendency, especially after 2006, to re/concentrate power in the state and, particularly, in the presidency...between tendencies to strengthening statism and those for greater transparency, participation, and popular sector autonomy” (Escobar, 2010:18). The state is still largely mired in liberal structures, partly due to its oil-based political economy, and a successful shift to post-liberal order would require greater autonomy of the popular sectors and its social movements than the government seems willing to allow (Escobar, 2010:20). The PSUV, like the MVR before them, are committed to not interfering in the internal life of social organisations and maintaining their autonomy but the state has played a central role in the movement from below by creating structures conducive to participation, promoting socialist values, and funding activity to channel the energy of *chavistas* with a weak or non-existent relation to three principal parties of the governing coalition (Ellner, 2008:54). Popular initiatives are often co-opted or absorbed by state activities or local *chavista* leaders, such as in the case of the Bolivarian Circles, or are transitory rather than permanent mobilisations, such as the Electoral Battle Units, which mobilised *chavista* support for the recall referendum of 2004.

The state-directed creation of councils from above may be at odds with the idea of popular self-government, but this denies the political agency of the popular classes. We must avoid falling into the common trap of viewing the popular classes and indigenous peoples as irrational, naïve, and capable of being manipulated or passively incorporated into an authoritarian project, rather than active agents of their own fate (Angosto

Ferrández, 2010; Buxton and McCoy, 2008; Mosonyi, 2007). Movements within civil society reveal the vitality of popular protagonism, which supports Chávez's government but is also reluctant to be controlled from above (Buxton and McCoy, 2008:185). This agency is reflected in the development of forms of power beyond the initial government decree in the Urban Land Committees, which, like the communal councils, are elected by, accountable to, and representative of their communities, combining representative and direct forms of democracy (Motta, 2011:39). Communal councils are perceived as legitimate community organisations, although they displace organisations of middle and upper class, such as Citizens Assemblies and Neighbourhood Associations. Councils represent a move away from the organisational pluralism of liberal democracy to which the Revolution seeks an alternative (García-Guadilla, 2008:128). The communal councils have been criticised by participants and academic observers for their restricted, local focus which impedes their ability to tackle larger scale issues and the frequent functional overlap and conflict with national and municipal governments.

The main purpose of the communal councils has also been debated in academic circles. Escobar (2010) argues that communal councils may be viewed either from a 'technical-clientelistic' perspective as managers of government funds, without involvement with political parties, or from an 'empowerment vision' as instruments of popular power linked to more autonomous social movements that risk conflict with government. Escobar believes the first trend is dominant, making the councils ineffective spaces for the construction of new political subjectivities or alternative modernities (Escobar, 2010:16). Communal councils fulfil the function of defining needs of community, but also possess new powers to manage funds from the centralised state, to exercise the sovereignty of the people (the true historical subject of Chávez' socio-political project),

and serve as an apprenticeship to teach people new ways of relating socially, economically, and politically (García-Guadilla, 2008:128). Communal councils may be characterised as a form of political apprenticeship for the formerly marginalised masses. Motta views councils as a new form of generating social knowledge and political practice through collective reflection on accumulated experience (Motta, 2011:38).

The participatory nature of communal councils and their role as a political apprenticeship offer a way forward for indigenous self-determination on a national level, albeit one of a standard prescribed by the state without indigenous consultation. The dependency of communal councils on a centralised state and the tendency for the government to co-opt these participatory structures through the maintenance of direct relationships between councils and the president, as well as the rising polarisation of national politics may have grave consequences for true indigenous self-determination, even if the councils approximate indigenous forms of political organisation.

3.3. Communal Councils as an Indigenous Form of Political Representation

Councils may represent a great advance in the capacity for representation and political participation of indigenous peoples, but may also enforce a state-controlled bureaucratic system that often conflicts and overrides indigenous forms of organisation. Government discourse claims the NGP closely reflects indigenous models of political-economic organisation, granting the state legitimacy to implement policies in indigenous

territories. Indigenous activists who align with the state also gain political capital and my participants are generally supportive of the Bolivarian government and its policies.

State discourse links the New Geometry of Power with indigenous forms of socio-political organisation to legitimise the establishment of communal councils in indigenous communities and reflect their aim of involving local communities directly in political decision-making and the amelioration of living conditions. Speaking of these new political structures, the Minister for Indigenous Peoples, Nicia Maldonado, explains:

[T]his refers to the change of housing at the request of communities, basic services, complete transformation of habitat, including the spiritual conditions of indigenous peoples, toward the reconstruction of what we call Indo-American socialism, the reconstruction of this long-negated ancestral sentiment that we now reclaim to proceed with a comprehensive plan for the assistance of more communities in a structural manner (Gobierno Nacional Reimpulsará Nuevas Comunas Socialistas en Poblaciones Indígenas, 2011: my translation).

This discourse links into academic and theoretical currents that promote a specifically Latin-American model of socialism founded in the history and characteristic of the region, rather than a mere replica of European models. In speeches, Chávez promotes the term “indoamerican socialism”, originary socialism, and indigenous socialism (Angosto Ferrández, 2008:22).

This concept of indigenous socialism has garnered support for Chávez among indigenous activists and voters, strengthened by emerging ethno-Marxist currents in

political discourse that unite ethnic and class interests, without negating the possibility of independent cultural and historical processes. Angosto Ferrández (2008:25) traces this trend to the work of Juan Carlos Mariátegui, who linked the socialist transformation of Perú to the “Indian problem”. He defined this problem in political-economic, rather than cultural, terms, establishing the antecedents of the ethno-Marxist position. This was echoed in Venezuela with Miguel Acosta Saignes who promoted the incorporation of indigenous peoples into the national production system. Esteban Mosonyi (2007) has similarly argued that class struggles must take into account the vortexes of ethnocultural and racial oppression. This position was combined with a liberationist *indigenismo* which saw indigenous peoples as historical subjects capable of being protagonists in development on their own terms (Angosto Ferrández, 2008:26). One of the objectives of MINPI, as declared by the minister, is to incorporate indigenous people into national production through endogenous centres of development, unified with the ‘New Geometry of Power’ (Angosto Ferrández, 2008:26).

Angosto Ferrández notes that communal councils have been proposed and impelled by Nicia Maldonado as an “alternative avenue for achieving the demarcation and recognition of indigenous territories” and a form of political organisation that closely resembles indigenous collective organisations (2008:24). The establishment of MINPI reflects the state’s commitment to creating indigenous territorial units along the lines of the New Geometry of Power (Angosto Ferrández, 2010:109). As Angosto Ferrández notes, indigenous actors aligned with the Bolivarian process and working in practical ways to create communal councils, use this rhetorical tactic: a “government project is discursively situated as an expression of indigeneity” (2008:24). In this way, indigenous actors valorise their own group and gain political capital.

3.4. Standardisation of Political Organisation and Dependency on the State

A major focus in the constitutional activism and the anthropology of social movements has been the impact of the state on indigenous cultural systems: “Indeed, there is often no neat way in which the terminologies and norms of Western legal systems and the conventions and values central to indigenous practices can be mapped onto each other” (Warren and Jackson, 2002:16). State engagement with local communities may lead to an imposed standardisation of heterogeneous local political and judiciary practices, and constructions of political authority. Although communal councils may more closely approximate indigenous models than liberal democratic institutions, they maintain a standardised form of political-economic organisation and development. Communal councils in indigenous communities are considered the same as in other communities by *Fundacomunal* with same formal requisites and the communal councils are the principal avenues of receiving economic resources and assistance for the development of their own projects (Angosto Ferrández, 2008:27). As Omar González Nãñez explains:

Even if it seems paradoxical, the constitutional changes that now benefit indigenous peoples, have greatly smoothed the terrain for indigenous homogenisation and dependence on the national state (2005:62).

I argue that this contradicts the constitutional promise that grants indigenous communities the right to self-directed development, which potentially includes alternative forms of economic and political development. The bureaucratic apparatus of the state tends towards homogeneity, but it is possible that there could be other outcomes on a local level.

González Nájuez (2005:63) argues that the Constitution guarantees indigenous peoples political participation in a system previously reserved for *criollos*, which may create an ‘indiocrazy’ or indigenous bourgeoisie with a discourse of domination that abandons traditional cultural values, dismisses ethnodiversity, encourages exploitation of other indigenous peoples, and closely mirrors that of *criollo* authorities. Although he acknowledges a discourse of ethnic-cultural resistance and reaffirmation exists in secret among the least acculturated and most politically excluded indigenous groups, offering hope for continued ethnic diversity ‘from below’ in the face of homogenising ‘top-down’ forces of globalisation (González Nájuez, 2005:64-65).

As Angosto Ferrández (2008) points out, the new model of endogenous development is desirable to some indigenous people as it could serve to dignify their social position through fair integration into national production and better their living conditions. For others, it is unclear why, despite the constitutional right to maintain their own political system, they are required to adopt communal councils, even if these are close to indigenous political systems. Some indigenous peoples wish to maintain their economic-political systems, such as semi-subsistence and consensus. Angosto Ferrández notes that the:

possibility of maintaining voluntarily these forms of life only is realizable if these people could pronounce themselves as collective subjects and had effective capacity of free determination of their lands, for which these must be demarcated and recognised previously (2008:27).

I concur with Barreto’s belief that the achievement of the objectives of the Constitution requires a “deeper transformation” that involves less imposition by the state from above

and more grassroots participation by indigenous peoples in planning and implementation of social policies and programs (2011:263).

Communal councils are superficially similar to the elected councils (*cabildos*) in Colombia which administered the reinstated indigenous *resguardos* (communal landholding corporations) and were responsible for managing public works funds and justice in the community (Gow and Rappaport, 2002:74). However, problems arose when the *cabildos* were first established in the 1960s due to the inexperience of Hiwi people with the new, externally imposed system of self-governance. Sosa notes that the councils became vulnerable to manipulation by white landowners and local authorities with their own interests for ‘helping’ the indigenous peoples (2000:96). In addition to these historical difficulties, Bolivarian communal councils expose traditional forms of leadership to the threat of new rivals and younger people with more experience of *criollo* politics.

Although social welfare programs are greatly appreciated by Hiwi as a way of redressing centuries of political and economic marginalisation, attitudes towards standardised political organisation within the context of the nation-state are more ambivalent. The persistence of Hiwi political authority and forms of organisation indicates that a parallel system exists alongside communal councils today, which are perceived as a means of engaging with the state and accessing resources. Through consultation with the state, such a bottom-up construction of indigenous political organisation remains a viable alternative to the top-down model of communal councils.

3.5. Political Polarisation within the Hiwi Community

Indigenous support for Chávez continued throughout the general election of 2000, the recall referendum of 2004, and the general elections of 2006 and 2012.¹⁶ Indigenous peoples have usually favoured *chavista* candidates in national, state, and municipal elections (Barreto, 2011). Political loyalty to Chávez takes the form of a deeply felt personal connection, which the president encouraged with his weekly television show, ‘Alo Presidente’, and his fatherly persona (see Zúquete, 2008). This connection is strengthened by Chávez’s use of Presidential Decrees to quickly introduce indigenous legislation, indicating his direct involvement with and personal commitment to indigenous matters. These decrees include the creation of the National Commission for Demarcation of Indigenous Habitat and Lands (2001), which was updated in 2010 and 2011; the National Council for Indigenous Education, Culture and Languages (2002); and the renaming of Day of Indigenous Resistance (2002). Support for the *chavista* government was still strong following Chávez’s death, which was announced on fifth of March in 2013. Many indigenous people expressed their great sadness about his death due to his promotion of indigenous rights and dedication to improving the lives of indigenous peoples.

¹⁶ The recall referendum sought to ascertain whether Chávez should be recalled from office and ended with 58% voting ‘no recall’, although many questioned the authenticity of this result. This referendum also ignited the Tascón list controversy, where the list of people who signed the petition to recall Chávez was published by National Assembly member Luis Tascón and allegedly used by the *chavista* government to discriminate against the petitioners.



Plate 9. A government sign promising agricultural development in Santo Rosario displays graffiti in favour of Nicia Maldonado, the *chavista* candidate in Amazonas State elections in 2013.

As Barreto notes, indigenous support is not “unequivocal or uncritical”, and a critical movement is emerging that aspires to implement the radical democratic revolution promised by the 1999 Constitution (2011:262). Opposition intensifies as government refuses to acknowledge the failures of the revolutionary process, calling critics counter-revolutionaries – a “polarizing and divisive” discourse which bars critics from participating in political, administrative, and social institutions (Barreto, 2011:262).

A socialist identity is often cultivated tactically and adopted by indigenous actors working for government and aligned with Bolivarianism, by adopting Marxist

terminology and concepts such as anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism, which Angosto Ferrández notes is a new development for the Venezuelan indigenous movement (2008:23). Although my participants rarely employ the slogans of Bolivarianism in their everyday lives, many identify themselves as socialists, acknowledging that communitarian and democratic indigenous political-economic practices resemble socialist ideals and claiming status for indigenous peoples as the “first Venezuelans”. This alignment grants symbolic capital to indigenous activists and may be an extremely effective political strategy and way of garnering financial resources from the state, as Angosto Ferrández (2008) suggests. However, this is a simplistic equation of two disparate and unique socio-political traditions that ignores major differences in historical development. The alignment of indigenous practices with socialism is problematic. Pedro laughingly compares Hiwi practices, such as the reciprocal labour system of *únuma*, to socialism. Clemente argues it is not a political practice, but rather is based in distinctly Hiwi principles of reciprocity and solidarity. This indicates that class and ethnicity cannot be easily conflated.¹⁷

Not all indigenous persons align themselves with this new socialist identity and increasing polarisation in national politics has opened up divisions in the indigenous movement. This became clear during the celebration of Day of Indigenous Resistance in Puerto Ayacucho in 2011. After a procession down the main street full of school children dressed in the traditional costumes of various indigenous ethnic groups, we

¹⁷ This identification may also be dangerous: Sosa (2000) adamantly denies that Hiwi people are communists, distancing indigenous political and economic movements from the Leftist guerrilla groups which fought the Colombian government in the late twentieth century. Hiwi communities were accused of collaborating and attacked by both sides of the conflict.

listen to the speeches outside the indigenous market and ethnographic museum. Nicia Maldonado, a Yekuana woman and the Minister for Popular Power for Indigenous Peoples, wearing a barkcloth dress and beaded headband, speaks on behalf of the national government and expresses their commitment to indigenous peoples. The government supporters provide buses for indigenous people to attend the celebrations and provide a meal of *cassabe* and soup to those watching the speech. We meet Clemente in the crowd of government supporters, quietly listening to the speakers. Chavistas have organised a bus to take people from their communities to the town centre for this celebration. Opposition governor Liborio Guarulla speaks simultaneously on the other side of Plaza Bolívar, in front of the blue Amazonas State government building, revealing the deep polarisation that characterises Venezuelan politics and bleeds into the indigenous movement at times.¹⁸

Liborio Guarulla is a Caracas-educated Baniva man who became leader of the PPT representing both indigenous and *criollos* on the national stage (Mansutti Rodríguez, 2000:82-83). He has criticised the national government for failing to adequately invest in the development of Amazonas, the poorest State in Venezuela, and not fulfilling its constitutional obligations to indigenous people. On Day of Indigenous Resistance 2013, the governor and representatives of the Regional Secretary of Indigenous Issues (SRAI) and the Indigenous Bolivarian Confederation of Amazonas (COIBA) organised a march between the communities of Puente Parhueña and Provincial via the national highway. The peaceful protest called for “Resistance, Peace, and Democracy” and drew attention

¹⁸ These divisions have even caused breakdowns in Piaroa family relationships, further complicated by differing attitudes towards *criollo*-style development and preservation of traditional ways of life (personal communication, Christian Espanol).

to the government's failure to meet its constitutional commitments to indigenous people and the National Bolivarian Guard's interference in indigenous communities (El Universal, 12-10-2013). Liborio attended a campaign rally in Puerto Ayacucho for presidential candidate Henrique Capriles Radonski, who criticised the government for failing to supply fuel to indigenous peoples and promised to immediately demarcate indigenous territories (El Universal 20-5-2012). Both opposition and government politicians are eager to engage with indigenous peoples and generate political capital by associating themselves with the symbolic discourse of *guaicaipurismo*. This is demonstrated in the below photo of Capriles and Liborio at a welcoming ceremony performed by traditional dancers in Puerto Ayacucho.



Plate 10. Capriles and Liborio attend an Indigenous National Assembly (Gómez, 20th May 2012).

Political polarisation causes conflict between the national government and opposition state government of Amazonas that can result in problems with government funding. For example, the Amazonas State government promised to provide a fleet of buses as transport for indigenous communities around Puerto Ayacucho, as currently the only option is an expensive private taxi cooperative or truck. The federal government cut the funding for this project because of political conflict between the two levels of government. This polarisation intensified in early July 2013, when the national government declared a state of emergency in Amazonas citing mismanagement and corruption within the state government. The national government took over management of Puerto Ayacucho hospital, which it maintains was subject to funds diversion and administrative and operative mismanagement (Rojas, 2013). Maduro justified the intervention, declaring “the state is in a critical and serious situation” (*Maduro Declara 'en Situación de Emergencia' al Estado Amazonas: La Entidad está Grave*, 2013). Later, the national government seized control of the airport, *Cacique Aramare*, and investigated the State’s police service, and, in September, clashed with members of the state government at an administrative meeting in the historic Hotel Amazonas. This dispute culminated in the detention of 18 people and the closure of several local radio stations, including *La Voz del Orinoco*, *Chamánica*, *La Voz del Pueblo*, *Deportiva del Sur* and *Impacto*, amid accusations of inciting rebellion against the government (Da Corte, 2013). Legally, the President has the right to declare a state of emergency under “circumstances of a social, economic, political, natural or ecological nature which seriously affect the security of the Nation, institutions and citizens*, in the face of which the powers available to cope with such events are insufficient” (Constitución de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, 1999: Artículo 337). However, this temporary measure should not interfere with the “organs of Public

Power (Constitución de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, 1999: Artículo 339). Furthermore, the state of exception in Amazonas has continued for years, well beyond the stipulated ninety days, with a possible ninety-day extension subject to approval by the National Assembly (Constitución de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, 1999: Artículo 338). In October 2015, the national government approved an extension of the state of exception in Amazonas, citing Colombian paramilitaries and illegal miners as threats to Venezuela's national security and natural resources (*Venezuela: ¿Qué hay en la Frontera de Amazonas?*, 2015).

Liborio has compared the expropriation of these state resources with the colonial acquisition of indigenous territories, invoking the same symbolic discourse of indigenous resistance and plurinationalism as the government party (*Liborio Guarulla Denunció las 'Expropiaciones' del Ejecutivo al Estado Amazonas*, 2013). In recent years, Liborio has been openly critical of Chávez and the national government for increasing political polarisation through the merging of allied parties in the PSUV.

The Division starts seven years ago when the President ordered the removal of all parties and the idea was to form a single party. At that time, we made a difference by noting that we were for political pluralism and cultural and ethnic diversity, and as a leader of the indigenous peoples in the Amazon I was not going to accept that hegemonic idea. All that they promised was never accomplished. Chávez arises to try to end bipartisanship and here in Amazonas also we stand against such hegemony, against sectarianism and discrimination in a multiethnic society like ours in Amazonas. It happens that the PSUV is a party where everyone must be registered, carry a card, or stand firm. In parties where I have served, we never compelled anyone. We

left an ethnic racism to enter one of colour because everyone who is not red is prohibited from everything from buying gasoline, shopping in the Mercal or participating in missions. That does not go with our spirit and here we struggle against colonialism, which was external and internal now. The one who has deviated from the Constitution is President Chávez (Díaz and Guarulla, 2012, December 28th).

This quote from Liborio touches on the intense political polarisation that has characterised Venezuelan politics in recent years. Political polarisation peaked after the election of Chávez's successor in 2013. Maduro won the election with 50.61% of the vote, opposed to Capriles's 49.12%; this 1.49 percent margin is significantly less than Chávez's 11 point victory the previous October (Ellner, 2013:45). During the campaign, Maduro took an aggressive tone with Capriles, trading personal insults and radicalising the debate. Opposition supporters accused the government of electoral fraud and banged on pots and pans in a protest known as a *cacerolazo*, while *chavistas* set off fireworks to drown out the noise. Increasing polarisation culminated in the murder of nine *chavista* activists in Caracas, Barquisimientto, Valencia, and Barinas (Ellner, 2013:46). Maduro calls the violence an attempted coup (*golpe de estado*), by right-wing extremists invoking an image of the Bolivarian Revolution as a struggle between good and evil, the people and the oppressive bourgeoisie who want to return them to their previous state as the poor and powerless masses. Several days later, opposition leaders are beaten in the National Assembly when they refuse to recognise Maduro's presidency. Maduro employs militant rhetoric— "We are militants of the peace, soldiers of the fatherland"— and promises to send the National Guard to disperse a planned opposition protest at the CNE calling for a recount. Capriles cancels the planned march and calls for peace, and, on April 18th, he accepts the CNE's offer to conduct a technical audit, in which electronic votes are compared to paper receipts to establish consistency, rather than the

manual recount of every vote, which he had demanded publicly (McCoy and McCarthy, 2013). On June 10th, the CNE confirmed that the result of the audit confirmed Maduro's victory (*Auditoría del CNE Confirma Victoria de Maduro*, 2013).



Plate 11. Presidential Candidate Nicolás Maduro receives a corona from the indigenous peoples of Amazonas (Amazonas Brindó Protección Ancestral Originaria a Nicolás Maduro, 6th April 2013).

Amidst this controversy and fear, we take a taxi to Santo Rosario. We delayed our trip a day due to the political tension that we felt in town and from media coverage. Instantly upon arriving at Pedro's house we feel an amazing sense of relief, like a weight of fear being lifted.

Here, there is tranquillity. If you didn't switch on the television or radio you didn't know anything was happening. — Pedro

For Pedro, tranquillity implies harmonious relations among the immediate family and with other relatives living in the community. It represents the attainment of the ideal of Hiwi conviviality; that intimate social relations are void of conflict and negative emotions, that everyday interactions are characterised by joy, generosity, and love. Later, I watch the inauguration of Maduro on Pedro's television. He has taken the day off work to watch the proceedings. There is a whole program about the history of Venezuela, focused on events that occurred in April, such as the independence of Venezuela from Spain two hundred years ago and the brief coup of 2002. They seem to be linking Maduro to this imagined history of nationalism. The commentary is also peppered with anti-imperialistic rhetoric – Bolivar's war against the imperialistic Spanish is compared to Chávez/Maduro's fight against US imperialism today which sours Venezuelan relations with the US despite their mutual dependence on oil trade agreements.

While political polarisation may affect individual relationships within Hiwi communities, their loose political organisation may be an advantage in terms of social organisation and harmony in the face of intense polarisation. Hiwi people are free to leave a community when disputes become too disruptive to everyday life. The reasons for leaving may be deeply personal and emotional, such as Clemente's decision to move to the Autana River after a romantic rejection, or a woman who left her children and husband to live with another man. Some young men leave their communities to live with their wife's family; matrilocal residence was once very common for Hiwi people. Some young people temporarily leave the community to work in the cities or study at

university. In the communities I worked with, some individuals are employed by the opposition Amazonas State government and therefore vote for the opposition party to preserve their jobs, while the majority are *chavista*. Pedro estimates 80% of Santo Rosario are pro-government, but we observed no great tension during the election. This accords with the Hiwi principles of personal autonomy and conviviality, as no-one has the right to dictate another person's actions and one usually rebukes others for misbehaviour indirectly. To reprimand someone directly is uncomfortable for everyone involved and considered a last resort.

Here, everyone is family (*pura familia*), so how could they fight? — Pedro

As Mosonyi points out, in indigenous communities it is never acceptable to see a bulk of the population as opposition, or at least as a sector with which it is impossible to exchange viewpoints, or negotiate with to reorganise the social body; there are no majorities or minorities in the communities due to “long, democratic and respectful debates that almost always arrive at a sufficiently important consensus to bring about the forward communal matters in a satisfactory rhythm” (Mosonyi, 2007:183). This is a principle of Hiwi shamanism with its focus on autonomy and harmonious social relations, as Clemente explains to me:

There are many paths but we are less likely to arrive when there are many divisions. Some people are PPT and some people are *chavista*, but we all have red blood, we are all human – and it is better to work together. —
Clemente

Pedro and Clemente, like many indigenous individuals, fear that the opposition wants to finish with the social missions that have benefited so many poor and disadvantaged Venezuelans. However, they refuse to participate in the polemical politics and instead hope for more dialogue between the two sides: a true pluralistic democracy. Within a

Hiwi worldview, no-one is perceived as an intractable enemy and everything is open to negotiation. For Pedro and Clemente, the opposition offers an important vision, which is needed to stabilise the increasingly dismal national economy. Under Hiwi principles, the government must participate in a debate and open up a dialogue with the opposition. For indigenous activists that navigate the tumultuous Venezuelan political landscape, uncertainty is the only certainty: “This explains the prudence of indigenous leadership, virtually subsumed in this situation by the *criollo* leadership of the *chavista* Revolution” (Mansutti Rodríguez, 2000:95). The fluidity and solidarity of Hiwi political organisation offers an alternative to polarising discourses; a flexibility that may allow indigenous communities to avoid the party divisions so characteristic of Venezuelan politics.

3.6. Indigenous Civil Society Organisations and the State

Historical efforts towards gaining indigenous rights were hampered by the characteristic confusion and contradictions of the Venezuelan political and bureaucratic context; the lack of coordination and continuity of policy between state agencies and the discontinuance of administrative programs established by the previous government

(Roosevelt, 1997:166).¹⁹ This situation necessitated a nation-wide, grass-roots indigenous political organisation that could unite all ethnicities and operate outside *criollo* political influence (Kuppe, 1996:166). In 1989, the National Indian Council of Venezuela (CONIVE) was founded during the 1st National Indian Congress (Kuppe, 1996:167; König, 2000:46). Its formation was partly a reaction to the events of Wanai Valley, as well as the product of two earlier Piaroa conferences and the hostile attitude of the government towards these meetings (Clarac, 2001:361).²⁰ Venezuela's oldest indigenous organisation, Indigenous Federation of Bolívar State (FIEB), established in 1973, was central to the creation of CONIVE, which became the first to unite indigenous organisations across state lines and allowed indigenous peoples to “present themselves as a concrete and valid interlocutor in national politics, a prerequisite for unified action during the constitutional reform process that unfolded a decade later” (Van Cott, 2003:52). Other organisations include the Venezuelan Indigenous

¹⁹ In the twentieth century, various government departments were established to integrate indigenous peoples into the political and economic structures of the nation-state according to the principle of assimilation. These include the Indigenous Commission under the Ministry of Justice, the Central Office of Indigenous Affairs (OCAI), and the Management of Indigenous Cults and Affairs, which was founded with the objectives of consolidating indigenous communities by improving living standards and ending marginalization; encouraging participation in socioeconomic development; and preserving human and specific cultural values as part of national patrimony (Clarac, 2001:343). These agencies considered indigenous people as mere objects of planning with whom consultation was unnecessary, revealing the “paternalistic attitude of a State for which the indigenous person was a savage and infantile being” (Clarac, 2001:346).

²⁰ Valle Wanai is a Piaroa territory that was invaded by industrialists from Caracas led by Hermann Zing in the mid-1980s, which led to violence against the protesting Piaroa. A national meeting of anthropologists, scientists and lawyers was called in Mérida in 1985 to discuss the situation. Articles addressing this conference were published in Volume 10 of *Boletín Antropológico* in 1986 (Clarac, 2001).

Confederation (CIV), an attempt by AD to co-opt indigenous organisations, and the Regional Organisation of Indigenous Peoples of Amazonas (ORPIA), which was established in 1993, with the support of the Puerto Ayacucho Catholic Church, to defend indigenous rights (Van Cott, 2003:52). According to Van Cott (2003:52-53), the knowledge gained during the crafting of the state constitution regarding Latin American constitutional law, mobilisation, and increased political awareness among indigenous populations, was drawn on by indigenous representatives from Amazonas during the 1999 Constituent Assembly. Compared to neighbouring countries, Venezuela's indigenous organisations, with the exception of FIEB, are relatively recent developments and have been, historically, more reluctant to form alliances with non-indigenous organisations (Van Cott, 2003:53). These organisations have also suffered from internal factionalism, due to interethnic tensions, the underrepresentation of some groups, and polarisation due to political party affiliation, which impeded unification until 1999 (Van Cott, 2003:53).

Today, CONIVE aims to promote the unity of legitimate indigenous organisations, represent human and indigenous rights, and facilitate the revitalisation and diffusion of indigenous cultures (Kuppe, 1996:168). Representatives of ethnic groups affiliated with CONIVE meet at least every 3 years and by special request. Each indigenous ethnic group is represented by an equal number of delegates and resolutions are passed by a unanimous or 75% majority of the vote. CONIVE elects members of the Inter-Ethnic Council (three members from each ethnic group), from among candidates chosen by each ethnic group, for a term of 3 years. This executive organ sets "the specific, political line of CONIVE and represents the organization in external legal and nonlegal[sic] affairs"; the council also establishes the Working Commissions of

CONIVE, which are responsible for the “everyday political work and are the true dynamic force of the organization” in the areas of health, education, ecology, mining, human rights, legislation, and international relations (Roosevelt, 1997:169).

After several years of political frustration and internal conflicts (Mansutti Rodríguez, 2000:82), CONIVE once again became a politically active indigenous organisation, as indicated by their endorsement of Chávez’s presidential candidacy in 1998, and their involvement in the election of indigenous representatives in the 2000 parliamentary elections. As part of his electoral campaign, Chávez promised to redress the ‘historical debt’ owed to indigenous peoples as the original inhabitants of Venezuela (Barreto, 2011). Mansutti (2000:84) argues that indigenous groups glimpsed the possibilities that alliance with *chavismo* gave them for strengthening their position at the Constituent Assembly. The specific, collective rights of indigenous peoples were officially recognised with the new draft of the Constitution in 1999, written by a Constituent Assembly that included 3 indigenous representatives elected by CONIVE. These legal breakthroughs were made possible and underpinned by the symbolic revalorisation of indigeneity.

Even though indigenous organisations, such as CONIVE, originated as civil society organisations, they soon entered into the sphere of national electoral politics. Due to the lack of existing state structures for the management of indigenous policies, particularly among territorialised populations, these indigenous organisations became key actors for the state, and the convening of a Constituent Assembly transformed CONIVE into the official channel for the election of indigenous representation (Angosto Ferrández,

2008:18-19). The process is complicated by divisions among indigenous peoples and the ambiguous political autonomy of CONIVE, revealed by their confrontations with CNE. CONIVE was initially recognised by the state as legitimate actor for coordination of indigenous representation on national and regional levels, which the state contemplated strengthening. Because of this CONIVE came to resemble an institution of the state, which negatively affected its autonomy as a civil organisation, while simultaneously transforming it into a potential political agent (Angosto Ferrández, 2008:19-20).

The institutionalisation of CONIVE as the principal representative and state liaison for indigenous peoples has simultaneously strengthened and confused their previous role as a civil society organisation, due to their close ties with the ruling parties (Angosto Ferrández, 2010:112). The influence of government parties is seen in CONIVE's discourse, manoeuvres, events and the transfer of personnel to government organs; in support for the constitution and government during the 2002 coup attempt; and the recall referendum (Angosto Ferrández, 2010:113). The confluence of government and CONIVE is reflected in the dual roles of personnel, such as Noelí Pocaterra who is both an elected representative of CONIVE and a director of the National Assembly. The legal ambiguity of CONIVE's political autonomy was also reflected in the tensions that arose over their central role in the election of indigenous representatives to the Constituent Assembly, which led to a confrontation with CNE and internal divisions among indigenous peoples (Angosto Ferrández, 2010:113).

The creation of a nation-wide state institution, the Ministry of Popular Power for Indigenous Peoples (MINPI), effectively reduced the representative power of indigenous organisations, as the state no longer needed to consult with indigenous organisations to enact its policies (Angosto Ferrández, 2008:20). The reduced power of civil organisations represents the Bolivarian Revolution's move away from liberal democratic institutions, such as forms of pluralism based on civil organisations that defend particular interests within a state construct, or competing political parties. MINPI is now the key organ for applying New Geometry of Power in indigenous territories. According to Angosto Ferrández:

In the ministry and the sphere of the indigenous movement that supports it, indigenous representatives have vehemently embraced the banner of socialism and are actively promoting the new geometry of power as a new state model of political-administrative organisation as much within as outside the indigenous polis (2008:21).

Legal recognition and increased participation in national politics means the indigenous movement now largely depends on national political structures, which has decreased the power of local political organisations. Barreto (2011) notes that the *chavista* government has sometimes weakened the indigenous movement through programs backed by indigenous political representatives on national, state, and regional levels. For example, CONIVE has often mediated between the government and indigenous communities, which effectively legitimises Chávez's policies and implies shared responsibility for indigenous living conditions. The conciliatory stance of some indigenous groups has led to more divisions and criticisms of the development programs that are often carried out by the Bolivarian Armed Forces (Barreto, 2011:263). However, the co-optation of indigenous organisations is not complete and

space remains for resistance to government imposed policies. For example, CONIVE organised a march to the offices of MINPI in 2011 to protest the lack of consultation and participation prior to a Presidential Decree modifying aspects of the National Commission for the Demarcation of Indigenous Lands and Habitat. This episode demonstrates indigenous organisation do not completely identify with the Bolivarian government and may be critical of certain policies. It also reveals that indigenous organisation use the New Constitution as a political tool in their confrontations with the government, as it guarantees their rights to consultation and participation in indigenous affairs. Indigenous political organisations have entered into electoral politics through their alliance with *chavismo*, which has increased their ability to effect change on a national level. Simultaneously, this engagement has allowed the government to take more control of indigenous policy, which has sometimes weakened the autonomy of indigenous social movements, who nevertheless possess a capacity for resistance based in constitutional rights.

3.7. Conclusions

In this chapter, I have described the intercultural political reality Hiwi people inhabit and negotiate in their daily lives. I have shown how Hiwi political organisation, based in solidarity, consensus, fluidity, and negotiation, continues to exist alongside these newer structures and provides an alternative to the militant rhetoric and radical polarisation of the government's discourse. Communal councils are a key part of the NGP and the state's construction of Twenty-First Century Socialism, but such a model diverges from indigenous forms of political organisation. I have explored how the Bolivarian government has demonstrated a commitment to redressing historical political

exclusion of indigenous peoples through various symbolic means. In practical terms, the Venezuelan state has failed to effectively implement its constitutional promises to preserve specific indigenous rights to self-determination and political decision-making. The imposition of an outside model from the top-down, even if it does truly approximate a more indigenous form of governance, nonetheless contradicts the constitutional premise which protects indigenous self-determination and political autonomy.

At a national level, I have explored how the state's co-opting of indigenous organisations reflects a loss of autonomy for indigenous peoples and increased dependence on the state's resources. The Venezuelan state was unprepared for indigenous self-determination and initially relied on indigenous civil society organisations to coordinate indigenous political representation. This liberal form of pluralism is antithetical to the participatory and protagonistic democracy that the Bolivarian government is constructing, and was soon replaced by MINPI. This organ has become a tool for the implementation of policies in indigenous territories, rather than a means of expressing indigenous concerns at a national level. The autonomy of indigenous organisations, such as CONIVE, is also questionable, given the partiality of its members and close alignment with the Bolivarian Revolution. This chapter has explored the interculturality of the political sphere in which Hiwi people live, revealing the possibility of a decolonial politics in which true indigenous self-determination is a practical reality.

4. Beyond Neoliberalism: Multiple Indigenous Economies and Twenty-First Century Socialism

In addition to constructing a participatory radical democracy, the Bolivarian government is decolonising the economic realm by developing a theoretical and practical alternative to neoliberal capitalism: Twenty-First Century Socialism. The Bolivarian government promotes this new economic project as a specifically Latin American form of socialism based on a particular notion of indigeneity, including economic practices, historical resistance to capitalist domination, and communal forms of production and labour organisation. The social economy represents a challenge to the interests of global capitalism, fuelled by popular discontent with the neoliberal policies of the 1980s, and legitimises its anti-imperial brand of socialism by appealing to indigenous histories of resistance. But what dynamics are at play in this ideal of indigeneity, and are the material practices of the Venezuelan state congruent with their constitutional commitment to promoting interculturality?

In this chapter, I critically examine the concept of a social economy based on indigenous economic principles and practices as a strategy for decolonising the economy. I use recent theoretical literature, material economic relations, and ethnographic evidence of current Hiwi economic practices to problematise the theoretical underpinnings of the socialist project. This new economy is grounded in a particular notion of indigeneity that verges on being homogeneous and essentialist. This is an idealised image that is belied by the reality of the multiple economies, from subsistence to capital accumulation, in which Hiwi people participate to ensure their physical survival and social reproduction.

The social economy reflects the Bolivarian government's commitment to social justice and to redressing the historical debt owed to previously marginalised populations, particularly Afro-descendent and indigenous peoples. This project is enshrined in the constitutional promise to preserve indigenous economic practices and foster the economic self-determination of indigenous communities, for which collective inalienable land rights are essential. These rights have yet to be fully instated because they contradict the state's sovereignty over subsoil resources, the revenues of which the government depends upon for domestic social programs and international trade alliances. This persistent entanglement with global neoliberal capitalism and the centrality of the state undermines the emergence of true Twenty-First Century Socialism in which indigenous sovereignty over land and development is guaranteed. I argue from my ethnographic evidence that the multiplicity of economic strategies and forms of organisation practised by Hiwi people may offer a more nuanced and effective theoretical basis for a pluralistic social economy.

In this chapter, I ask how Hiwi people organise their labour and engage in Hiwi forms of economic activity, while simultaneously participating within the dominant capitalist economy and amid the government's introduction of cooperatives to promote socialism? What does this intercultural and plural economic situation represent for the decolonisation of neoliberal economies? To answer these questions, I first provide various examples of the plural economies in which Hiwi people engage in their everyday life. These strategies range from subsistence farming, hunting, and fishing to wage-labour and salaried work. I describe a Hiwi form of labour organisation, called

únuma, in which community members work collectively on projects, such as land-clearing and housing construction, and labour is reciprocated on a later occasion. I place these plural economic practices within the context of the Bolivarian government's project of Twenty-First Century Socialism. I examine the discursive origins of this project in an imaginary of indigeneity and explore how far cooperatives reflect indigenous forms of production, such as *únuma*. In the final section, I link these local forms of economies with broader currents in Venezuela's economy by problematising the role of hydrocarbon sovereignty given the state's professed commitment to indigenous self-determination. To make my argument, I draw on anthropologists with a focus on indigenous political-economies, such as Angosto Ferrández (2008; 2010), Clarac (2001), and Mosonyi (2007). I further explore the position of indigenous peoples within the broader economy of Venezuela by drawing on economic and political scientists, such as Ellner (2004, 2008, 2011, 2012), Thomas Purcell (2011; 2013), Fernando Coronil (1997, 2011), Andy Higginbottom (2013), and Bernard Mommer (1996).

4.1. Indigenous Economics Practices

In this chapter, I will describe the pluralistic economic reality of the Hiwi in order to challenge the state's simplistic construction of indigenous socialism and reveal the contradictions inherent in promoting pluriethnicity and socialism within a capitalist state. I argue that Hiwi people live within an intercultural economic space that includes activities from subsistence farming to salaried work. The following case study of Hiwi economic life and activities reveals the multiplicity of economic practices in which individuals and families engage to ensure their physical survival and social

reproduction. Many of these strategies are collective, with the immediate family as the primary organisational unit in a system involving some form of subsistence farming, hunting, fishing, and gathering. However, the historical immersion of the region in capitalist imaginaries and relations have modified or destroyed some collective practices, such as game meat distribution, in favour of private capital accumulation through salaried work or the sale of locally produced goods. These diverse strategies reveal a tension between the capitalist and indigenous forms of production, distribution, and consumption that is articulated through everyday practices of negotiation and exchange.

Since the beginnings of colonisation, indigenous societies have undergone fundamental changes due to the often forceful immersion of indigenous peoples in the national capitalist economy. This confrontation with capitalist processes has shaped indigenous economic strategies. Indigenous peoples have been assimilated, often coercively, into capitalist labour relations since the early days of Spanish penetration into the interior of Venezuela. Although Venezuela largely relied on African slave labour in coastal regions, the *encomienda* system gave colonists the right to demand labour service from local indigenous groups (Newson, 1985; Gacksetter Nichols and Morse, 2010). Early merchants established trade arrangements with indigenous communities using a form of debt peonage, in which indigenous products were exchanged for manufactured goods at exorbitant prices, leaving the Hiwi in perpetual debt (Sosa, 2000:56). By the 19th century, Hiwi people were being persuaded and coerced to work on rubber plantations in Amazonas State in exchange for goods and many never returned, sparking rumours

of cannibalism and magical disease that resulted in the murder of at least one trader (Sosa, 2000:54-55).²¹

The colonial decimation of indigenous peoples in Amazonas, caused by epidemic disease, missionisation, slave trading, and military conflicts, severely disrupted Pre-Columbian trade networks which linked trade to political alliances (Whitehead, 1993). Many indigenous groups migrated closer to missions and colonial towns along the Orinoco in order to trade for the manufactured goods on which they came to rely (Sosa, 2000:51). In the 18th century, Hiwi people moved into territory formerly belonging to the Achaguas in the Colombian llanos and the Atures and Maypures along the east bank of the Orinoco River (Mansutti Rodríguez, 1988). Indigenous migration towards economic centres was encouraged by capitalists, state policies, and Christian missionaries, who were eager to exploit cheap indigenous labour in the extractive industries of Amazonas, such as rubber, timber, and mining.

Polanyi (1977:10) emphasises that the emerging global market system of the 19th century spawned a whole new conception of human being and society, in which land and labour became commodities. What was previously understood as nature and human activity became a product that could be sold within a market operating on the principle of supply and demand. In this vision of society and humanity, material motives are the only incentive and rational reason for labouring; capitalists work to accumulate profits and landless workers sell their labour to purchase food and shelter (Polanyi, 1977:11).

²¹ Taussig (1980) argues that such magical beliefs reveal the conflicting meanings operating when a culture is subsumed by capitalist forms of organisation.

The economic determination of society is challenged by the historical and current existence of societies based on a different conception of human economic activity. Polanyi (1977:36) classifies substantive economies by their form of integration: reciprocity, redistribution, and exchange. These forms of integration are not stages of evolutionary development and often co-exist with other dominant forms, and become dominant at a later time; they describe relations of labour and land, how it is distributed and organised within a society (Polanyi, 1977:42).

Castoriadis ([1975] 1987) notes that capitalism (and Marxism) assume that economic motivations (production, consumption, and power) reflect the “eternal content of human nature”; an assumption belied by those “indigenous” mentalities and societies that have always presented an obstacle to the global penetration of capitalism. As Castoriadis elaborates:

Whenever it succeeded in constituting among these peoples a class of wage earners, capitalism has not only, as Marx has already shown, had to reduce them to poverty by systematically destroying the material bases of their independent existence. It has simultaneously had to destroy pitilessly the values and the significations of their culture and their life—that is to say, actually turn them into that combination of an empty stomach and of muscle ready to perform meaningless labour, which is the capitalist image of humanity ([1975] 1987:26).

The material practices of production, distribution, and consumption in Hiwi daily life are conditioned by indigenous conceptions of social obligation and reciprocity, but also by the prevailing system of capital accumulation. This reveals that all economic systems are characterised by multiple forms of economic practice; there is no pure capitalism.

As Polanyi demonstrates, a substantive economy is that which satisfies the needs of the society to which it belongs. This may take many diverse forms, of which capitalism is only one strand. Today, Hiwi people are immersed in the capitalist economy, although they work, produce, and distribute in a culturally specific manner. I present two case studies of Hiwi families to reveal the economic diversity of contemporary indigenous economies and argue that the multiplicity of economic strategies actually employed offers a stronger basis for a plural and more socially just economy.

4.1.1. Case Study: Hiwi Economic Practices

The Hiwi family, usually consisting of husband, wife, children, and possibly grandparents, is described in ethnographic literature as the primary economic unit in Hiwi social life. My participant Pedro is about 58 years old and his wife Hilda is about 10 years younger. They married and emigrated from Colombia about 35 years ago. They have 8 children: 3 daughters and 5 sons. The two eldest daughters are married with young children of their own and separate residences in the community. One studies science at university on a scholarship and is married to a Hiwi man employed by the national government. In 2011, the government paid workers to build a concrete house for his family. Miguel, a young man from the Hiwi community of Coromoto, is married to Pedro's second daughter and studies social science at university with a scholarship.

Large amounts of land are used by each family for hunting, fishing, and gathering. Each family cultivates a garden of about 1-1.5 hectares, which the husband clears and burns. Hilda and her unmarried teenage daughter do most of the tending and harvesting, replanting manioc as they harvest. The same plot is used for 2-3 years, then left fallow

for 3-4 years before replanting (Sosa, 2000:18). However, Pedro and other Hiwi people are keen experimental agriculturalists; they grow coffee seedlings and purchase worm humus to enrich the soil of garden plots and extend their fertile period. The demands of education and cash labour decrease the amount of time available to women to tend their gardens and many younger people prefer to seek salaried work, rather than tend a garden, which is still seen as an essential activity by many Hiwi. Economic activities vary across the seasons of the year. The dry season (November to April) is the time for land-clearing and planting, and is also the best time for fishing, gathering eggs and wild fruits, harvesting sweet potatoes and plantains. In the wet season (May to October), Hiwi hunt game animals, such as peccary, deer, and *chigüire*; gather the fruits of various palms, such as *seje*, *cucurita*, *moriche*, and *pendare*; and harvest corn, sugar, pineapples, and manioc cultivated in family gardens (Sosa, 2000:20). Traditionally, men weave baskets for the women to use in manioc harvesting and processing, while women make pottery, but these gender divisions in labour are becoming less common as more people enter the national economy. While women still perform the bulk of the gardening and child-rearing, younger women, like Pedro's eldest daughter, are studying at university and some have taken up weaving hammocks for sale in the marketplace.



Plate 12. A Hiwi man weaves a basket for processing manioc, with his children.

Pedro and Hilda consider it to be very important to maintain a family garden, and both married daughters continue this practice despite also pursuing education and paid work. In this respect, their economic practices are similar to Hiwi people described in ethnographies dating back to the 1960s (Morey and Metzger, 1974; Conaway, 1976; Sosa, 2000; Kondo, 2002). This arrangement, however, appears to be changing. Increasing numbers of families do not clear or plant a garden, relying instead on government salaries, scholarships, and cash labour to meet their needs. This loss of subsistence knowledge, especially among the younger generation, is particularly troubling due to the instability of the Venezuelan economy. Accelerating inflation, currency controls, bureaucratic inefficiency, and corruption are contributing to growing shortages of basic foods, products, and medicine.

Grandchildren spend a large amount of time with their grandparents while their parents tend their gardens, study, or work salaried jobs. This relationship is described as very close, loving and important in the ethnographic record (Wilbert, 1957:96; Sosa, 2000:13). Hilda often carries her youngest granddaughter over her shoulder while she cooks and cleans, putting her down to rest in a hammock when she drifts off to sleep. Pedro's school-aged children are also involved in caring for and playing with their small nieces and nephews when they are home. This collective child-rearing practice frees parents to engage in productive activities.

Tourism is also an avenue for generating income and capital for many Hiwi people. Santo Rosario is located near a small river and swimming hole which is a popular venue for weekend recreation for *criollos* from the city and surrounding communities. Large family groups congregate to swim, drink beer, barbecue meat, and cook soup on wood fires, often accompanied by booming *reggaeton* music on speakers connected to car batteries. Indigenous women and children sell firewood by the highway to capitalise on these weekend visits and some enterprising community children have taken to asking for donations at the entry point for cleaning up the rubbish left behind. The community received a government loan to build a tourist posada in the early 2000s and rent the rooms to tourists. The two buildings house a kitchen, dining room, and bathroom and the bedrooms containing wooden beds with mattresses and air-conditioners. The harshness of the Amazonas climate often causes issues with electricity and plumbing that require maintenance. International tourists are uncommon in Amazonas but the region is popular with urban Venezuelans, who travel for holidays such as *Semana*

Santa and Christmas. Profits are shared among community members who work to maintain the posada; during my time, Pedro often slept at the posada to protect it from vandalism by outsiders who visit the river at night.

Hiwi often engage in wage-labour or the production of crops or goods for sale at the market. Pedro's eldest son works part time cutting wood for a nearby farmer for cash. Pedro himself is a skilled wood-carver and carpenter, with a workshop built into the back of his house.



Plate 13. Pedro and my research assistant Mat in Pedro's woodworking shop.

In addition to the money Pedro makes from carpentry, Hilda receives a salary from working in the communal kitchen, which generally provides one meal a day for the members of the community. This suggests a willingness to take advantage of

government resources that are available under the Bolivarian government. On the other hand, the founders and organisers of the Indigenous University of Venezuela explicitly refuse to become financially dependent on the national government. Although they accept some funding, they disagree with programs, such as Communal Kitchens. They also encourage independent economic development of indigenous communities by teaching students to maintain bee hives and produce honey, as well as traditional agricultural practices. In this way, indigenous communities will be empowered to participate in the national economy using indigenous forms of collective organisation. However, Hiwi people also practise independent and diverse means of generating income. Occasionally, Hilda sells surplus manioc or cassava to other community members and passing *criollo* traders who buy and sell goods to the communities along the highway. Other families also trade or sell produce to community members, such as fruit and sugar cane juice, excess fish and manioc.

My other main participant, Clemente also practises subsistence farming, but another major source of income is his role as healer servicing his community, surrounding communities and even *criollos* seeking divination and healing. Clemente charges a reasonable fee for his labours, which is usually restricted to what his patients can afford: 30-40BsF. At the time, this amount would buy a couple of coffees and a snack or a fairly short taxi ride.²² This is not much, he says, considering the amount of concentration and effort this work requires, but he is obligated to help those he can. A

²² In 2011, the official exchange rate hovered at about 4.6BsF/US\$1, while the exchange rate on the black market (*Mercado paralelo*) was a negotiable 8-10BsF/US\$1. Following several currency devaluations and a period of hyperinflation, the official exchange rate, in 2016, has risen to 10BsF/US\$1, while the unofficial exchange rate has risen to an extraordinary 1000BsF/US\$1.

good shaman never turns people away because they cannot afford his services, although they are obligated to pay what they are able.

Shamanic practices are also effective in economic relations and trade partnerships, revealing that shamanism plays a role in everyday life beyond medical or religious interventions. Using the light of the moon, which he calls down with chants and hand gestures, Clemente protects his community and makes the people lucky. He points to the large truck parked on the shoulder of the highway about a hundred metres from the shaded area where we are sitting. Music is blaring and some men are selling fresh produce and manufactured goods to the community and passers-by.

This is a good place for people to sell things, and people from the community can buy things they need, maybe an onion to make soup. If it wasn't a good place, they wouldn't come here to sell things. — Clemente

Clemente's wife and teenage daughters weave nylon hammocks and bags for sale in the tourist market in the centre of Puerto Ayacucho, known as the Indigenous Market (*Mercado Indígena*).



Plate 14. The Indigenous Market in Puerto Ayacucho.

Crafting traditional products, such as baskets, beaded jewellery, low stools, etc. for sale is a common economic strategy across many indigenous groups. I also observed Piaroa, Yanomamĩ, and Yekuna individuals crafting and selling these objects, as well as exotic pets, such as toucans and parrots. Increased trading and work opportunities, along with access to health and education, is likely an important reason for settling along the National Highway, the only road to Puerto Ayacucho from the north.

Cash is spent on foodstuffs that are not cultivated in the *CONUCO*, such as coffee, rice, beer, and sugar; school uniforms and books for the children; transport costs, which may include the taxi cooperative, petrol for motorcycles, and a local truck that takes people to Puerto Ayacucho; woodworking tools; medicine; clothing, cooking utensils, and

other manufactured products. Conversations involving financial negotiations with my main participants, such as rent payments, were usually somewhat awkward, halting, and accompanied by laughter. This suggests that the Hiwi obligation to share among relatives and friends remains an imperative in social life and renders direct conversations about the exchange of money uncomfortable. For example, my negotiations with Clemente to exchange money for his time and knowledge occurred over a long period of time, involving many visits and gifts. Once he was sure my intentions were good, he made clear to me that he desired more financial reward for his participation by telling me a story of a botanist who had paid him for his time and knowledge of plants. In this indirect way, Clemente avoids some of the awkwardness of negotiating prices, a process no doubt complicated, but also necessitated by my social distance from him. Hiwi people also negotiate monetary exchanges for produce. I observed Hilda selling two kilos of processed manioc to an older female relative. The conversation was a little stilted and involved deliberately light-hearted negotiations over the true weight of the produce and price.

Many younger Hiwi people are less interested in learning agricultural, hunting, and fishing techniques as they become increasingly dependent on selling their labour for wages within the capitalist system. For this reason, numerous Hiwi youths are pursuing tertiary education to increase their ability to participate in the salaried workforce. Countless young Hiwi adults are invested in continuing their studies at university, particularly in subject areas that will benefit their community, such as tourism, education, medicine, nursing, and social science. The costs of education are raised within the family and the community. In Santo Rosario, children walk from house to house selling tickets in the 'animal bingo' game. Participants buy tickets and select

animals, at the rate of 2BsF per animal. Later, a winning animal is selected randomly and a monetary prize is awarded. The rest of the funds are used to purchase school uniforms, books and supplies for the children.

A new indigenous university is under construction near Puerto Ayacucho, which will increase educational opportunities for indigenous people by obviating the onerous expense of supporting oneself financially while living far from family. The emotional and monetary costs make this prospect impossible for many indigenous youths, especially young women who take on most of the responsibility for children and gardens. It is becoming increasingly common for indigenous youth to seek a career in the army, the *Guardia Nacional*, which may be facilitated by more accessible identity documentation and increasing military presence on Venezuelan borders. In his youth Pedro joined the *Guardia Nacional*, but left after several years because the work took him around the country and he missed spending time with his wife and family.

This assimilation into the national economy is the product of hundreds of years of often violent insertion into the capitalist system. It is the result of individuals exercising their agency and intelligence to survive within an often hostile and racist economic system of exploitation. Hiwi people not only survive, but thrive due to their ingenuity and resourcefulness. As we have seen, the Venezuelan government encourages the development of non-capitalist forms of production and distribution, modelling its specifically Latin American socialism on an idealised view of indigenous economic practices. Hiwi economies at present may be described as a plural economy consisting of capitalist practices such as wage labour and private property, as well as reciprocal

practices of labour and exchange. Sosa, a Hiwi man from Colombia, provides a thoughtful analysis of the differences between Hiwi and capitalist economic systems, pointing to the intrinsic value of the person:

So these foreign tools, brought in by white men, were not what harmed the Guahibo culture. What was harmful was the white man's system of transacting business, aimed at making a profit and amassing a fortune for his own personal prosperity (2000:74).

Sosa (2000) describes the Hiwi economy as more focused on the value of the person, than the value of the object being produced and exchanged. As we saw in the two case studies, Hiwi individuals earn cash to buy manufactured goods by selling their labour and products. This creates a tension with older practices of redistribution and exchange, where individuals with salaries and private property are pressured to distribute this wealth among relatives according to traditional kinship obligations. These demands are often resisted as they compete with the aim of accumulating capital. I have observed that the principle of sharing is still highly valued, but this is clearly delineated from outright gifts, such as lending a tool to a relative or exchanging manioc for cash. Salaried work and labour migration are potential obstacles to the continuation of indigenous communitarian practices, which must be recuperated in order to form the basis of a social economy.

The case studies illustrate the plurality of indigenous economic practices, both capitalist and indigenous, currently used today. The substantive economy of Hiwi communities is characterised by tensions between principles of indigenous reciprocity and capitalist accumulation. This complex, fluid, and distinctly indigenous matrix of economic strategies has developed historically through indigenous incorporation into capitalism

and reflects the plural nature of economic reality in any society. Such diversity and ingenuity would perhaps offer a more realistic, given the state's entanglement with global capitalism, model for a pluralistic economy than that of Twenty-First Century Socialism. The case study reveals the heterogeneous nature of indigenous economic practices. Simplistic characterisations of indigeneity often assume the existence of an underlying homogenous nature or essence, resulting in the supposition that indigenous modes of production are similar and distinct from non-indigenous or capitalist forms of labour and production. This belies the existing diversity of productive activities among and within indigenous groups. The plethora of economic practices in which Hiwi engage refutes the simplistic assertion that indigenous peoples practise solely communitarian and collective production and distribution.

Angosto Ferrández (2013:29) notes that in the Gran Sabana region of Venezuela, high concentrations of population around economic centres, such as Santa Elena, cause the overexploitation of local resources which render traditional indigenous means of production insufficient. Yet these practices remain necessary for survival due to the lack of complete capitalist development of the region. For Angosto Ferrández (2013), no indigenous community is fully immersed in one pure form of economic practices. Rather, the indigenous and capitalist economies coexist in a regional system in which all social actors—indigenous and non-indigenous—are related. The economic reality for any society comprises many forms of economic production beyond the relation of capital to salaried work. Pure capitalism exists only as a theory and all concrete societies are characterised by multiple diverse forms of production and distribution that ensure survival. Pre-capitalist practices, such as direct exploitation of resources without much capital and workers owning their own means of production, often co-exist with

capitalist forms, “structuring a heterogeneous complex of relations of property, production, and distribution of riches and different stages of development of productivity” (Maza Zavala, 1967:12).

Mosonyi (2007:182) affirms that the historical plurality of indigenous socio-economic models constitutes an important intellectual legacy for modern forms of socialism, if the internal diversity of indigenous societies is respected. This requires a true and dynamic intercultural contact between indigenous peoples and the state, which moves beyond a homogeneous and simplistic conception of indigeneity. Mosonyi characterises interculturality as a “bridge that communicates in a horizontal and democratic form [between] all [aspects of] our plural society in its history and essence” (2007:189). True indigenous socialism is based in internal and external diversity of each participating society, and great tolerance for individual difference that does not threaten conviviality (Mosonyi, 2007:186). This requires a more dynamic and open conception of intercultural exchange and pluriethnicity than is possible within the confines of Twenty-First Century Socialism, as it would encompass botanical, biomedical, and social psychology knowledge embedded in the cosmological framework of indigenous shamanism and spirituality (2007:184).

4.1.2. *Únima*: A Hiwi Form of Reciprocal Labour Organisation

The Venezuelan state supports endogenous development and social inclusion through the funding of cooperatives to produce basic goods under the direction of workers. Endogenous development is overseen by the Ministry of Popular Economy and consists of “internal, self-sustaining development”, where leadership and decision-making

processes are located firmly within the community (Ross, 2006:73). Within Bolivarianism, this model of development is perceived as a challenge to neoliberal imperialism and unsustainable resource exploitation, although public policies are funded by petroleum exports (Clark, 2010:136). I compare the cooperative with the Hiwi form of labour organisation, *únuma*, to problematise the government's assertion that this new form of labour more accurately reflects the indigenous history of the nation. Although cooperatives have yet to fully penetrate indigenous communities around Puerto Ayacucho, I argue that the establishment of a cooperative system in indigenous communities, under government control and direction, may violate their right to economic self-determination as promised in the CRBV.

Únuma, in the Hiwi language, refers to a reciprocal form of labour organisation used by Hiwi people. In this system, all able-bodied men in the community work together on a project, such as building a house or clearing a garden that belongs to a particular family. The working day usually starts early in the morning, around 4 or 5am. The wife prepares a huge breakfast of *cassabe*, fruit, rice, soup, or whatever is available. In exchange for his labour, each helper receives food for the day in payment and is owed a day of work by the man who organised the *únuma* (see Sosa, 2000:25). All crops yielded by the field belong to the owner and his family. If a man is unable to work due to illness, his relatives and community members would perform an *únuma*, for which he owes them work when he is well. Reciprocity is based on obligations to kin and the community; if an able-bodied man refuses to participate, he may be verbally censured by community leaders and shamans. The shame of this criticism may lead a man to migrate to another community, but he cannot be coerced into participation.

Speaking generally, Mosonyi (2007:187) notes that Amerindian communities often organise into labour groups, but retain their individual dignity and each person possesses specific kinship obligations based on their relationship to others. Sosa (2000), wishing to distance Hiwi practices from the political polarisation of capitalism/communism, emphasises that *únuma* is not a form of socialism as crops are not owned communally. Clemente assures me that *únuma* is not a political practice and is not enforceable by the community. However, if you refuse to help someone else, they have no obligation to help you later. Pedro says if a healthy man refuses to work for others after he has benefitted from the *únuma* system, he may be reprimanded by the community's *capitán* or shaman, but ultimately they cannot punish him or force him to leave. The system relies on trust and reciprocity in order to function, which is enforced by a well-developed network of social obligations. Sosa (2000) contrasts the fun and sharing of knowledge involved in egalitarian practice of *únuma* with work undertaken for whites, where one man stands over the others. Pedro tells me the workday passes quickly when everyone is together. Old and young people work side by side, the young learning much from their elders about the forest and its plants. The importance of social relationships, harmony, and conviviality to economic activities is a common characteristic of Amerindian societies. As Passes (2000) argues for the Pa-ikwené people, economically productive work is physically arduous, but this hardship is balanced by an element of pleasure and sociability: joking and chatting is highly valued and considered to increase productivity. He (2000:98) posits that economic labour and social life are not perceived to be distinct domains, as they are in Western societies, and economic production inherently involves the production of society. As Passes explains, community and personal autonomy coexist and work is “non-coercive and

unconstricting; each worker is free to come and go, to take part or withdraw their services as and when they wish” (2000:100). Similarly, the autonomy of the individual is maintained, while Hiwi people simultaneously participate in collective work, such as processing manioc.

The continuance of the *únuma* system is threatened by increasing participation in capitalist labour relations and capital accumulation. Salaried workers, such as bilingual teachers and health workers, have no time for planting, hunting, and fishing and must rely on others who they pay. There is pressure for these individuals to share their salary with relatives, by buying them cattle or contributing to community projects. Although kinship obligations may prevent the purely private accumulation of capital, Sosa (2000:68) warns against the danger of a new class emerging who earns salaries and do not participate in *únuma*. As he explains:

This refusal to cooperate starts to bring imbalance within the Guahibo system; a new evolution in work begins to take place, one lacking in definite boundaries where people do not know where to go nor what to do (Sosa, 2000:78).

I did not observe an *únuma* on a large scale, although Clemente recounted how his community had worked together to build their newly issued houses before I arrived for my second visit in 2013. The government provided the building materials to the community, who then worked together to build each house quickly, rather than waiting and relying on the skills of a government builder. I also observed Pedro working with his teenaged sons to build a roof on a house extension, instructing them as they worked to fasten the corrugated iron to the wooden frame.

This Hiwi principle of autonomy and reciprocity is also reflected in the obligation to share food and resources. The *únuma* and food distribution are aspects of a distinctly Hiwi economic model that values the person and the land in themselves, rather than as commodities to be sold for profit. According to Sosa, Hiwi people historically had a concept of property as either collective or personal, which differed from *criollo* notions of private property. All natural things, such as land, rain, and rivers were considered collective property, belonging to whoever uses them. Objects produced and purchased by an individual, such as a house, garden, bow and arrows, and axes, were his or her personal property, but these things should be lent to others for the common good (Sosa, 2000:5). I argue in this chapter that a concept of private property is also becoming increasingly common in Hiwi communities, although the imperative to share and be generous remains strong. In the past, Hiwi people felt an obligation to share produced food with others, such as cassava or game meat; it was socially unacceptable to be stingy (*asiwa*) (Sosa, 2000:30). According to Sosa:

Showing up to claim one's own part was a norm in the society, the same as sharing the product of everyone's efforts among all the people in the community (2000:31).

Sosa argues that the distribution of game or seed was not a matter of social prestige, but of recognising and supplying the needs of others. During periods of hunger due to epidemics, violence, or plagues villages would seek food at another village, and it was their obligation to share with their neighbours and relatives. Someone who received food or resources felt obligated to repay the favour, by giving something so as not to feel ashamed (*aura*): “That is how they would value each other” (Sosa, 2000:32). A man provided for his children because he loves them more than the materials they

consume and this extends to every member of the human race, as human beings have an intrinsic value (Sosa, 2000:37).

I did not observe the free distribution of food and participants informed me that this practice has been largely discontinued. Food and other products are now sold, traded, or borrowed among members of the community. Pedro tells me that in his grandfather's time, a successful hunter returning with game meat would distribute a portion to each family in the community, no matter how small each portion.

I really wish I lived in this time. Now, he who doesn't have money (*plata*) doesn't eat. — Pedro.

The government model of cooperatives is yet to penetrate far into the rural areas of Amazonas and is more common in industrialised regions. One of the areas targeted by the state is food security where local nucleuses of endogenous development are responsible for increasing national production. These nucleuses are jointly managed by communal councils, local farmers, and government ministries, which reflects a vision of a social economy constructed from the bottom-up by the people, while the state supports its creation through “market regulation, subsidies and new institutions of government” (Clark, 2010:146). This process is managed through the Ministry of Popular Power for Agriculture and the Ministry of Communes and Social Protection. The latter is responsible for aiding workers and farmers to establish cooperatives and, recently, Social Production Enterprises (SPE), by providing “training, technical assistance and credits” to communities and coordinate with all levels of government (Clark, 2010:147). From 2001-2006, the government encouraged cooperatives for all types of industries, including models which shared management between workers and

private businesses or the state, known as social production companies. This project gained impetus from the large general strike in 2002, when many workers took over and ran businesses closed by management (Azzellini, 2013:28). Chávez began to promote Socialist Workers Councils (CST), a bottom-up form of economic organisation, in 2007. Many institutions tried to prevent their formation or take control of the process, making them the site of power struggles between workers and the state (Azzellini, 2013:29). Economic pluralism may lead to a lack of consistency in policy which, according to Escobar, establishes “an uneasy mixture of private and State capitalism” (2010:14). A lack of clarity about social economic theory may lead to unintended consequences and may ultimately support existing capitalist structures (Angosto Ferrández, 2010:112). The assumption that cooperatives would satisfy social needs and that internal collectivism would extend to the community proved false. As Azzellini elucidates:

Most cooperatives still followed the logic of capital, concentrating on the maximization of net revenue without supporting the surrounding communities, many failed to integrate new members (2013:28).

State-funded incentives of credit and tax-exemption led to a rise in number of cooperatives in 2004, although many were, in reality, small businesses and many cooperatives failed. As Clark notes, these problems led the government to adopt a “more state-managed and less voluntarist approach” (2010:148) characterised by Social Production Enterprises. These social production companies, co-owned by the state and workers, are the government’s response to the problems of these struggling and short-lived state-subsidised cooperatives owned by private members. They are designed to go beyond private organisations by providing production, processing, and distribution for the community; a mediating point between cooperatives and the social economy

overseen by the Venezuelan Agrarian Corporation (Purcell, 2013:154). Production is focused on use-values (social needs rather than capital accumulation), labour is organised collectively outside the exploitation and alienation of exchange-values, fair prices are set above market value and profits are reinvested in the local community (Purcell, 2013:154). SPE are subject to more state monitoring, management, and assistance putting involving bureaucratic official in a dominant position, while workers control production at a local level (Clark, 2010:149). Although people may choose to register as a cooperative, this process is increasingly dependent on state intervention.

The cooperative model may allow indigenous communities economic independence and more direct control of the mode of production. Certainly, many indigenous people desire economic development in their territories to improve living standards and allow the community to increase participation in capital accumulation. Agricultural cooperatives would take advantage of Hiwi geographical knowledge and the communal labour organisation of the *únuma*. Such projects would also develop the infrastructure of the community, such as water supply and irrigation systems. A cattle-raising cooperative was founded in Colombia in the 1970s with funding from INCORA (Colombian Institute of Agrarian Reform), which experienced some success before being abandoned due to fears it departed from Guahibo principles. Sosa argues that it shows the possibility of building a Guahibo economy, with government aid, that would not be swallowed up by the white economy (Sosa, 2000:67). Indigenous people in general require government resources and institutional knowledge to develop cooperatives based on a foreign model of labour organisation.

Cooperatives are intended to increase horizontal decision-making and empowerment of marginalised peoples. They form part of the New Geometry of Power, which aims to create new politico-territorial units within the federal system, distinct from existing states, municipalities and parishes, to facilitate self-management of communities. However, these new units are not subject to free determination by indigenous communities, but rather are closely tied to government projects. The government discourse that indigenous people act as natural socialists by producing, distributing, and consuming communally is a simplistic representation of the complex dynamics operating in indigenous communities.

Although Hiwi people practise a form of reciprocal labour, this may not easily be translated into the more rigid communitarianism of a state-funded cooperative, where the land and crops to be produced are decided by the state. Regular working hours seem at odds with Hiwi sense of time as fluid and work as flexible. Cooperatives may be in danger of being manipulated by leaders for their own personal gain and of reproducing labour relations under capitalism. Cooperatives may be seen as a new stage in the process of assimilating indigenous peoples into the national economy by transforming them into capitalists and wage-labourers (Angosto Ferrández, 2010:122-123, 2015). The state's requirement that labour is organised according to a cooperative model is in direct contrast to indigenous people's right to develop their own form of economic production and distribution, as promised by the CRBV. It seems unlikely that indigenous sovereignty and self-determination could be achieved under a universal system such as this.

4.2. Twenty-First Century Socialism: Toward a Social Economy

I have argued the Hiwi people live within an intercultural, plural economy, where Hiwi practices of *únuma* and subsistence farming, hunting, and fishing coexist with wage-labour and salaried work. Processes of capital accumulation compete with Hiwi imperatives to share and work collectively. In this section, I turn to a consideration of the Bolivarian government's project of Twenty-First Century Socialism to further explore the plural economies that structure Hiwi lives. Chávez's brand of 21st Century Socialism promotes endogenous development through the intervention of a centralised state which manages redistribution of oil wealth to the citizens through social programs, promotes popular participation in economic decision-making through workers' cooperatives, and seeks to counter US dominance in the region by seeking new trade alliances (2011; Ellner, 2012).

The Bolivarian movement, like other Left-wing movements in Latin America, evolved into an organised coalition that expressed popular discontent with *puntofijismo* and the government's attempts to introduce orthodox IMF policies that exacerbated suffering among the popular classes. This resentment culminated in the *Caracazo* of 1989—a popular uprising against increased gas prices, tax hikes, and liberalisation of the retail sector (Rosales, 2013:1445; Cameron, 2009:337).²³ Harnecker describes this New Left as the collection of forces that stand against capitalism and its pursuit of profits, fighting for a society based on humanism and solidarity that frees the working classes from the

²³ Looting and protests broke out in major urban centres, but was violently oppressed. These years of instability bred discontent in the lower levels of the military, who, led by Lieutenant Hugo Chávez, unsuccessfully attempted to seize power in the coup of 1992. The *Caracazo* has been mythologised within the Bolivarian canon as the first anti-imperial protest in Latin America.

“material poverty and the spiritual misery which is bred by capitalism” (2005:143, emphasis in original).

Bolstered by electoral successes and taking advantage of popular fears of a counter-revolution which would reinstate the old oligarchy, Chávez radicalised his economic policies over the course of his 15-year term. In 1998, Chávez was elected on an anti-neoliberal platform with a leftist orientation and the support of left-leaning parties.²⁴ Chávez downplayed socio-economic change during his electoral campaign in 1998, instead promoting political reform, such as a new constitution and indigenous rights. From 2001-2004, the government reversed the neoliberal economic formulas of previous decade by seizing greater control of strategic industries such as oil, aluminium, electricity, by increasing social spending, and by enacting an agrarian reform law (Ellner, 2011:250). As Ellner (2004) notes, Chávez’s ideological conceptions are vague and lack a comprehensive critique of capitalism; his early anti-neoliberal radicalisation owes much to the dynamics of populism and class: the marginalised classes suffered greatly under neoliberal reforms and their politics are unpredictable; the bourgeoisie vehemently opposed Chávez, which may have propelled his government further towards anti-capitalism (Ellner, 2004:27). From 2005-2006, the government moved beyond their initial anti-neoliberalism by redefining private property to include obligations, expropriating several closed businesses, and defining itself as “pro-socialist” (Ellner, 2011:250). Although the Bolivarian revolution initially sought a ‘third way’ between

²⁴ In 1998, MAS was ill-prepared for the anti-neoliberalism debate surrounding Chávez’s election and pressure from below caused their national leaders to endorse him although none of them embraced anti-neoliberalism. This created a rift with rank-and-file members, which led the party to split twice, in 1998 and 2001, when no veteran national leaders joined the pro-Chávez group (Ellner, 2004:20).

capitalism and socialism, in 2006 the national election was presented as a choice between the two economic models (Azzellini, 2013:26). In 2007, the government enshrined their commitment to creating a more socially just economy in the *Simón Bolívar' National Project: The First Socialist Program for the Social and Economic Development of the Nation 2007 – 2013*.

A social economy is a nascent reality in Venezuela and is generally defined as an inclusive economy, based on practices of solidarity with the aim of achieving social well-being, which draws theoretical inspiration from Latin American history, indigenous resistance to imperialism, and Christian liberation theology.²⁵ Although Venezuela's oil-based economy remains inextricably enmeshed in global capitalism, this recent turn towards socialism reveals that other economic forms are possible and even desirable. As Polanyi (1977:liv) noted, changes in the relation of society and economy are never an unconscious or organic growth. Rather, change depends on human agency and encompasses two phases: the ideal and material. These phases refer to the thoughts and ideas that shape historical institutions, and the objective conditions that affect the successful diffusion and instantiation of these ideas. As Castelao and Srnec (2013:717) note, the social economy emerged as a response to neoliberalism's social consequences, such as unemployment, business closures, and growing labour informality, which forced workers into individual and collective income strategies. On the theoretical level, social economies challenge the liberal fiction that society must be determined solely by economic motivations, such as the private accumulation of capital

²⁵ I use the singular of 'social economy' because multiple forms of social economy are possible and each will be shaped by historical-social conditions in which they emerge; Bolivia and Ecuador are also working towards a more social economy.

(Polanyi, 1977). In a social economy, the pursuit of profit or surplus-values is subjugated to social needs or use-values.

Reintjes (2004) defines the social economy as more than just an attempt to redress the harmful effects of neoliberal globalisation. Rather, it is an innovative re-imagining of the economy and society in service of the basic needs of all humans and the environment, which are seen as supreme values with rights, rather than resources (Reintjes, 2004:67). Twenty-First Century Socialism is grounded in the principles of “collectivity, equality, solidarity, freedom, and sovereignty” (Azzellini, 2013:26). Ideally, the social economy operates according to ethical criteria of autonomy; self-management; social, cultural and environmental utility; social property/control of production; territoriality/rooted in local places; democracy; participation; de-emphasis on profit-making; cooperation and solidarity; economic activity with social utility (Reintjes, 2004:67-68). As Arruda explains:

The Solidary Economy, in sum, is an ethical, reciprocal, and cooperative form of consumption, production, exchange, finance, communication, education, development that promotes a new mode of thinking and living (2004:73).²⁶

A social economy challenges what Polanyi dubbed the “economistic fallacy”: the conflation of the economy, in the sense of the substantive human practices that support the survival of a social group, with the market, a historically specific economic

²⁶ Spanish language theorists use the term ‘*economía solidaria*’ (solidary economy) in describing this phenomenon, which I have translated as ‘social economy’ due to the archaic nature of this word in English.

institution linking supply, demand, and price (1977:5-6). The market is the determining factor in neoliberal conceptions of society and the driving force behind development. Proponents of a social economy do not reject markets entirely and, indeed, the private sector now occupies a larger percentage of the Venezuelan economy than before Chávez (Beasley-Murray et al., 2009:323). Rather, supporters repudiate the “ideology that places markets at the centre of the development model to the detriment of public institutions and their social context” (Cameron, 2009:337). Latin American leftists “have accepted that it is possible—and desirable—to promote a plural economy and within that economy, economic units lying at the intersection between the state, the marketplace and society, combining various resources and social rationalities” (Castelao Caruana and Srnec, 2013:716). The Venezuelan social economy is built upon existing economic structures, such as the market, to construct a more socially just alternative to capitalism (Angosto Ferrández, 2010:108) and redress structural issues of poverty and marginalisation (Cameron, 2009:333).

The shift away from market-based economics requires a new theoretical principle, which the Venezuelan government draws from the history, politics, and culture of Latin America. This decolonial perspective seeks to “overcome the expensive bad Latin-American habit of mechanically applying recipes coming to us from the north” (Angosto Ferrández, 2010:112). Such a project involves a reimagining of history which recognises and glorifies previously marginalised groups and their struggles, particularly indigenous resistance to Spanish colonial authorities (Ellner, 2012:107). As a new concept in Latin America, social economies are in the process of being defined in practice through worker’s cooperatives, social production companies, and self-directed development. These social production companies or cooperatives are grounded in the

work of Hungarian Marxist Istvan Mészáros (1995), who argued that production should be reorganised to encourage communally produced goods and services to be shared equally among the producers (Purcell, 2013:147). This new model emphasises the efficacy of plural economies, which encourage self-management and collective ownership, and social policies which aim to promote social inclusion and employment (Castelao Caruana and Srnec, 2013:715). In Venezuela, worker management and cooperatives function as economic units, but also a means of empowering the people and increasing political-economic participation (Castelao Caruana and Srnec, 2013:718).

An important function of cooperatives and social-production companies is as a means of empowering marginalised populations, providing experience, and increasing economic participation. As Harnecker (2009:310) notes, they are also a means of repaying the social debt to marginalised classes that domestic and international capital has failed to relieve. Workers participate in business decisions, creating a New Geometry of Power based on popular participation. As Ellner explains:

In contrast to the nationalisations of socialist inspiration that create vertical structures, cooperatives promote horizontal decision-making, small-scale units of production, empowerment of the non-privileged (2008:58).

Ellner (2008) notes that fast growth of cooperatives over a short period has led to a lack of supervisory mechanisms and guarantees that investment will be used effectively. Harnecker (2009) notes that coordination between cooperatives and communities is necessary for cooperatives to meet their obligations to society. New agricultural cooperatives are often poorly equipped, lack necessary financial resources, and function

as a surrogate for either cheap labour or welfare (Purcell, 2011:576). Cooperative leaders are frequently accused of embezzling government funds for personal gain, known as ‘briefcase cooperatives’ (*cooperativas de maletín*) and many cooperatives are inefficient and eventually fail. Those that survive emerge with a strong base and these experiences form an apprenticeship for the marginal sectors and contribute to a sense of empowerment (Ellner, 2008:59). The popular sectors prioritise this grassroots focus on social-humanitarian considerations, cultural transformation, and increasing class consciousness, rather than a perspective preoccupied with the efficiency and profitability of cooperatives. As Ellner explains:

Since the foundation of the Ministry of Popular Economy in 2004, state promotion of cooperatives has taken the form of a social program that generates employment, more than the seeds of a productive and self-sustaining economic model that would eventually form an integral part of the economy of the nation (2008:60).

Purcell agrees that cooperatives have failed to reach the level of a self-sustaining economic model. Rather, he sees them as a means of quickly redistributing oil rent money to marginalised groups, portrayed as a socialist alternative to capitalism, while in reality they reproduce “dependent rentier-capitalist social relations” (Purcell, 2011:568).

According to Purcell:

Although such direct transfers permit the Chávez government to bypass existing institutional inertia, they create a dependent parallel economy, rather than a nonprofit-based[sic] sustainable alternative (2013:159).

To remedy this, Purcell (2013:163) calls for larger cooperatives that can compete at least on a national level with private companies and the political transformation to progressively abolish private ownership, including cooperatives.

Within the official government discourse, the cooperative's goal of transforming capitalist values and resolving social issues has eclipsed the practical concerns about the viability of cooperatives as a novel economic model (Ellner, 2008:61). In this view, a democratic and communitarian workplace is assumed to cause a "moral self-transformation" of the workers; an awareness of human community that is discovered outside of capitalist market relations and alienated labour (Purcell, 2011:571). Purcell counters that Social Production Enterprises maintain capitalist relations of production and are given financial incentives by the state initiatives to invest in programs that benefit the wider community (Purcell, 2011:572). Purcell further explains that:

Although ideologically presented as an intervention into the production process, a key political function of an EPS, therefore, is the targeted transfer of resources to small-scale production experiments that are given a socialist identity *post festum*—at the level of distribution (2011:573).

He contends that this rhetorical positioning of cooperative economies as breaking with private capital accumulation, without consideration of the material conditions in which production takes place, "presupposes that 'the collective' functions as a direct solidarity alternative to capitalist individualism" (Purcell, 2011:576). Purcell (2011:576) argues that cooperatives reproduce, rather than challenge, the prevailing system of rentier capitalism by distributing rents to the population. A new theoretical principle is required to transform the material conditions of capitalism and group consciousness, which the Venezuelan government locates in indigenous socialism. But whose notion of indigeneity is at play in this political-economic narrative, and does it reflect the reality and diversity of indigenous identities?

4.2.1. Indigenous Socialism in the Twenty-First Century

In the search for a specifically Latin American form of social economy, regional leaders such as Hugo Chávez, Evo Morales, the President of Bolivia, and Rafael Correa, the President of Ecuador, often invoke the work of José Carlos Mariátegui (2007), a Peruvian Marxist who proposed a form of socialism founded on indigenous communitarianism, rather than European workers' movements. Chávez often cited Mariátegui as a political influence, his birth was commemorated by the National Assembly in 2005 and his work influenced the writing of the 1999 Constitution (see Valdés Díaz, 2012). Chávez frequently used phrases such as 'indigenous socialism' and 'indoamerican socialism' to refer to the government's new economic model and claimed that the New Geometry of Power reflects indigenous principles of organisation (Angosto Ferrández, 2008:22). Indigenous economic practices of solidarity, communitarianism, and redistribution are cited by the government as an inspiration for Twenty-First Century socialism, and the image of indigenous resistance grants legitimacy to Chávez's anti-US imperialism rhetoric. This discourse relies on a particular imaginary of indigenous people as unchanging and ahistorical, preserved in a pristine pre-capitalist stage that has not been the reality for most indigenous peoples since Conquest.

Angosto Ferrández (2008), an anthropologist working with Pemón in the Gran Sabana region of Venezuela, argues that the Bolivarian government uses a particular imaginary of indigeneity to construct their legitimising political-economic narratives. This involves an official revalorisation of the indigenous contribution to national patrimony and history, which is evident in Chávez's 1998 campaign promise to pay the 'historical debt' to indigenous peoples during his presidential campaign and his pride in his own

African and indigenous heritage (Angosto Ferrández, 2008; Herrera Salas, 2005). Angosto Ferrández (2008) dubs this political imaginary ‘*Guaicaipurismo*’, named for the indigenous hero of colonial resistance. This discourse uses symbolic images and narratives drawn from precolonial indigenous peoples and their resistance to colonial domination. This discourse complements the political mythology of ‘*Bolivarianismo*’, which links the revolutionary Fifth Republic under Chávez to the heroes of the War of Independence, such as Simon Bolivar, Simon Rodriguez and Ezequiel Zamora, and the themes of “national independence, popular sovereignty, Latin-American integration or the role of the State as guarantor of social justice” (Angosto Ferrández, 2008:13). *Guaicaipurismo* powerfully conflates revolution and indigeneity, colonial resistance and the anti-imperial, anti-neoliberal alternative offered by the Fifth Republic (Angosto Ferrández, 2008:28).²⁷

²⁷ David Guss (2000) reveals that this process of revalorising and reimagining history is a dynamic and constant practice among other subaltern identities in Venezuela, such as Afro-Venezuelans, who use the symbols of the festival of San Juan to associate their current identity and experience of inequality with a colonial history of resistance to European elites.



Plate 15. A public mural in Puerto Ayacucho depicts indigenous resistance.

This narrative has the positive effect of decolonising the past, of valorising indigenous history, and empowering indigenous people to participate in political and economic life. Indigenous leaders share in the cultural and political capital granted by appeal to a “glorified indigenous past” (Angosto Ferrández, 2008:17) and many actively identify themselves with the Bolivarian Revolution by adopting socialist terminology. But the intertwining of *Guaicaipurismo* and *Bolivarianismo* may also threaten indigenous political autonomy. MINPI was initially perceived positively by indigenous civil organisations as a means for indigenous communities to direct their demands to the national government with the aim of including indigenous communities in the socialist transformation and national development. In practice it has become an instrument for applying state policies and projects, such as the First Socialist Plan for the Economic

and Social Development of the Nation (2007-2013), in indigenous territories (Angosto Ferrández, 2010:121-122).

As Angosto Ferrández (2008) notes, many indigenous activists now identify with the revolutionary process and socialism. At a political rally in the presidential electoral campaign in 2013, the President of the Federation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolívar State (FIEB), José Gregorio Cascante was joined by many leaders of indigenous communities in praising the Bolivarian revolution: "We have decided on the path to life and this is represented by the revolutionary process which President Hugo Chávez leads, and the other is the path to destruction and disregard for the rights of people power" (*Pueblos Indígenas Respaldan la Candidatura de Hugo Chávez*, n.d.). Indigenous representative and PSUV leader, Noeli Pocaterra, gave a press conference soon after Chávez's death in March 2013, stating "We cannot hide the pain of the physical departure of our eternal Comandante and President Hugo Chávez because he put the defence of the rights of indigenous peoples in first place...and this Constitution recognised that we are a pluricultural, multiethnic country" (*Nohelí Pocaterra: Chávez Visibilizó a los Pueblos Indígenas y Defendió sus Derechos*, 2013).

Besides the constitutional recognition of indigenous peoples, social programs and presidential decrees attempted to redress previous racial marginalisation. The remains of indigenous hero Guicaipuro were symbolically placed in the National Pantheon alongside other heroes of the Revolutionary War (1811-1823) and the *Día de la Raza* was changed to *Día de la Resistencia Indígena*; identity cards (*cédulas*) were authorised which recognise indigenous persons as Venezuelan citizens, but also members of native

peoples (*pueblos originarios*); the Ministry of Popular Power for Indigenous Peoples was created in 2007 to increase indigenous representation in high level government decision-making; and Mision Guicaipuro was established in 2004. Mission Guicaipuro aims to “Coordinate, promote, articulate and make feasible policies, plans, programs, and projects of the Bolivarian government in order to operationalize and accelerate their implementation in communities, communes and cities together with community councils and grassroots homeland indigenous organizations” (*Misión Guicaipuro (MINPI)*, 2011). Guaranteeing indigenous rights and legal recognition of indigenous peoples is intrinsic to “defining Venezuelan society as socialist, pluriethnic, and multicultural” (*Misión Guicaipuro (MINPI)*, 2011). The mission’s objective is to “promote, develop, and implement Bolivarian policies directed to settle, with national government entities, the historical debt owed to organized indigenous communities, enforcing the Simón Bolívar National Plan, from the perspective of a single Bolivarian project, one revolution, and one *Comandante Presidente* generating the greatest amount of happiness” (*Misión Guicaipuro (MINPI)*, 2011).

State constructions of indigeneity, however, involve reducing a complex and diverse identity to an essence or ideal fuelled by ethnocentric assumptions. Mosonyi (2007) argues that the state’s narrow view of indigenous societies as the remnants of primordial communism founded in anti-individualism and without private property is inaccurate and potentially endangers existing cultural diversity. Implicit in the state’s ideal of indigeneity is an assumption of homogeneity in indigenous economic practices that fails to reflect the historical diversity of indigenous forms of production and distribution or the use of capitalist strategies within the market economy of the present. Despite lacking a legal framework for property, families cultivate separate parcels of land and

distribution patterns hinge on complex kinship relations, all of which cannot be reduced to primitive communism. Far from reflecting indigenous principles, state structures impose new forms of political-economic organisation on indigenous communities and may align with the racist idea that indigenous peoples are passive recipients of revolution, rather than the protagonists of their own fates (Mosonyi, 2007:186). As Mosonyi explains:

In this way we witness the imposition of a new institutional structure, with their communal councils, cooperatives, educational schemas, symbolic configurations and unknown revolutionary party slogans, totally incomprehensible for the monolingual Indian in his language (2007:185).

This reveals the dangers of naively identifying one political-economic model, the product of distinct historical processes and social imaginaries, with an entirely distinct system that evolved in a different time and place under different conditions. All of this strongly suggests that indigenous political and economic inclusion is only possible within the parameters of the Bolivarian Revolution. The state retains control and directs the nature of the political and economic institutions in indigenous territories, through MINPI and *Mision Guacaipuro*. This imposition of centralised structures contradicts indigenous constitutional rights to political and economic self-determination, and the state's commitment to pluriethnicity and cultural diversity. Opposition governor of Amazonas, Liborio Guarulla argues against a centralised state apparatus where *chavistas* dominate political and economic policy-making. In his own words, he states:

PSUV authorities announced they have one project and that they are guarding it. One package for all regions. What happens is that the regions are different in their peculiarities and development. In *chavismo*, they are almost reaching the extreme of sending robots to govern the states. It is easy to

predict their failure. Their vision is hegemonic and dictatorial. Based on just one person. Our vision is different because for us everyone is important. You cannot develop a state if you are only going to be nourished by one leader; you have to generate many political cadres who are able to work to bring Amazonas to a higher level of development and progress. We must be many, not just one (Díaz and Guarulla, 2012, December 28th).

The governor clearly shares in the government's vision of an inclusive and pluriethnic state, but criticises the government's flawed implementation of a plural political-economic reality. The 1999 Constitution promises economic self-determination for indigenous peoples, which gives them the right to continue traditional economic practices of subsistence or semi-subsistence. These rights are ensured by territorial demarcation of indigenous lands, which would be owned by the community collectively and inalienably. This demarcation process has yet to be seriously undertaken in Amazonas, a contradiction within the state's socialist and pluriethnic project that Angosto Ferrández links to Venezuela's dependence on hydrocarbon exportation.

4.3. Territorial Demarcation in a Petro-State

As I have shown, Hiwi people live in plural economies that include Hiwi practices, capitalist forms of production, and the discourse and cooperatives of a new social economy. This intercultural economic space contains the seeds for the decolonisation of economic theories and practices. A plural and decolonial economy may be achieved by ensuring that indigenous self-determination and self-directed development is possible and even encouraged by the state. However, this option is complicated by Venezuela's reliance on hydrocarbon resources and its entanglement with global capitalism. In this

section, I explore this relation and its impact on territorial rights for Hiwi people, which constitute an important step in the direction of economic self-determination.

Despite its commitment to territorial demarcation for indigenous peoples, the state has achieved very little on this front for multiple reasons. The importance of hydrocarbon sovereignty to Twenty-First Century Socialism offers a compelling explanation for stalling territorial demarcation of indigenous lands. True economic and political self-determination is only possible for indigenous communities if they possess inalienable collective rights to territory: many indigenous people believe they will lose everything if they divide the land into individual parcels. As Angosto Ferrández argues, subsistence and semi-subsistence systems are only able to be voluntarily maintained, the “if these people could pronounce themselves as collective subjects and had effective capacity of free determination of their lands, for which these must be demarcated and recognised previously” (2008:27). In fact, the majority of specific rights for indigenous peoples may only be manifested within the existing legal framework once territorial demarcation and recognition has been achieved, a commitment the Fifth Republic has not met in the last 14 years.

The Constitution establishes specific indigenous rights to the demarcation and collective ownership of their lands, rights which are “inalienable, not subject to any statute of limitations, immune from seizure and nontransferable” (CRBV: Chapter VIII). The Constitution employs the term ‘habitat’ instead of ‘territory’, a term commonly used in international law to refer to indigenous sovereignty, because some elites feared a strong indigenous movement would lead to secession (Mansutti Rodríguez, 2000:89).

Furthermore, the Constitution limits indigenous peoples' ownership of territory to the 'land', effectively restricting indigenous communities' rights in the exploitation of natural resources (Mansutti Rodríguez, 2000:90). Angosto Ferrández notes that the state's choice to award land title to indigenous 'communities,' rather than 'peoples,' creates an obstacle to indigenous self-determination as a collective subject with rights, atomising traditional structures of authority, complicating plans which extend beyond the community, and failing to ensure titles for all communities belonging to a people (2010:108). The demarcation of indigenous territory was to be completed by the National Executive within two years of the release of the Constitution. Although the law of the Demarcation and Guarantee of the Environment and Lands of Indigenous Peoples was passed in 2001 to comply with this deadline, demarcation has still not fully been achieved.

The process of demarcation is complicated by bureaucratic inefficiency. For instance, there is no administrative organ devoted to land demarcation at the state level in Amazonas; indigenous claimants must petition the National Commission directly (Monsalve, 2006). Although bureaucratic inefficiency or misinterpretation of the law are certainly factors slowing the progress of land demarcation, Angosto Ferrández (2010:126) argues the larger problem is a lack of specific legislation and theory that formalises the new conception of indigenous participation within the nation-state. The problem is more a "lack of political will", than a lack of legislation (Angosto Ferrández, 2010:105). The government demonstrates the symbolic values of cultural recognition, rather than a political conviction to the construction of a differentiated citizenry. This is because indigenous autonomy does not fit with the government's present model of development or universalistic political principles (Angosto Ferrández, 2010:126).

The centrality of oil revenues to the government's socialist project conflicts with the vision of a pluriethnic state in which specific collective indigenous rights to self-determination are protected. Article 119 of the Constitution grants indigenous peoples rights to the land they inhabit but not the subsoil resources, a condition which limits "concrete rights to the disposition of resources" (Mansutti Rodríguez, 2000:90). Article 120 provides indigenous peoples with the right to be informed and consulted by the state before the extraction of resources from their lands. However, indigenous approval is not a necessary requirement for such projects.²⁸ My Hiwi participants agree that there is still a long way to go to full territorial demarcation and recognition of indigenous rights:

The law gives indigenous people land rights but this is only on paper. If you were to take it to an institution, what would they do? They wouldn't honour it, they would tell you to go away. — Pedro

This is consistent with the historical dynamics of the petro-state tradition where the state owns the nation's vast amount of non-renewable resources: "This was a pertinent and viable strategy for a mining State like Venezuela" (Mansutti Rodríguez, 2000:91). The Constitution limits the exercise of this right by requiring some democratic participation, but also denies the rights of indigenous peoples to freely dispose of natural resources in their territories.

²⁸ Both consultation and approval were included in a constitutional draft proposed by the Commission for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, but were removed from the final draft.

The importance of mineral rights to the government is frequently cited by indigenous peoples as the reason for the slow progress of land demarcation. Many indigenous peoples, including my participants, have title to their communities under the previous laws, meaning they have no specific or collective rights as indigenous peoples to extensive territory, even though they make use of forests for gardens and rivers for fishing. Hiwi people who have migrated into new territories are eligible to apply for territorial demarcation, as the government recognises that colonisation causes displacement: “Those indigenous peoples and communities that have been displaced from their land and have been forced to occupy other, shall be entitled to be considered in the new demarcation processes” (Ley de Demarcación y Garantía del Hábitat y Tierras de los Pueblos Indígenas, 2001: Artículo 9). However, as Arias (2007:200) notes, the state retains rights to subsoil resources. Consequently, indigenous peoples do not have the right to run mines or profit from the minerals in their territories. Instead, the government grants concessions to foreign corporations.

Although Amazonas State was largely undeveloped by industrial and mining interests until the 1990s (Ellner, 1992), in recent years the national government has entered into agreements with Chinese and Canadian mineral companies to develop mining opportunities in Venezuela and alleviate the current economic crisis (Ore et al., 2016). In 2011, Chávez promulgated a law that nationalised the gold mining industry, raising tax rates, forcing foreign mining companies to become minority partners with the government and taking over some previously granted concessions to Russian-Canadian companies (Jamasmie, 2012). The region is also exploited by small-scale illegal miners from Colombia and Brazil, who often harass remote indigenous communities, particularly the Yanomami who live in the Upper Orinoco region (Jangoux, 2016). In

2009, the Venezuelan government sent the National Guard to Amazonas State to deport illegal gold miners, who are responsible for environmental degradation and poisoning rivers with mercury that is used in the extraction process (Gacksetter Nichols and Morse, 2010:12). The presence of illegal miners also justified the national government's declaration of a state of emergency in Amazonas in 2013, ostensibly to curb this threat to the environment and indigenous communities.

Amid criticism from environmentalists, the Bolivarian government announced in early 2016 that it would open of the 'Orinoco Mining Arc', an area of 111,843 square kilometres that encompasses the north of Bolívar State and parts of Amazonas and Delta Amacuro States, to the development of bauxite, gold, and diamond mining (Olivares, 2016). In April 2016, indigenous organisation KUYUJANI declared their opposition to the development of the Orinoco Mining Arc, citing environmental and social destruction if the plan to open approximately 12% of Venezuela's territory, and large tracts of indigenous territory to mining continues (KUYUJANI, 2016). President Maduro has dismissed the opposition to this development, claiming dissenters are being funded by criminal organisations of illegal miners (Koerner, 2016). Thus, it appears that indigenous communities have little control over the development of mining in their territories. While the CRBV mandates that the state consults with indigenous communities before developing mining in their territories, the communities right to benefit from development is less clear, as the Bolivarian state retains control of all subsoil resources.

There could be a mine right here <pointing to his patio floor> and we would have no right to anything produced. If the government worked with us, everyone would eat. — Pedro

These constitutional ambiguities reflect a historical tradition of political marginalisation and the continuing power of elite interests in economic resource management within indigenous territories. This is not the first time that the Venezuelan state has passed laws that officially recognise indigenous land rights but fail to effectively enforce these commitments. The Agrarian Reform Law of 1960 offered a new framework for indigenist policy because this “law 'guarantees and recognises' for the indigenous population, as far as this population is 'traditionally living', the right to use those lands, forests, and waters, 'where they traditionally live', or 'which traditionally belong to them'" (Kuppe, 1997:245). Arvelo de Jimenez (1972:37) notes that land ownership was difficult to enforce under this law. The Agrarian Reform also classified indigenous lands as vacant (*tierras baldias*) and used CODESUR to expropriate large swathes of indigenous territory, simultaneously forcing indigenous inhabitants to settle on small grants in communities based on the colonial missions and produce crops for the market (Kuppe, 1996:163; Clarac, 2001; Maybury-Lewis, 1999).²⁹

Indigenous lands have been subjected to severe environmental degradation in the name of national development and progress, a Western project envisioned almost exclusively in economic terms. These projects threaten not only the ecology of some of Venezuela's

²⁹ CODESUR was founded by President Caldera in 1972. Its objectives were to ensure the physical presence of the State in all regions to affirm national sovereignty; increase the level of socio-economic and cultural development of population; and secure new sources of income for the State, i.e. minerals, agriculture (Clarac, 2001:347). This State agency used oil boom profits to fund its 'Conquest of the South,' building roads and airports, radio stations broadcasting in indigenous languages, and funding technical studies of natural resources, but their indigenous policies remained assimilationist and paternalistic.

most unique, beautiful, and biodiverse regions but also could render indigenous habitation impossible and force migration into the cities, as in the case with Warao moving into Caracas. Some examples include deforestation from logging and river contamination from gold mining in Imataca; PDVSA's Sowing the Oil Plan for developing Venezuela's capacities for exploration, extraction, and refinement capabilities in the Orinoco petroleum belt; the Venezuelan-Brazilian Electricity project causes deforestation along its trajectory through the Imataca Forest Reserve, Canaima National Park and the Protected Zone of Southern Bolívar State. Indigenous peoples living on national borders face incursions by illegal and legal mining, drug trafficking and petrol smuggling, and Colombian paramilitaries.

Indigenous land rights are based on the prior ownership, before the advent of the nation-state, which the state recognises as continuous because ownership was never relinquished. This is a special case of property law, distinct from private and public, which is collective, inalienable, and can only be transferred through traditional means (Monsalve, 2006:192). However, the legal reality is that territory belongs to the state and whoever it has granted land since the Conquest. Clarac (2001) traces the current problems with demarcation to trade agreements signed by previous governments with foreign resource extraction companies, which are difficult to revoke. These unilateral decisions were made without consulting the indigenous owners of the territories where these resources are located and it is difficult to reconcile these arrangements with a constitution that assigns rights to indigenous groups and new laws which promise territorial demarcation (Clarac, 2001:362-363). Technically, the Constitution of 1999 recognises indigenous claims above all others, meaning even without official titles, indigenous people have the juridical means to defend their rights to lands (Monsalve,

2006:193). Land demarcation is not a complete solution to indigenous problems, but rather a plausible path to allow people to freely determine their own development within the national project.

4.3.1. Sowing Oil for Social Justice: Hydrocarbon Sovereignty

In this section, I investigate the material practices of the state in order to reveal the contradictions inherent in the government's promotion of political-economic plurality and cultural diversity. The state's flawed implementation of indigenous territorial demarcation inhibits the self-development of indigenous communities. Hydrocarbon resources provide the majority of the finances and collateral that is essential to the Bolivarian government's foreign trade relations and social justice programs, revealing the state's ongoing entanglement with global capitalism. The state's promotion of self-directed worker's cooperatives is a key aspect of their promotion of a social economy. This bears a superficial similarity to indigenous modes of labour organisation, such as the Hiwi practice of *únuma*, but also potentially endangers indigenous cultural diversity by imposing a standardised and state-centric model of development. Such a consequence contradicts the state's commitment to economic plurality and indigenous self-determination of political and economic life. This situation precludes the fulfilment of the territorial demarcation of indigenous communities that was promised in the CRBV, as the state must necessarily retain complete control of subsoil resources, particularly in the Orinoco region where there are large untapped reserves of petroleum.

Venezuela remains dependent on funds generated within the global capitalist economy and the government promotes development through capitalist accumulation, continuing

the colonial tradition of exploiting natural resources (Coronil, 2011:39). Since the discovery of oil reserves in 1914, the Venezuelan state has relied heavily on foreign (largely US) capital and technical expertise to achieve the highest possible profits from oil exports at lowest cost and with minimum risk (Miller, 1940:205). This arrangement creates a dependent or neo-colonial relationship, where foreign capital is invested in developing nations solely for the purpose of transferring surplus value to investors in developed nations. Profits generated within the domestic economy are extracted, rather than re-invested in the local economy, contributing to the continuing underdevelopment or dependent development of these nations (Higginbottom, 2013:186). As Coronil (1997:7) argues, reliance on a single export also renders these rent-seeking economies vulnerable to boom and bust cycles: commodity booms overvalue domestic currency, promote import of manufactured goods, and undermine productive sectors in domestic market. The flow of surplus value from third-world to the first and the active construction of this relationship by developed nations and transnational companies is whitewashed within the modernity paradigm: foreign capital is perceived as the agent bringing modernity and progress to these traditional nations hampered by poor governance and a lack of liberal institutions (Higginbottom, 2013:186; Coronil, 1997:8).

Economic development in Venezuela is contingent on the state's appropriation and investment of oil revenues or rents to diversify local economic production, a long-standing policy referred to as 'sowing the oil' (Blank, 1984:66). The state plays a central role in redistributing oil revenues to citizens, which is manifested in market protection, overvaluation of currency, low taxes, and cheap foreign exchange (Mommer, 1996). According to Coronil:

Presiding over these kingdoms of nature, the state appeared as the great alchemist in charge of turning oil money into productive agricultural and industrial investments and, thus, of transforming Venezuela's vast but exhaustible oil wealth into permanent social wealth (1997:134).

Coronil highlights how Chávez, who “criticizes the inequities and irrationality of capitalism—and who seeks to reduce these inequities, to democratize social services, and even to develop at the margins collective forms of ownership” has overseen an increasing dependence on oil and entanglement with capitalist markets and trade arrangements, particularly with China (Coronil, 2011:38). Purcell (2013:151) asserts that Venezuela sustains a form of rentier capitalism, where state policies aim to recover a portion of ground-rents to support restricted capital accumulation in the domestic economy. Higginbottom (2013:200) argues that a pattern of dependency still holds in Latin America, with US and European capital now owning 3 times more property than 15 years ago.

Rosales (2013) follows Coronil (2011) in asserting the universal significance of struggles over economic resources within the recent trajectory of left-wing governments in Latin America. He (2013:1449) also argues that the centrality of hydrocarbon policy may deepen the structural relationship of state, citizens and territory rather than create a more indigenous relational ontology. The dynamics of the petro-state in Venezuela is strongly entrenched and the “socialist re-enhancement today may well be a continuation of the ‘magical state’ erected in the twentieth century and staged to its greatest expression in the 1970s” (Rosales, 2013:1453). However, he (2013:1445) argues that hydrocarbon sovereignty does not necessarily represent a continuation of neoliberal policies, rather, this nationalisation of resources is crucial to the left's project of

dismantling neoliberalism. Rosales argues that “central to the revolutionary experiments in Venezuela, Ecuador, and Bolivia is their use of natural resource extraction as a way to enhance and include a hitherto marginalised ‘demos’” (Rosales, 2013:1444; Castelao Caruana and Srnec, 2013). The state’s capacity to reject or reverse neoliberal policies and achieve social equality is dependent on their ability to claim revenues from the extraction of sovereign resources during sustained high commodity prices. Resource governance is central to the left’s political imaginary and economic goals; they work to fairly distribute the wealth created by mineral extraction and export among previously marginalised sectors. Hammond (2011:373) similarly argues that rent-seeking strategies may be successful when they benefit the citizens in this way.

Hydrocarbon sovereignty is crucial to the Bolivarian government’s project of creating a more socially just economy. Oil has become “a political weapon” over which the state asserts its sovereignty to ensure funding for social welfare programs, development, and more favourable international trade agreements (Hammond, 2011:363). The re-nationalisation of the oil industry under Chávez represents a reversal of structural adjustment policies and the *apertura petrolera* (opening up of the oil industry) of the 1990s, a new contractual system which increased foreign investment and production by lowering implicit taxes and offering PDVSA as collateral against renegeing (Manzano and Monaldi, 2008:87). Many saw this as the “sacrifice of national sovereignty and the general good of the population to the interest of international capital, a perpetuation of the resource curse in a different form” (Hammond, 2011:364).

In 2001, Chávez introduced a new Hydrocarbons Laws by Presidential Decree, which doubled royalties to 30% paid to the state by PDVSA and foreign companies. In April 2002, Chávez attempted to appoint pro-government managers to PDVSA, leading the opposition to protest what they saw as the monopoly of power and mismanagement the nation's resources (Coronil, 2011). This resulted in an attempted coup and a massive strike, which reduced investment and production. The opposition saw Chávez as wounding the nation's social and natural bodies, while *chavistas* perceived Chávez as protecting these bodies from the corrupt elite seeking to re-establish control (Coronil, 2011:38). The government eventually succeeded in taking political control: firing half the workforce and most of the management. After 2002, Chávez used the popular fears of a counter-revolution that would reinstate the old oligarchy to radicalise the revolution, assert control of Venezuela's oil, and legitimise the move towards socialism. From 2004, the government began changing the contractual framework to take more control of private oil investment and, in 2007, 're-nationalised' the industry, taking majority control of all private operations without compensation (Manzano and Monaldi, 2008:88).

Hydrocarbon sovereignty or the assertion of state control over natural resources, is not only essential to the development of the Venezuelan economy, but also underpins the Bolivarian government's commitment to social spending. In 2005, the government established the National Development Fund (FONDEN), a state-run agency that invests excess foreign reserve currency from oil revenues in manufacturing and agricultural industries, as well as overseas investment; it is funded by PDVSA and directly under the President's control (Rosales, 2013:1447). The state-owned oil company, PDVSA, also invests its profits directly into social programs or *misiones*, which provide health care,

education, housing, and subsidised food to Venezuela's popular classes, empowering the people and redressing past marginalisation. These social initiatives are overseen by the executive and sometimes directly by PDVSA, and cost over US\$23 billion. Rosales (2013:1447-1448) notes that social spending has reduced poverty, with rates reaching 40% of GDP in 2006, and remaining at 29.3% in 2011. However, the deployment of PDVSA as an instrument of governmental redistribution policy conflicts with its previous role as private company investing in oil production (Manzano and Monaldi, 2008:73; Higginbottom, 2013:195).

Chávez's focus on social justice in the face of an uncertain modernity under US influence contrasts sharply with the discourse of previous governments, which invoked the political myth of a modernising capitalist project on behalf of the state (Coronil, 2011). According to Coronil (1997, 2011), political legitimacy in Venezuela is tied directly to the leader's ability to promise progress and development using oil revenues. All leaders have shared in this myth of progress through oil wealth, which depicts the state as the agent of development, and concentrates state power in the figure of the President (Coronil, 1997:3). However, Chávez distances himself from previous Presidents who promised to recreate the material and cultural achievements of capitalist Europe and USA, by instead developing a new, specifically Latin American moral community based on justice and improved quality of life (Coronil, 2011:38). The focus on sowing the oil to redress historical social injustices breaks with previous government discourses, but nevertheless invokes the longstanding political myth of progress fuelled by oil money (Higginbottom, 2013; Manzano and Monaldi, 2008).

Hydrocarbon sovereignty is crucial to Chávez's anti-imperial project of liberating Latin America from the economic hegemony of the US. The Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) agreement, launched at the Miami Summit of the Americas in 1994, assumed that as Latin American nations became more liberal-democratic and market-oriented, they would become more open to transnational trade, competing with each other for access to the US market and foreign investment, thereby creating the most advantageous conditions for multinational corporations (Cameron, 2009:343). Chávez vehemently opposed FTAA and was joined by Mercosur countries that feared the increased influence of US corporate interests in the region which would decrease their political ability to address social problems (Pearce, 2013:41). Venezuela and Cuba formed an alternative regional organisation, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) in 2004 (Cameron, 2009:343). Bolivia joined this emerging bloc in 2006, bringing the idea of a People's Trade Treaty (TCP), a potential alternative economic model based in solidarity, economic complementarity, and sovereignty (Pearce, 2013:41). Using ALBA-TCP, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela have retained a portion of surplus profits against the part captured by international capital by recovering sovereignty over resources and nationalising industries in order to further social development (Higginbottom, 2013:200).

Venezuela, as well as Bolivia and Ecuador, maintain an extractivist economic model, but have recently pursued less unilateral relations with foreign investors and withdrawn from the World Bank's International Centre for Settlement of Investment Dispute (Higginbottom, 2013:195). Petrocaribe supplies oil to Caribbean countries under preferential terms, which allows nations to defer payment and use this capital for government projects without the policy requirements of IMF or World Bank loans

(Pearce, 2013:42). These measures maintain the economic and political autonomy of the region, open up an autonomous policy space, protect nations against US sanctions and decrease their reliance on US currency and markets by seeking other investors. China Development Bank has lent the Venezuelan state and PDVSA \$36 billion to develop oil extraction in the Orinoco River belt in exchange for future oil exports (Rosales, 2013:1448). China's economic growth increases demand and prices for minerals, and their investment strategy reflects China's desire to secure resources for the future and their increasing influence Latin America (Rosales, 2013:1453).³⁰ Despite the (no longer ongoing) recent boom in oil prices, Venezuela's debt to China continues to grow as oil production declines: funds have been used for social welfare policies rather than economic development; the costs of oil development are increasing, and oil are prices decreasing due to the ascension of shale fracking, for which Venezuela has no current capacity.

The Venezuelan government has successfully used oil revenues to achieve poverty reduction measures among large parts of the population, especially in health, education and subsidised food, as well as free itself from economic dependence on the US. However, the nation's continued reliance on hydrocarbon resources has reinforced its dependent entanglement with global capitalism. Despite 10 years of booming oil prices, which constitute 93% of export revenues and a large part of the government budget (Purcell, 2011:569; Rosales, 2013:1448), the Venezuelan state has failed to diversify the economy, increase domestic production, curb insecurity and violence, or meet basic

³⁰ ALBA plays a role in this process as it privileges Venezuelan 'oil diplomacy' and cooperation with companies from developing nations, like China.

consumption levels for water and electricity. A ballooning foreign debt and high inflation rate led to two devaluations of the Bolivar in 2012 and massive shortages of basic imported products. This has cemented relations of dependency on global capital that render hydrocarbon sovereignty increasingly central to the Bolivarian government's socialism.

The creation of a social and collectivist economy in Venezuela draws from an indigenous imagery of resistance and communal economic practices. This process is hampered by the reliance of the Venezuelan state on global capitalism and hydrocarbon resources, which may impede the process of territorial demarcation for indigenous peoples. My Hiwi participants and their families inhabit a complex economic world structured by global capitalism and the Venezuelan state's dependency on hydrocarbon resources. This complex reality affects their ability to achieve territorialisation and to direct their own economic development. Furthermore, the imposition of a standard model of communal economic activity, such as the worker's cooperatives, represents a homogenising process that prevents true indigenous self-determination and increases dependency on the state.

4.4. Conclusions

In this chapter, I have shown that Hiwi people live within plural economies and participate in Hiwi, capitalist, and socialist practices. I have given examples of the diverse economic activities in which families engage, ranging from subsistence farming, hunting, and fishing to wage-labour and salaried work. I positioned Hiwi economics within the national economy, which the state insists is in the process of moving from

capitalism towards socialism. After a long history of assimilation into a capitalist economy, indigenous peoples are now being assimilated into the government's social economy, which is itself based on an essentialised view of 'indigenous socialism'. This theoretical conception fails to reflect both the indigenous history of insertion into capitalism and present reality of pluralism as we saw in the two case studies. The pluralistic economic approach of Hiwi individuals and families may in fact provide a far more effective model for Venezuela's social economy than a stylised view of indigenous economic practices. This is because Hiwi people inhabit an intercultural economic space and engage in diverse economic activities from subsistence to wage-labour to ensure their physical and social survival, suggesting a decolonial alternative to neoliberal capitalism.

The Bolivarian government has committed itself to the promotion of indigenous self-determination and the construction of an 'indigenous socialism' based in community-led development and social justice. I have argued that the state's socialist project contains two major contradictions in its theoretical and practical development. First, the Venezuelan state undermines the indigenous economies it cites as intellectual influences by imposing the non-indigenous notion of worker's cooperatives, which also betrays the constitutional guarantee of indigenous self-determination and development. Second, the state continues to complicate formal land demarcation for indigenous communities, an essential basis for their self-directed economic development which is recognised in the CRBV, as a result the state's immersion in the global capitalism of resource extraction.

I have demonstrated that, despite the centrality of a particular notion of indigeneity to their socialist project, the Venezuelan government has failed to effectively develop the postulates of the Constitution required to institute a pluriethnic state. Indigenous self-determination and self-directed development are improbable without territorial demarcation and within the confines of the cooperative labour system that is closely tied to state agencies. Hiwi economic strategies, which, like all real economies, exist on a continuum between capital accumulation and subsistence, collectivism and private property, may offer a more sustainable model for a social and plural economy. A model based on economic pluralism and self-determination would respect the specific rights of different cultural and ethnic groups to envision and work towards their own development.

5. Hiwi Shamanism and Intermedicality: Decolonising Biomedicine

In the next three chapters, I turn my analysis away from the political-economic sphere of Hiwi life and investigate how Hiwi people manage interculturality in the realms of medical knowledge, epistemology, and morality. I ask how Hiwi people navigate plural medical systems with different conceptions of the body, health, and illness and how can this intercultural or intermedical situation open up the possibility of decolonising medicinal knowledge? To answer this question, I discuss Hiwi shamanism and healthcare within the context of Venezuela's medical system through the lens of Greene's concept of intermedicality, which leads me into a critical exploration of biomedicine's historical and contemporary role on the frontline of colonialism. More specifically, I describe Hiwi concepts of the body, illness categories, and healing rituals. I provide two case studies that reveal how Hiwi people select among Hiwi and biomedical treatments within a medically plural society. I explore these dynamics in light of the revitalisation of indigenous medicines, which is linked to the ability of indigenous activists to convert cultural capital into political capital and secure political rights at the national level. The intrinsic value of indigenous medical knowledge is a central claim of indigenous rights movements, revealing the political and social relations within which medical knowledge is produced. Hiwi people may employ biomedical concepts to validate their own constructions of the body and illness, effectively 'shamanising' science (Greene, 1998:653), or seek shamanic treatment as an affirmation of their indigenous identity. I also discuss how medical pluralism may also perpetuate social inequalities by obscuring and legitimising the structural lack of biomedical services in the region.

Part of the Bolivarian government's vision for a pluriethnic and multicultural society involves the protection of indigenous knowledges, such as medicine, suggesting a possibility for the decolonisation of knowledge. I argue that everyday life in Amazonas is characterised by an intercultural medicine or medical pluralism, constituted by biomedical services and the medical systems of each indigenous group. I explore these dynamics using Shane Greene's (1998) concept of intermedicality, which acknowledges the specific socio-historical, political, and symbolic contexts in which all forms of medicines are produced and used by socially related agents. While the efficacy of biomedicine remains unchallenged, philosophers of science and medical anthropologists have questioned the nature of its objectivity, the validity of certain paradigms, and its universality, as well as its central role in colonisation and imperialism.

5.1. Pluralistic Medicines: Body, Health, and Illness in Hiwi Shamanism

In this section, I explore the nature of medical pluralism in Amazonas by outlining the central principles of Hiwi shamanism based on fieldwork observations and informal interviews with healers. Hiwi notions of the human body are pluralistic; they recognise the multiple factors that influence health and illness and locate them in the social, spiritual, and natural environment. Hiwi shamans and plant healers have specialised knowledge of these elements, which is used to transform harmful substances and promote health by balancing the opposing forces.

5.1.1. The Hiwi Body in its Natural, Social, and Spiritual Environment

The Hiwi concept of vital force is known as *pe'tajju* in the Hiwi language.³¹ This force, breath, or vital principle gives and maintains life, and is present in everything, but manifests most strongly in stars, animals, plants, and rocks. For instance, this energy imbues plants with sap, an essence that is their life-force and analogous to human blood. Although this concept varies across indigenous ethnic groups, all Venezuelan indigenous peoples have a concept of a:

principal material or vital energy, which usually flows in and from an animated natural world, composed by no end of owners or spirits of nature who play an active role in the cause and aetiology of diseases and their cure (Perera and Rivas, 1997:11 my translation).

This life-force is transferred among all living beings through the processes of birth and death, the growth and consumption of plants and animals. For instance, a father imbues his child with vital energy at the moment of conception and a mother imparts her substance during lactation (Rivas, 1997:40). This substance may also be described as a soul or shadow, an immortal individual essence or energy, which all things—animated or not—possess. For Hiwi people, this spiritual component of the self can be lost or captured by a witch, causing progressive weakness culminating in death (Perera and Rivas, 1997:14).

³¹ Perera and Rivas (1997) refer to the Hiwi concept of life-force as *petsaü*, which may be a result of regional or orthographical differences. I use the term as it was spelled for me by a consultant. The pre-fix *pe* is the definite article.

In general, indigenous bodies are composed of many diverse elements. As McCallum notes, the Amazonian body is not seen through a biological frame as something that just grows naturally, but rather, it is produced by processes in the environment and the actions of social agents (McCallum, 1996:349). For Hiwi people, the health of an individual depends on their relations with beings and elements which possess a similar vital force or substance, such as family members, natural and spiritual entities. *Pe'tajju* inhabits every part of body, but concentrates in the chest and can be perceived as pulse (Perera and Rivas, 1997:12). Substances are interdependent or consubstantial; anything that affects one also affects the other. For this reason, parents must observe behavioural and dietary norms to ensure the health and development of the baby such as avoiding eating plants and animals whose characteristic force is dangerous, i.e. too fatty, oily, salty or spicy. Transformations of substance, such as menarche and childbirth, must be attended by a shaman who prays, sucks and blows air over the woman to strengthen her vital force and prevent sickness.

The nature of the animating force is classified according to pairs of binary oppositions such as hot/cold, nutritive/putrefying, and are grouped as similar or different according to this categorisation which includes all plants, animals, and persons (Rivas, 1997:38). *Pe'tajju* is described as the spirit, positive energy, nourishment that is associated with heat, light, and illumination. It is described as:

The light that makes us conscious of who we are and what we do. — Pedro.

Its opposite, *pe'kaynaejawa*, is associated with spirits that cause illness, negative energy, putrefaction, and is associated with cold, dark, and destruction. This energy is

destructive, evil, bad-smelling, and associated with death and decomposition.³² It is positive life-force that has been corrupted or transformed into something harmful.

Humans share in the same vital force or *pe'tajju* that animates animals, plants, rocks, stars, etc. Consumption of the vital force of plants and animals nourishes a person's own vital force, but is potentially dangerous if precautions are not taken; children, who are more vulnerable to illnesses, were, in the past, prayed over before leaving the house. Vital force is located in the brain/mind and is responsible for emotions, feelings, sensations, and actions. In addition, humans possess a soul, nucleus or centre, known as *namun*, which is responsible for morality and reason. This soul is located in the heart, and is responsible for morality, social well-being, and profound feelings of connection to humanity. It is identical in all humans and makes us all fundamentally similar. The soul or *namun* is a microcosm of the world, imbued with the animating energy drawn from the sun. Sumabila notes that the cosmology of the closely related Cuiva people contains "frequent correspondences between characteristics attributed to the natural world and those of human physiology and anatomy, between 'the world of the body and the body of the world,' each with its own entity, but perceived in a reciprocal consubstantial relationship." (2005:61).

32 The link between decomposition and illness has also been described for other Amerindian peoples: For Desana people, the Milky Way is associated with sperm and fertilisation, but is also the repository of putrefaction and sickness (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1971:43); Warao people associate rain with pollution, infirmity, suffering, and death (Wilbert, 1996:71).

Because of this reciprocal consubstantiality, the environment is considered capable of seriously affecting a person's health. For instance, people living in cities are perceived as not being so healthy or long-lived, due to the deleterious effects of air pollution and the preponderance of mechanical sounds, which cause a pressure that leads to headaches, sore backs, and ill health. In contrast, the calming and natural sounds of insects, frogs, and the forest have a purifying effect on the body, as does clean river water. The natural environment is also inhabited by dangerous spirits. Certain sicknesses originate in distant crystalline rocks that split open in the heat of the sun, releasing hot fumes that rise up into the air, affecting persons and infiltrating the clouds. Once cooled, the spirit-sickness falls with the rain into rivers and infects the fish; if a person eats the fish without proper ritual precautions, they may become infected with this destructive energy (Rivas, 1997:45; Perera and Rivas, 1997).

Due to cultural and technological changes in their society, disease is also now attributed to the vapour that rises from asphalt, plastic bottles, and other rubbish that heats in the sun, releasing bad or putrefying chemicals into the air that sicken people when inhaled. Food products that are produced distantly and are frozen or preserved are perceived as containing less nutritive life energy or vital force, located in blood or fatty oil. Chemicals used in agricultural production and preservation are also conceived of as weakening people's vital force when consumed; it does not nourish them and makes them sick. In contrast, traditional foods from the local area, such as fish and yucca are considered to be the most nourishing and strengthening. This became clear on an early visit to Clemente's place. We brought ham and cheese sandwiches to share for lunch. Clemente seemed grateful and offered one to his son, who was resting inside the house in a hammock. While happily eating the sandwiches, Clemente then told us it was

dangerous for Hiwi people to consume this sort of non-traditional food too regularly. He himself, however, had a strong energy and could consume much more of this food without fear of contamination from the chemicals contained in processed food.

If I raised and killed a chicken here, and then cut it open, it would contain blood, fat that spills out. But the chicken from the *Merca!* contains nothing but chemicals to preserve it. — Clemente

This consubstantiality of the human body and environment is frequently expressed in sensory images that describe disease as a coherent whole, an “indivisible unity” that encompasses the individual and their relation to the world around them (Perera and Rivas, 1997:10). Organic metaphors are employed to describe illnesses, revealing the interrelationship between humans and the surrounding world. Clemente says cancer is formed by little animals similar to mosquitoes. They begin to form in the body when one has evil thoughts and refuses to help people in need. He compares the formation to how the mosquito larvae grow in standing water; after a day or two the water is full of these insects. Pedro compares fibroids to a spider, growing inside the woman’s womb and causing pain as it expanded. Just like a woman, plants change their sap for their health and the level of sap in a tree is indicated by the moon – at certain times it is low and only in the roots, at others the sap is high up in the leaves and branches and flowers, which can then be harvested for medicine.

Amerindian concepts of health involve an individual’s harmonious relations with the social and supernatural worlds, which require the observation of certain behavioural norms, such as respecting elders and staying away from sacred places inhabited by spirits (Rivas, 1997:49). Illness can be brought on by overworking, which reduces vital

force, the refusal to acknowledge and respect social obligations, and negative emotions such as envy or greed. For instance, Clemente perceives the ultimate cause of Chávez's illness to be overwork and the evil thoughts of his enemies in the opposition. Bad thoughts and evil actions, such as sexual rivalry or jealousy, may cause pain, headaches, swelling, and even cancer. For example, if a man leaves his wife and children and begins another family, the wives have an obligation to offer hospitality to the other family if required. Similarly, a man must not refuse to recognise his son from a previous marriage or offer him food and a resting place when he comes to see him. This attitude extends to even strangers; one shouldn't refuse to give people money to feed their kids or turn away old people who need help.

To do so is a witch (*brujo*, in Spanish) thing – they do harm to people, thinking, “Why should I help them? They are not my family.” This kind of bad thinking causes illness. — Clemente

Sosa (2000:37), a Hiwi author, describes how Hiwi people value all human beings above material objects and that Guahibo notions of social obligation extend from the close family, to other Hiwi, to the entire human race. According to my participants, the soul or *namun* is responsible for sociality and morality, and may be affected by spirits which cause conflict in social relations and psychological distress characterised by overheating. Just like a psychologist, the shaman examines the situation looking for the cause of the problem in the relationships within the family. Once the person has calmed down and the excess heat has dissipated, the shaman can eliminate this spirit by sucking parts of the body and chanting. Hiwi shamanism represents a social psychology or philosophy, a way of living well socially that promotes both individual and community health. Hiwi people possess a “healing paradigm that honors[sic] the mind, body, spirit, and community” (Lee and Balick, 2002:120). Individual health is an expression of

environmental and social health, unlike biomedical models of health that focus on the biological functioning of the individual body.

Doctors (*medicos*, in Spanish) don't understand how everything is related,
they look at the human body as an isolated thing. — Clemente

For Hiwi healers, multiple and diverse factors interact to produce both health and illness. The Hiwi cosmology expresses the paradoxes and inconsistencies of existence, but simultaneously affirms the underlying meaningful complementarity of human society and the universe. As Bodeker argues of indigenous medicine in general, this may be “the expression of an appreciation of a deeper level of unification between the different dimensions of life, where paradox is seen more as the product of superficial or fragmented perception than as an accurate rendition of a meaningless universe” (Bodeker, 2007:26). This holistic vision of health and environment is often lacking in biomedical models, which focus on the individual material body and its biological processes.

5.1.2. Hiwi Disease Classification

Most indigenous medical systems consider the causes of illness to be multiple and located within the social, natural, and spiritual environment. For Hiwi people, illness may be explained as disharmony or imbalance in the concentration of opposing hot/cold, nourishing/putrefying forces, or as an excess or lack of one particular force, which is healed by applying something with either an opposite or similar force to re-establish harmony (Rivas, 1997:41). One avoids bad forces, sorcery, and spirit contamination by maintaining good relations with family and neighbours, behaving according to social norms, and avoiding contact with negative spiritual substances

(Rivas, 1997:42). More specifically, the causes of disease are seen as sorcery, object intrusion, spirit contamination, loss of vital force, taboo transgression, and the influence of natural phenomenon (Perera and Rivas, 1997:14-15; see Metzger, 1968:216).

Hiwi people distinguish physical and spiritual illnesses, which require different therapies. As other studies have shown, indigenous people often distinguish physical illnesses, such as colds, influenza, and minor injuries, which yield to plant remedies or biomedical intervention, from those of a supernatural or spiritual origin that require a specialised healer (Sussman, 1981; Saethre, 2007). For Hiwi people, spirits inhabit the forest, mountains, and rivers and may be perceived by shamans under the influence of powerful psychotropic substances, *dopa* and *huipa*. *Dopa* and *huipa* are the Hiwi terms for *Anadenanthera peregrina* and *Banisteriopsis caapi* (Latin). There are three categories of spirits that may intrude into the body and cause illness: *mawari*, *dowati* and *ainavi* in Hiwi language (see Metzger, 1968:215; Kirchhoff, 1948:455; Rivas, 1997:48). *Ainavi* appear to be associated with rivers and fish, while *dowati* are more likely to inhabit the forest, and *mawari* likely represent spirits of the mountains and rocks. These spirits can appear in many forms, such as dogs, people, or wind, but are often invisible and manifest as a strange sound, whistling, screaming, or music. Spirits are understood to be the immortal life-essence of a deceased predatory animal, fish or evil person (*malandro*, in Spanish) whose spirit remains on the earthly plane and continues to attack people in accordance with their nature. Spirits may enter the body by ingestion of food, water, air, or when one is frightened by a loud noise. They inhabit the body, feeding off the victim's vital force and weakening them. These spirits are the ultimate cause of certain severe maladies, including diarrhoea, vomiting, and fever.

Spirit forces are always present in the surrounding environment, plants, and animals, but are able to lodge in the body and cause disruptions when a person fails to properly observe dietary and sexual restrictions, or perform purification rituals that involve praying and blowing over food prior to eating (Perera and Rivas, 1997:17). Contamination with or consumption of harmful spirit forces may cause problems of the stomach, pain, inflammation, vomiting, diarrhoea, hernia, and cancer (Perera and Rivas, 1997:16). These forms of illness are distinguished from physical illnesses, as they cannot be treated effectively by biomedical doctors, and require intervention by a shaman. More severe illnesses may be attributed to sorcery: spirits may be sent to attack a person by enemy shamans jealous of a family's success, requiring a shaman to call upon appropriate spirits to drive out the sickness.

Shamans possess the knowledge to detect and properly address an imbalance of forces in a patient caused by spirit contamination or sorcery, as well as the power to affect the existent forces in the world around them, such as sending lightning to strike enemies (Rivas, 1997:39). A shaman must develop specialised knowledge of the origins and causes of disease to be able to enter into dialogue with the responsible spirits and call on helping spirits. For example, a shaman must know the names of 'traditional' foods, such as fish and game meat, and their god-spirit owners: each type must be properly understood in order to counteract or neutralise their potential negative effects. For instance, Hiwi people recognise a potentially fatal class of spiritual sickness, known as *jawapa* in Hiwi language, which manifests as severe vomiting, diarrhoea with blood, and weakness. The ultimate cause of this sickness is an *ainavi* ingested as poorly prepared or raw fish; the beard (*barba*, in Spanish) of the fish lodges in the body and sickens the person.

When the elements are out of balance, medicinal plants may facilitate the natural healing process. Pedro appeals to the biological concept of “cellular generation” to explain how the essence of a plant may heal the body by concentrating healing hot energy on the affected area or cooling an excess of heat, as in fever. This is based on a principle of consubstantiality; a broken bone is like a tree that is cut by a machete, the sap concentrates around the cut area and aids the healing of the injury. Thus, the sap of certain plants aids the healing of wounds or bones, known in Spanish as *cola de caballo* (*Equisetum arvense* L.) and *plantanillo* (*Canna indica* L.), which both grow very quickly after being cut. The fat (*manteca*, in Spanish) of an anaconda, which also heals quickly when cut, is used to heal wounds and prevent scarring. This regenerative property of plants or animal fats is the spirit or essence that aids healing when applied to humans. In Hiwi cosmology, human bodies are composed of the same components or elements as the natural environment, and so plant properties can affect the human body in similar ways.

5.1.3. Shamanism and Healing

Hiwi healing therapies are diverse and specific to the affliction. Like many indigenous healing practices, treatments “are designed not only to address the locus of the disease but also to restore a state of systemic balance to the individual and his or her inner and outer environment” (Bodeker, 2007:24). This may involve, rest, baths, drinking large quantities of water, fumigation (burning tree sap to drive out or ward off spirits), blowing (to transmit shamanic power to the patient), chanting to invoke helping spirits, massage and sucking (removing pathogenic objects), the rattle (its breeze represents the

breath of the familiars blowing the spirits away), prescribing botanical remedies (to which shamanic power is transferred by blowing and food taboos) (Metzger, 1968:216-217).

Although most adults know certain plant remedies and orations suitable for minor injuries or illness, more severe illnesses require a shaman. A general term for shaman in Hiwi language is *macabi* ('one who knows'), but I also encountered a *dopatubinü* and a *tsamaninü*. The *tsamaninü* treats illnesses considered to have a physical or natural cause with plant remedies, although he may also know useful orations to speed the healing process.³³ A *dopatubinü* uses *dopa* (*anadenanthera peregrine* L.), *huipa* (*Banisteriopsis caapi* L.), and tobacco to divine the cause of an illness that is suspected to be the result of a spirit or sorcery attack.³⁴ There is evidence that this practice has existed since pre-contact: Spruce ([1908] 1970:423-428) describes the use of *huipa* and *dopa* by Guahibo men he met during his 1854 journey and Marcano mentions the use of *dopa* in the 1890s (Marcano cited in Kirchhoff, 1948:455). The seeds of the *Dopanae* tree are roasted and ground into powder upon a wooden plate (*paté* in Hiwi language) and inhaled through the nose using an aspirator (*sillipu* in Hiwi language) made from the

³³ There are many different forms of shamanism among Hiwi people and related groups. Rivas (1997) identifies five types of shamans, but the most consulted is the *Penahorrobini*, who uses songs, special orations and *yopo*. This shaman is doctor and protector of the community, officiates at rituals, and cures the sick. The others work in particular areas of the *penahorrobini* i.e. plant remedies (*waibini*), snake bites (*homo waibini*), curing with prayers (*wahibini*), diagnose illness and sorcery. Others are "curiosos" who have very limited knowledge, and women healers who use *yopo* are called *Penahorrobiwaa* (Rivas, 1997:43).

³⁴ *Dopa* and *huipa* are more commonly known in Venezuela as *yopo* and *caapi* respectively.

bones of an aquatic bird and sealed with wax (see also Kondo, 1973:202; Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1944:453-454).

An apprentice shaman is known in Hiwi language as *isimaliné* during a training period that generally lasts six months, but may begin in childhood. Women are usually excluded from becoming a shaman, although most Hiwi women know some plant remedies and orations for minor illnesses and injuries. An apprentice generally chooses to learn, but there is sometimes transmission between father or grandfather and son, as in the case of Clemente. According to Metzger (1968:212), there are no particular behavioural or physical requirements, the apprenticeship is paid for in labour or goods, and there are no particular initiation, training, or graduation ordeals. Apprentices are subject to food and behavioural restrictions in order to strengthen their vital force: they must fast, eating very little in the morning and evening; they cannot eat meat, as it puts too much pressure on the chest, or fish as it is too fatty and is linked to cancer; they must be sexually abstinent as a woman's bodily substances may weaken a man's vital force. An *isimaliné* must only consume fruit and honey along with large nightly doses of *dopa* and *huipa*. The ingestion of hallucinogens helps one to reach and communicate with god-spirits, such as Kúwai, Tsamani, and Matsuldani, who live above the earth in the constellations or upper levels of reality. This is a means of preparing and forming the mental/spiritual capacities necessary to perceive and call upon the spirits.

In Hiwi cosmology, every plant, animal, or mineral is owned by a particular spirit or god and the shaman must know the owner of the appropriate medicine to treat an illness. If a person is cut by an iron axe, machete, or bullet, a shaman may call upon the

owner (*dueño*, in Spanish) of iron to help close and heal the wound. Palameco, a member of the original family of god-like beings, is credited with discovering iron and giving it to Hiwi people. The shaman calls upon Palameco and prays over water that the patient will drink and the wound, bringing the energy of the god who created the iron responsible for the injury in order to heal the wound quickly.³⁵

And it is said like this, like the grass in the field is cut with iron and sprouts new seeds, the flesh sprouts immediately and closes. So, this is converted into an energy and leaves no scars, it heals. This is the power of shamanism. The power of the true shaman...With blowing, prayers, one can heal a person because one is summoning the spirit, the owner of this energy, where the iron emerges, because iron is a metal that exists in the earth. — Pedro

Importantly, the spirit or energy does not belong to the shaman; he only has the ability to manipulate forms of energy that exist already in the world. Shamans manipulate this energy using their specialised knowledge of the mythical owners of all entities and the relationships. For instance, Clemente crosses two machete blades just outside his house to reflect a lightning attack sent by evil shamans. Palameco is the owner of both thunder and iron, so this is a coherent articulation of Hiwi cosmology.

³⁵ Palameco koji bima, hierro watiji, hierro watiji, bima palameco koji bima, palameco koji bima bojotojo biju biju bi cuma kenai naca kibi kibi kibi, cuma kenai naca kibi kibi, mera naka jimai naka jimai y taitabo tsibi tsibi tsibi, taita tsibi tsibi, cuma kenai naca kibi kibi kibi, bokato jubi jubi jubi <blows out several times> (Pedro; Oration to heal wound in Hiwi language: fieldwork notes).

The shaman requires specialised knowledge of the specific healing orations, which were given to the Hiwi people by Matsuldani.³⁶ The wife of *Rey Zamuro* (Spanish)—the king vulture, a carrion-eater associated with sickness and death—contracted all possible diseases; diarrhoea, vomiting, AIDS, cancer, everything! The god-spirit Matsuldani, who wanted to help the Hiwi people, arrived at the house to see her and began chanting throughout the night. For each disease, he chanted, “Yes there is a remedy, yes there is a remedy,” calling down healing energy with his prayers and transferring his healing essence to the water with his breath.³⁷ She drank the water and was cured. About midnight she and her husband became tired and fell asleep. For this reason, Hiwi shamans do not know the cure for cancer, AIDS, and other diseases that are treated with biomedicine. This myth indicates that biomedicine is valued by Hiwi healers as a system of knowledge complementary to Hiwi shamanism and originating in a different social context.

This myth also illustrates how shamans draw on the healing powers discovered and owned by the first Hiwi people: a family group consisting of Kúwai and Pabeduwa, the first man and woman, as well as their children, four brothers and one sister: Matsuldani, Tsamani, Liwirnei, Batatuaba, and Kajuyali.³⁸ According to Kondo (1974), the myth of *Tsamanimónae* states that the first family danced without eating and only drinking a

³⁶ In other accounts, it is Matsuldani’s son, Tsamani, or Kúwai, his brother/father who teaches the first Hiwi people to heal with plant medicines and prayers.

³⁷ For the purposes of communication, Clemente told me this myth in Spanish and I have summarised the text in English.

³⁸ In other versions I encountered, the first family is composed of brothers and sisters, revealing the close and affectionate relationship among siblings.

special beverage, *dána*, which descended from the sky. They danced until they ascended into the sky, transformed into immortals, and today live among the constellations of stars. The constellation we know as the Pleiades is Kúwai, the first Hiwi man.

This is Kúwai, the god that he is, gone up to the sky and he is there formed in these lights and illuminating the earth with his energy, so that shamans who work with the power of shamanism view the stars, the seven powers, seven forces, that compose the mind of this shaman. — Pedro

It is this energy that Hiwi shamans use to remove spirit contamination and replenish a patient's vital force. The shaman draws energy from the Milky Way, conceived as the 'path of *Tsamanimónae*' or the original Hiwi family and a repository of animating energy or *pe'tajju*, that ultimately derives from the sun. Shamans take this cosmic energy into their bodies—as air or breath—to divine what sickness someone has, how they will succeed in the future, and to heal by strengthening vital force. Shamanic healing is grounded in the ritual transformation and transmission of energy among humans and environment; the shaman passes energy from one to another in a process known as in Hiwi language as *nacaraba*.³⁹ The transfer of vital force is mediated by the shaman's breath and water, which is purified through prayers, transmitting the shaman's force, to protect and cure the individual (Rivas, 1997:49). The patient drinks the cleansing water, which acts like a 'water filter' or 'purifier', removing the spirit contamination from the body and strengthening the patient's vital force. In serious cases, a shaman under the influence of *huipa* and *dopa* may take the spirit or shadow of the patient to a celestial lake belonging to Kúwai, which heals them and infuses them with energy.

³⁹ In Spanish: "pasar energía de un otro. Eso es lo que es chamanismo"-Pedro.

The *dopatubinü* cures patients using special orations invoked during a ritual of sucking, blowing, and shaking a maraca to dispel the malignant spirit from the body. If the cause of illness is spirit contamination or sorcery, shamans may “fight” or manipulate the spirit with verbal prayers and invocations, counteracting their effects and convincing them to depart using greater knowledge and the power of allied spirits (Perera and Rivas, 1997:20-21). A shaman has the ability to convince and persuade supernatural entities to come to his aid, rather than absolute power to control them, which Metzger (1968:213) notes is consistent with the egalitarianism of Hiwi social and political life. Although, the Hiwi intercultural lifeworld has no doubt evolved over the last half century, this observation remains true. Conaway (1976:115) notes that access to education and medical services have shaped Hiwi people’s migration patterns, drawing settlements and families closer to city centres and missions. Conaway (1976:116-118) shows that Hiwi people accessed medical services, particularly for malarial conditions, but nevertheless complained of the inefficiency of clinics and the inefficacy of medications, often preferring to treat minor complaints with plant remedies. This suggests that Hiwi life in the 1970s was becoming an intermedical and intercultural zone, in which Hiwi persons selected among various diagnoses and treatments. This may partly reflect the penetration of Simplified Medicine clinics into rural Venezuela at this time. Compared with studies by Conaway (1976), Morey (1970), and Metzger (1968; Morey and Metzger, 1974), Hiwi people today are more closely engaged with *criollo* society and biomedicine than in the past, when many Hiwi people were isolated by geographical distance, a lack of Spanish language skills, illiteracy, and the oppressive structures of *criollo* racism. In many cases, these barriers have been largely overcome, particularly under the socially progressive Bolivarian government and their

social welfare programs, which I consider in more depth in Section 5.3.2. In the next section, I provide two case studies that demonstrate how medical pluralism operates in the everyday life of Amazonas, before turning to an analysis of these dynamics in light of intermediality.

5.2. Case Studies

The following two case studies reflect the pluralistic principles of Hiwi understandings of health and illness as they operate in everyday life. Individuals choose amongst the diverse medical traditions that inhabit the socio-historical landscape of Amazonas, together forming a diverse and fluid complex. In the next section, I turn to an analysis of these dynamic processes of intermediality within the case studies. These include the socio-historical evolution of all medical traditions, the politics of medicine, and the social inequalities that characterise medical pluralism in Amazonas.

5.2.1. Case Study One: “Health is a delicate balance.”

During a stay at Santo Rosario, my partner developed a fever and symptoms of influenza. After discussing his health with the *capitán* (Spanish), Don Pedro, a well-respected man with extensive knowledge of healing plants and orations, we cancel our planned hike into the hills. Don Pedro asks Mat to sit down on the steps in front of the posada and examines him, taking his pulse by pressing both of his thumbs onto Mat’s right wrist. Pedro says it is weak and that the fever is quite severe. Mat hasn’t eaten anything since last night and has taken only ibuprofen. Despite Mat’s protests that he only needs to rest, Pedro says it is better to go to the hospital, if it is open. It is better to be certain when one’s health is in danger. As he explains in Spanish, “*lo más*

importante es la salud".⁴⁰ Pedro leaves us, saying he will return with some medicine (*un remedio*, in Spanish) for Mat.

We finish making coffee and have a cigarette while we wait for him to return. We speculate about what herbal remedy he will make to treat Mat, who is slightly apprehensive. To our surprise, Pedro comes back with an injection of penicillin, which he explains will help to bring down (*controlar*, in Spanish) the fever. Pedro does a government course in First Aid in Puerto Ayacucho every 3 months or so. He says that basic medical knowledge is part of his responsibility as a tourist operator (the community possesses a tourist posada and receives visitors during national holidays). Pedro has to be aware of both indigenous and non-indigenous systems of medicine because people like us, that is, non-indigenous, are not accustomed to the plant medicines traditionally taken by Hiwi people and these remedies will not work for us.

The maintenance of health is a delicate balance and knowledge of both systems is necessary. — Pedro

In next section, I describe a case of sorcery illness and a shamanic healing ritual. I analyse this case study in light of Hiwi epistemologies of health and illness, as well as locating Hiwi medicine in a contemporary political landscape. Medicine is an important

⁴⁰ During my fieldwork, I often heard people say, "*lo más importante es la salud*" (health is the most important thing). I believe this statement expresses a general preoccupation with health in a country where infectious diseases are common, poverty and inequality are rife, and medical services are insufficient. Such great concern initially struck me as unusual, as health and a good standard of health care was something I took for granted as a middle-class white Australian living in a regional city. Good health, as a result of excellent nutrition, sanitation, health care, and clean living conditions, seemed to me a basic right and expectation. Not so in rural Venezuela.

part of indigenous identity politics and is central to the current revalorisation of indigenous culture.

5.2.2. Case Study Two: A Sorcery Attack

Early one Saturday morning, a young Hiwi woman brings her small son of about two years of age to see Clemente. He has been suffering from vomiting and diarrhoea for several days; his skin is loose and bruised from dehydration, and his eyes are glassy. Clemente divines the cause of the illness using tobacco in the form of mass-produced cigarettes. Tobacco is an important substance in Hiwi shamanism (Zethelius and Balick, 1982:181), with which Clemente also divines the future success of business ventures, the safety of a journey, and the probability of successful treatment. He breathes in deeply, filling his lungs and pondering the question he wishes to ask. He breathes out the smoke, passing the smoke over his *tapi*, the place in his throat where knowledge is located.⁴¹ This knowledge is a spirit, *pe'terimarunae*, which indicates an answer to the question by catching in the shaman's throat, indicating the "good path"; how to avoid enemies, evil spirits, dangerous animals or other obstacles. On this occasion Clemente also chews *huiipa* to help him diagnose or envision the cause of the child's illness.

In this case, an evil shaman or witch (*brujo*, in Spanish) has cursed the woman out of a vaguely defined jealousy, sending an evil spirit to enter her body and cause her breasts to become over-heated and contaminated. These spirits are likened to magic missiles,

⁴¹ The shaman keeps his specialised knowledge in his throat, in a location known as *tapi*. For this reason, the shaman breathes in the patient deeply to "read" or "see" their problem and blows on them to transfer his power.

“invisible bolts of thought”, which assume physical form and enter the victim’s body; these are also explanatory principles for curing (Metzger, 1968:215). A *dopatubinü* can call down a water spirit, *ainavi*, into water that a person drinks and consequently falls ill, in a process compared to bacterial infection. In this case, the mother’s body has been entered by spirit force, causing her breasts to overheat. The child has ingested this contamination through the mother’s breast milk, falling ill as a result. Although everyone is susceptible to disease, people become more vulnerable during certain periods due to a lack of *pe’tajju* or vital force: children, the elderly, during menstruation, sleeping, or periods of weakness (Perera and Rivas, 1997:15).

Clemente seats himself on a chair, holding a plastic bottle containing clean water and a metal straw. He begins to chant slowly and softly, gazing off into the distance, calling down the spirits of healing into the water that he will give to the mother and the child will drink three times a day for several days. As he chants he invokes the names of some of the original family of god-spirits, including Matsuldani, and Purunamunae, calling upon them to drive out the evil spirit and cure the boy. The chant is repetitive and simple. Occasionally, he pauses to blow into the long straw and the air bubbles loudly through the clear water, infusing it all with the curative essences transmitted by means of his breath.



Plate 16. Clemente blows into the water, transmitting his energy.

Clemente changes into a red *chavista* shirt and hat, wearing his necklace of animal teeth and carrying a maraca. The shaman uses a feathered and decorated maraca, known as *tsitsito*, to ward off illness. He wears a necklace of animal teeth, beads and gourds, called *kumara itcato* that protects the shaman against evil influences, spirits, and sorcerers. He brings over the woman and child, seating them in the shade of some *huipa* vines. Eyes bright, he is still chewing a piece of *huipa* vine, which he says makes you “drunk” and helps you to see the whole world, the other dimension.

Clemente begins to chant softly, shaking the maraca slowly around the child, who is staring blearily into space. He begins to move slowly around the woman and child, blowing and sucking at his head, abdomen, hands, and feet. He sucks for a long time and occasionally turns to the West and blows out sharply through his cupped hand,

coughing slightly in the back of his throat as if something is catching there. He shakes out his hand as he blows, dissipating the spirit force that he is removing. It seems to be hard work, and Clemente pauses frequently to sit and smoke a cigarette, carefully stubbing it out in a glass of water. He wets his fingers with the tobacco-infused water and sprinkles the child occasionally, still chanting. Tobacco aids communication with the spirits upon whom Clemente is calling, as is common in Amazonian shamanism (Wilbert, 1972).



Plate 17. Clemente sucks the malignant spirit out of the child's body.

Towards the end of the healing ritual, Clemente stops and gently presses a hand to the child's back. The boy is cooling down, which indicates the spirit infection has been removed, the body is calming, and the sickness alleviating. The excess of heat has been reduced and balance restored to the child's body. He asks me to touch the child's back

to confirm this prognosis for myself. The healing ritual is over. The boy and mother must abstain from dangerous foods, such as salt, chilli, and fat, for the next few days in order to restore their vital force and avoid further contamination.

We chat with the mother, a member of a nearby community, while Clemente fetches the bottle of water. She has just come from the hospital in Puerto Ayacucho, where her son spent several days receiving injections and pills. “They couldn’t do anything,” she dismisses this medical treatment definitively. So she has brought her baby to Clemente, a well-known shaman in the region. Several days later, Clemente receives a phone call from the mother, who confirms the child’s recovery.

5.3. Intermediality in Amazonas

In this section, I argue Hiwi people inhabit an intercultural space, which is manifested in the sphere of medicine by medical pluralism and I ask what factors influence Hiwi people to choose between biomedical or shamanic treatments. The two case studies highlight several important dynamics that influence the decisions of Hiwi healers and patients as they navigate the medical pluralism of Amazonas. I analyse the case studies from an intermedical perspective to demonstrate the role of biomedical concepts and services in Amazonas, the revitalisation of indigenous medicines and the state’s political commitment to a pluriethnic society. The discussion of specific examples from Hiwi life shed light on some common aspects of medical pluralism and its potential for evolving into a decolonial and intermedical space.

5.3.1. ‘Shamanising’ Science: The Socio-historical Production of Medical Knowledges

The first case study reveals how different medical frameworks may be attributed to different historical and social formations that exist within an environment of medical pluralism, which is a central tenet of medical anthropological literature. Pedro’s prescription of an injection of penicillin reflects the Hiwi distinction between physical and spiritual illnesses. It is not necessary to consult a specialized shaman as no spirit is attributed to minor illnesses such as influenza. As we saw in Section 3.1.1., the Hiwi body is perceived as a totality of social, physical, and psychological forces, which may be acted upon using diverse therapies, including biomedicine (McCallum, 1996:351). The ingestion of a substance to counteract an imbalance of heat that causes fever is also compatible with Hiwi notions of vital force and healing via the application of similar or opposite substances.

This also reflects a distinction between the different efficacies of biomedical and spiritual therapies, and the role of ethnic identity in medical decision-making. In Hiwi cosmology, human bodies are consubstantial with the social and natural environment. Bodies are not merely physical entities, they are also socially and morally constituted; they are not purely individual and self-contained, but partake of the similar substances that exist in the surrounding natural world. Mat and I, as Westerners or whites, are constituted within a different social and natural environment; our medicine better reflects this milieu. Our bodies do not share the same substances of the Hiwi lifeworld. Simultaneously, Hiwi bodies are often better treated with plant remedies because they are immersed in their particular natural-social world.

Indigenous medicine works best for indigenous people, anyway, because it is their nature and their custom (*naturaleza y costumbre*, in Spanish). —
Clemente

Indigenous medicines and biomedicine may be used in complementary ways, depending on the social context and identity of patient and practitioner. This approximates a social constructivist view of medical systems, where the diagnosis and effective treatments reflect the constantly evolving socio-cultural reality of the patient and healer. For my Hiwi participants, biomedicine is but one strand among the many other medical systems, although its efficacy and hegemonic global position is acknowledged. Hiwi persons maintain health using all the therapeutic techniques available to them, resolving the apparent contradictions inherent in this practice by ascribing each tradition to a particular historical and social complex.

Pedro's use of penicillin reveals that Hiwi medicine is open to and largely compatible with new knowledge due to its pluralistic nature. For Hiwi people, illness may be caused by many factors and no one tradition is considered capable of curing everything. The ethnographic literature suggests that Amazonian dichotomies may be more "dynamic, expansive, and centrifugal" than the static and divisive dichotomies of Western philosophy (McCallum, 1996:364). Indigenous medical systems, which explicitly recognise the interrelation of medicine and society, may be more practically adaptable than biomedicine with its claims to universal validity and links to existing power structures (Haram, 1991; Cosminsky and Scrimshaw, 1980). However, both biomedicine and Hiwi shamanism are theoretically open to change and adaptation as explanatory modes that are produced by a "continuous dialectic between latent social and cultural structures and manifest thought and experience" (Comaroff, 1981:376).

This dynamic is also revealed in how Pedro reinterprets biomedical concepts through a Hiwi lens. Multiple studies demonstrate that people often reinterpret biomedical concepts and therapies within local categories of illness and health (Ngokwey, 1995; DelVecchio Good, 1980; Whitaker, 2003; Young, 1976). Pedro employs biomedical terminology in discussions of his healing practices, citing the chemical compositions of plant remedies and making explicit comparisons of plant remedies and pharmaceuticals. He generally prefers what he perceives as the natural, pure, and gentle qualities of herbal medicine to the manufactured, preservative-laden, and strong side effects of biomedical treatments. At the conceptual level, Pedro draws on biomedical theories, such as germ theory, viruses and bacteria, as equivalent to the Hiwi principle of spirit contamination.

Germs and viruses, they are tiny things that possess a life, therefore they have a spirit like everything that is alive and their spirit is harmful to humans. Therefore, germs are spirits and the shamans were right, they just couldn't see them because they had no microscopes. — Pedro.

Other scholars have noted the similarity of Amazonian shamanism and biomedical concepts. Chaumeil (2001[1993]) links virological complexes to Amazonian shamanic beliefs in invisible darts or spirit forces that shamans control in order to both cause sickness in others and, during healing, absorb into their bodies in order to remove and neutralise this substance. The shaman is partially immunised to the viral entity through exposure during psychedelic intoxication and specialised knowledge. This interpretation leads Chaumeil (2001[1993]:276) to conclude that Amazonian peoples are familiar with the general principles of virology, although this knowledge occurs within a different belief system. Rivas (1997:50) has also noted how the Amerindian notion of life-force

or essence may correlate with and even facilitate absorption of biomedical concepts, such as the active properties of medicine and infection with pathogens. This indicates that indigenous medical concepts may be compatible with biomedicine and that by asserting this compatibility, Pedro is able to absorb some of the status of biomedicine.

Using Greene's terminology, Pedro's claims may be interpreted as an example of how the shaman "shamanizes science" (1998:653), by transforming the social and political meanings of biomedical concepts in relation to Hiwi socio-cultural reality and constructing new meanings which assure the social reproduction of Hiwi medical knowledge. Greene (1998) argues that an Aguaruna shaman, Yankush, appropriates the hypodermic needle as a symbol of biomedicine, deriving power from forms of knowledge belonging to a socio-political Other and associating Aguaruna concepts, such as sorcery darts, with biomedical instruments. Far from corrupting an ancient static form of medical knowledge, Greene (1998:652) posits that the appropriation of symbols or the creation of a hybrid shamanic-biomedical healing system actually confirms Aguaruna understandings of shamanic power and sorcery. According to Greene:

It highlights the fact that Yankush's shamanism is part of an agential expansion of Aguaruna social consciousness, a hyperawareness of the interethnic and intermedical political situation in which they find themselves. Further, it is precisely through acting on this awareness that Yankush advances the likelihood of the successful social reproduction, through active sociocultural readjusting, to indigenous knowledge and practices (1998:652).

In a similar way, Pedro appropriates the powerful and effective concepts and language of biomedicine to reinforce the efficacy of the Hiwi medical system and ensure its

social reproduction and value. His claims assert the validity of indigenous medicine by codifying it or formalising it in a similar way to science, despite radical differences in methodology, concepts, and transmission of knowledge. Medical anthropologists have often noted that indigenous practitioners often gain respect by using Western scientific words and claiming indigenous medicine is proven to work by science (Mitra Channa, 2004:202; Ganesan, 2010). Such claims challenge the construction of indigenous medicine as traditional, local, and irrational (Marsland, 2007; Abraham, 2009). In fact, no medical system is a closed, bounded, or static tradition. Rather, healing practices encode unconscious values and meanings that reflect and negotiate ever-evolving social, political, economic, and cultural arrangements (Comaroff, 1981:376; Leslie, 1980; Crandon, 1986).

As in the case of Yankush (Greene, 1998), the ability to transcend epistemological divisions and bridge socio-historical meanings also grants Pedro significant prestige within the local community. Pedro is respected as an intelligent and knowledgeable man with mastery of both Hiwi plant medicines and basic biomedicine. From the ages of 9 to 21, he studied at the Summer Institute of Linguistics in Lomalinda, Colombia, where he learnt Spanish, as well as agricultural techniques and woodworking. He also studied to be a biomedical doctor, but decided to give this up due to an aversion to blood and an episode in which he had to surgically remove a fetus that died *in utero* (Latin). After becoming ill from the smell, he decided to return to Amazonas and develop the plant medicine his grandfather had taught him as a child. He prefers to work with plants, because he asserts that they are less invasive and have fewer side effects.

Pedro's prestige as *capítan* is partly predicated on the mastery of new forms of knowledge, which he mediates as a healer, standing in the vortex of social, spiritual, and physical processes (Cosminsky and Scrimshaw, 1980:276). In this sense Pedro is, like Dumont the anthropologist and amateur medico whose knowledge of both Panaré and biomedical systems made him, in the eyes of the local people, "the repository of two types of knowledge which were partly complementary, partly supplementary, and which, each in its own right, were deemed to be efficient" (1996:124). Thus, his prescription of penicillin may also be seen as an assertion of Pedro's knowledge and power as a healer and leader of the community. The ability to move between different medical frameworks grants Hiwi healers prestige and represents one way in which Hiwi people navigate and even benefit from an intermedical world in which different medical traditions meet and influence one another.

5.3.2. Indigenous Activism, the State, and the Value of Knowing

Another way Hiwi people may choose to negotiate intercultural medical zone is by choosing a Hiwi medical specialist when appropriate for their illness. Both case studies demonstrate that Hiwi people seek biomedical treatments, but the second case indicates that they may choose to use such treatments together with shamanic or plant-based therapies for a variety of reasons. While Hiwi people seek pharmaceuticals for the relief of illnesses such as malaria, this may be combined with herbal restoratives that nourish the body and restore vital force. Hiwi people recognise that some diseases have physical-natural causes, and will seek biomedical and physical therapies. Major or chronic illnesses are perceived to be the result of sorcery or spirit contamination and require a shaman. Despite apparent theoretical differences, sick individuals are able to position both indigenous and biomedical traditions in a local social context to

understand their illness experience, as other medical anthropologists have shown (Saethre, 2007).

In the second case study, biomedical treatment at the hospital failed to treat the underlying spiritual causes of the child's illness and was thus viewed as ineffective by the Hiwi mother. Clemente explains that biomedicine will not effectively treat illnesses related to the 'shadow' (*sombra*, in Spanish) or soul, as diagnosed by Hiwi people. Medical anthropologists have noted that biomedicine is often used as a supplement to relieve symptoms, while indigenous medicines are employed to treat the underlying causes (Cosminsky and Scrimshaw, 1980:267). The deployment of different healing resources is not a matter of switching between different conceptual frameworks or choosing among equally effective alternative therapies:

Rather, it involves the choosing of the therapeutic resource 'appropriate' for the ailment and all of the resources are contained within a single conceptual framework (Sussman, 1981:257).

The second case study indicates that Hiwi people consider medicine to be a pluralistic structure within which biomedicine is one element standing in both *competitive* and *complementary* relationships with many other therapies within particular historical and social contexts, as other medical anthropological studies document (Leslie, 1980:191; Whitaker, 2003; Ngokwey, 1995).

Hiwi people may be more likely to openly seek shamanic and plant treatment given the centrality of indigeneity to the current political discourse and the constitutional recognition of indigenous medicine. This may reflect global trends towards the

revitalisation of ‘traditional’ medicine in many countries, that medical anthropologists have linked to global political and economic factors, such as the demise of colonialism, the re-evaluation of Western knowledge, and criticism of evolutionary philosophy (Mitra Channa, 2004:196). Many medical anthropologists have linked the use of traditional medicine to resistance of modern medicine and assertion of traditional culture or nationalism (Ngokwey, 1995:1146; Broom et al., 2009; Ganesan, 2010). In the Hiwi case, this may also be connected to structural deficiencies in delivery and access to biomedical facilities in rural Venezuela. Hiwi people are generally proud of the healing capabilities of their shamans and their own knowledge of plant remedies. Indeed, my well-meaning offers to treat children’s burns and slight fevers with my biomedical supplies were often politely rebuffed in favour of Hiwi plant remedies. This indicates that the choice to use biomedical treatments involves more than the availability of biomedical services. Rather, choices are made on the basis of an individual’s trust in the Hiwi medical tradition. According to Pedro:

Even if a Hiwi woman married a *criollo* man, she would always remember how to heal with plants because health is very important. — Pedro

This statement touches on the centrality of medical knowledge to the Hiwi identity. Some knowledge of healing plants and orations is conceived of by Hiwi people to be largely innate to indigenous people; a natural part of their life that is learned informally from parents and grandparents at a very early age. As we see in Chapter Six, knowledge is a function of the body. Choosing Hiwi medical therapies may be an assertion of a particular ethnic-cultural identity and the value of indigenous medical knowledge, challenging colonial constructions of indigeneity as inferior that may affect psychological health negatively. According to Kirmayer:

Political activism, seeking to reclaim autonomy and control over their nations and communities is also understood as a form of healing both individual and collective wounds traced back to the violence of colonization (2004:41).

This global shift is related to the rise of indigenous rights movements and the international recognition they have received in the last thirty years. The importance of cultural knowledge to this political activism is enshrined within the CBRV and the LOPCI, which guarantees indigenous people's rights to their language and culture, including religious and medical beliefs and practices. As the LOPCI states:

Indigenous peoples and the general public have the right to their traditional medicines and health practices, including the right to the protection of plants, animals and minerals of vital interest from the medical standpoint. This right shall not affect their right to access, without any discrimination, to all institutions, facilities, health services and programs. Health policies aimed at indigenous peoples will tend to the valuation of the worldview and traditional medicinal practices of each ethnic group, and foster their inclusion as part of the health systems, particularly in states with indigenous populations. The State shall ensure the conservation and regulation of traditional indigenous medicine and research into its contributions to universal knowledge. It will encourage the contribution of traditional indigenous medicine, within the vision of integration, to the strengthening of medicine directed to the rest of the population (Ley Orgánica de Pueblos y Comunidades Indígenas, 2005: Artículo 192).

'Indigeneity' as a cultural and ethnic identity has gained political capital, as have the specific forms of knowledge that are defined as 'indigenous'. Like Mitra Channa, I subscribe to the view that "indigenous knowledge is constituted in social relations and

in spite of being internally diverse may serve as a ‘cultural totem’ to define community identity” (2004:190). The promotion of indigenous culture and knowledge as an important part of the national patrimony originates in indigenous activism in the 1970s. A new form of *Indigenismo* developed in Venezuela around the idea that Amerindians are ethnic minorities with the right to develop their own socio-cultural identity, without social isolation and promoted a notion of indigenous culture as part of a national patrimony, both among indigenous peoples and within the national culture (Mosonyi, 1972). By asserting that their knowledge is valuable, ethnic groups simultaneously proclaim their independent cultural identity and demand certain political rights. According to Mitra Channa:

Indigenous knowledge is understood here not as a pragmatic path to aid ‘development’, or as a rational system of knowledge, but as a symbol of power, assertiveness and identity (2004:200).

Simultaneously, indigenous knowledges are promoted by the Bolivarian government as part of the project of constructing an inclusive and participatory politics, a collectivist and solidary economy, and a pluriethnic and multicultural society. This new vision moves away from European and North American models of modernity, seeking a distinctly Latin American social imaginary drawn from the region’s indigenous history and culture. Many aspects of indigenous culture and society become valorised within this discourse: indigenous history is glorified and appropriated as a central tenet of this new nationalism. Similarly, the governments of nations, such as China and India, often promote traditional medicine for nationalistic reasons (Lock and Nguyen, 2010:62). This discourse draws indigenous peoples into mainstream politics by claiming that indigenous knowledge is an integral part of the national identity: “indigenous knowledge is understood not only as knowledge but also as symbol of nationhood”

(Mitra Channa, 2004:203). The link between indigenous medicine and nationalism is reflected in the actions of President Hugo Chávez. During his illness in 2011, Chávez sought the ritual healing of shamans, reflecting a belief in the power and value of indigenous healing traditions, and was photographed in a feather headdress.



Plate 18. Chávez receives a shamanic corona at a ‘cleaning’ ceremony (Venezuela's Chávez Turns to Shamans to Fight Cancer, 2011).

The Venezuelan state’s recognition of indigenous medicine may be partially the result of biomedical interest in Amazonian plant remedies for their pharmacological and curative properties which has been growing in intensity since Richard Schultes botanical studies of the 1950’s (see Davis, 1996). This academic curiosity culminated in the 1990’s with extensive exploitation of indigenous healers by the state and international medical community, who sought indigenous plant knowledge in order to isolate new disease treatments, often without properly compensating their sources (Greene, 1998; Posey, 1990). Tension about the use of plant knowledge by non-

indigenous researchers exists to this day.⁴² The debate over intellectual property rights consists of two conflicting forces, described by Bodeker:

the attempt by non-indigenous individuals and organisations to claim ownership of indigenous knowledge for commercial gain; the other has been the attempt of indigenous groups to fend off this trend and either to take ownership of such products themselves or to engage in partnership with fair sharing of benefits for the commercial development of their knowledge, products or processes (2007:35).

Patenting is designed to protect individual knowledge to bring it into public domain but in reality this process takes knowledge from public domain and uses legal means to place it in the private domain for financial gain of drug companies.

⁴² The son of a Hiwi-Piapoco shaman in Puerto Inirida (Colombia) expressed concerns that I was interested in shamanism because I planned to sell traditional remedies in pharmacies, benefiting myself and not the indigenous guardians of such knowledge. I assured him this was not the case.



Plate 19. Herbal remedies available in the Indigenous Market.

Despite this image of inclusion and equality, government attempts have largely failed to integrate indigenous shamanistic practices within state-run biomedical facilities. During my fieldwork, I was told that shamans were employed at the *Centro Diagnóstico Integral* in Puerto Ayacucho and were drawing state-paid salaries for their work. According to participants, a shaman maintained his consultation office and secretary within this centre, alongside more conventional medical practitioners, and patients would visit these practitioners simultaneously (Borrego and Llanes, 2008). Clemente, claimed to still be employed at this hospital. He may have been involved unofficially; doctors or nurses referred patients to him who were seeking a shaman, perhaps after biomedicine had proved unsuccessful. However, when I visited the hospital and spoke with the director, a young Cuban doctor, he assured me that shamans were not currently employed and had not been in at least four or five years. It is probable that Clemente

was involved at some point in working at the hospital and maintained that he still was in order to claim authority as a powerful shaman, recognised even by *criollo* and government organisations.

There is little formal integration between indigenous medicine and government medical services, although indigenous healers and biomedical workers interact at an informal community level. There are several laws, such as the 1999 Constitution and LOPCI which aim to stimulate cooperation and attempts to implement these laws (e.g. the Department of Indigenous Health in the Ministry of Health; Indigenous offices in several hospitals). Most programs are still experimental and often fail due to lacking of funding and organisation, as with the shaman's office established in the Piaroa community of Alto Carinagua. The two medical models do interact within the community, where biomedical nurses and practitioners interact with shamans/healers during their everyday life and many indigenous people are studying nursing and biomedicine. Indigenous people are increasingly able to access education and return to their communities as biomedical doctors and nurses. The state's commitment to the construction of a true intercultural and intermedical exchange in Amazonas is largely symbolic at this stage, as its practical manifestation is complicated by the lack of integration of traditions and the continuing dominance of biomedicine. As I have shown, Amazonas is an intercultural medical zone where Hiwi people choose among biomedicine and Hiwi shamanism to treat illnesses on basis of multiple factors, including perceived efficacy and suitability, as well as pride in Hiwi medical traditions. This intercultural space opens up the possibility of a decolonial medicine, which values alternative knowledges, although the Venezuelan state has stopped short of enacting this in practice.

5.3.3. Biomedicine in Amazonas: Medical Pluralism and Social Inequality

I have demonstrated that Hiwi people live within an intercultural medical landscape structured by Hiwi medical knowledge and biomedicine. In this section, I position the intermedical zone of Amazonas within the context of colonialism and continuing social inequality, where biomedicine has actively worked on the frontlines to subjugate and appropriate alternative knowledges. I problematise the relation between medical pluralism as an expression of ethnic pride and the structural lack of biomedical resources in rural and impoverished regions that necessitates cheaper alternative medicines. I conclude that medical pluralism promotes cultural difference in medicine, but may simultaneously obscure and even perpetuate inequalities in medical provisioning.

From the beginning of European colonial expansion, biomedicine has been inextricably intertwined with the conquest, colonisation, and continuing subjugation of indigenous peoples. Missionaries in Latin America often undermined the authority of indigenous shamans, perceiving their healing practices as, at best, ignorant superstition and, at worst, satanic ritual. Epidemics of measles and smallpox were blamed on the faithlessness of indigenous peoples and effective biomedical treatments were linked to Christian salvation. According to Lock and Nguyen:

The occasion of illness was a privileged moment for converting the suffering soul...Ultimately it did not matter whether illness was explicitly attributed to sin, because care and occasionally, cure could serve as powerful demonstrations of the superiority of Christian faith as both a spiritual and a material doctrine (2010:162).

The introduction of biomedical services in Amazonas began after WW2 with both missionaries and the state running programs promoting basic vaccinations, sanitary conditions, and illness treatments (Zent, 1997:343; Toro, 1997:318). In the 1970s, biomedical services were expanded from Puerto Ayacucho to outer regions (Isla Raton, Atabapo, and San Juan de Manapiare) and in the 1980s CAICET was founded to research and treat endemic diseases (Zent, 1997:343). Amazonas was, from the start, a medically plural zone, with the state introducing biomedicine, each indigenous ethnic group possessing its own medical tradition, and missionaries associating conversion with a conception of health and illness that often diverged from both indigenous and state medicines (Toro, 1997:318). But these traditions are weighted differently within the power relationships of colonial and neo-colonial societies.

As critical medical anthropologists have identified, medical metaphors permeate the modernity narrative and justify imperialism by associating subjugated peoples with dirt, sickness, and poverty, a premodern state of being to which the West brings health, progress, and development (Greene, 1998; Briggs, 2004). Early medical anthropologists participated in this dominant paradigm by constructing indigenous medicines as irrational superstitions, religious rituals, or magical beliefs, effectively denying any possibility that they possessed medical efficacy or ‘medicinity’ (Greene, 1998:635). Indigenous medicines, imagined as a static, primitive, and continuous magico-religious tradition, were contrasted discursively with biomedicine, perceived as a dynamic, modern, and progressive science. This discourse obscures the role of the social actors—transnational corporations and governments—who profit from the unequal relations of capitalism and perpetuate social inequalities in health.

Closely linked to the modernity discourse, the medicalisation of experience has been a way of civilising the colonised, assimilating them by imposing biomedical views of the body, self, and health (Lock and Nguyen, 2010:69; Mitra Channa, 2004). This involved the propagation of biomedical ideas about the body and disease, diffused among indigenous peoples by missionaries and government workers. As recognised in critical medical anthropology, biomedicine often symbolised the “superior power and alien knowledge” of the colonisers and its adoption by indigenous peoples became a tacit acceptance of their right to rule (Mitra Channa, 2004:196). This imposition of biomedical ideas of health simultaneously implies a particular negative image of traditional healthcare practices. Semali and Kincheloe note that the dissemination of books and other literacy materials in indigenous communities is never purely altruistic, but is also a political and economic manoeuvre to “erase and subjugate indigenous knowledge systems” (1999:10).

What has been identified in the global literature of medical anthropology is also true of Amazonas. The provisioning of biomedical services and resources has lagged far behind this expansion of biomedical political influence. Biomedicine in Amazonas has been restrained by the lack of government funding, lack of qualified doctors and nurses, shortages of medicines, huge geographical distances and dispersed rural populations (Jaro, 1997:337; Toro, 1997:319). The state’s investment in a centralised urban health service has focused on the most populated and accessible regions, failing to adapt to the rural reality of Amazonas (Toro, 1997:319). The Simplified Medicine Program has historically had most impact in indigenous communities because it located primary

health care services and resources in the local community (Zent, 1997:343; Yates, 1975; Chacón Nieto and Arias R, 1975).



Plate 20. A medical clinic in the Piaroa/Hiwi community of Puente Parhueña, which services the communities to the north of Puerto Ayacucho.

In Amazonas, access to biomedical health services and centres has improved under the Bolivarian government, although medical resources and supplies are frequently unavailable. Hiwi people employ both shamanic and biomedical resources to maintain health, despite apparent conceptual and therapeutic contradictions. In this context, biomedicine may be seen as one form of medicine emerging from a particular socio-cultural tradition, albeit an effective and politically powerful one, which- exists among many alternatives. Like Hiwi shamanism, biomedicine possesses its own historical

evolution and paradigm, which may overlap or intersect with indigenous ways of healing.

The Bolivarian government has in a sense continued the Simplified Medicine program of the 1970s, introducing new programs to build clinics and provide primary health care in underserved rural or poor areas. From 2003-2011, *Misión Barrio Adentro* documents 528,833,299 primary health care consultations and, from 2005-2012, the construction of 6,712 Consultorios Populares, 550 Centros de Diagnóstico Integral (CDI), 578 Salas de Rehabilitación Integral (SRI), and 33 Centros de Alta Tecnología (CAT) (*Indicadores Básicos de Salud*, 2012). This program is predicated on a trade arrangement with Cuba where oil is exchanged for medical doctors; an estimated 15,000-20,000 Cuban doctors at one point worked for *Misión Barrio Adentro* in exchange for 90,000 barrels of oil a day (Carrillo de Albornoz, 2006:411).⁴³ Venezuelan medical professionals have often resented this program, claiming that Cuban doctors are not legally qualified to practice in Venezuela (Villanueva and Carrillo de Albornoz, 2008:579).

Despite this increase in access to primary health care, critics are concerned with the government's disinvestment in and hostility towards established medical institutions, where doctors tend to oppose the current government's policies. Álvarez Herrera and Rodríguez (Álvarez Herrera and Rodríguez, 2008:161-162) argue that, although many

⁴³ The exchange of doctors for oil is part of a soft diplomacy campaign to promote a positive image of Cuba as provider of medical assistance and training to developing countries in South America and Africa, including Venezuela (Bustamente and Seig, 2008).

Venezuelans have directly benefitted from *Misión Barrio Adentro*, its development has coincided with a decline in resources allocated to the conventional functions of a public health system, such as hospitalisation and the prevention of endemic diseases. This dysfunction has reached a crisis in the last few years, as basic medical supplies become increasingly unavailable. The government blames the shortages on the illegal stockpiling of medical supplies or the illegal sale of government-controlled dollars by importers (Cawthorne, 2014, October 23rd). The situation is more complicated; Venezuela lacks a significant pharmaceutical industry and must rely on imported medical supplies, and equipment. Hyperinflation, currency controls, and plummeting oil prices have reduced imports and contributed to shortages of basic medical supplies and equipment, while the overseas flight of trained medical personnel and lack of maintenance of existing infrastructure has led to a decline in medical services (Forero, 2015, March 13th; Lohman, 2015, April 29th)

Given this dire lack of medical infrastructure and supplies, it is clear that the assumption that indigenous practices would simply fade away with increasing access to biomedicine has proved false (Lock and Nguyen, 2010:61). Indeed, due to the global market dynamics that regulate biomedicine, costly therapies and treatments are largely inaccessible for most of the world's population who continue to rely almost entirely on indigenous medicine (Lock and Nguyen, 2010:66; Greene, 1998). Greene notes that the expense of biomedicine has precipitated a shift towards medical pluralism. Partly for this reason, traditional medicine has been granted some legitimacy in recent years, but only as far as it can be absorbed and transformed ("scientized") within a biomedical framework, usually without adequate acknowledgement or compensation to indigenous practitioners (Greene, 1998:641). As Greene (1998) argues, the WHO and other

development agencies expand the political influence of biomedicine, without committing to redressing the economic inequalities generated by global capitalism which limit access to biomedical resources in developing nations. As Greene explains:

The inherently capitalist commitment of biomedicine restrains the proliferation of costly resources, but does not preclude opportunistic expansion of biomedical political influence (emanating from the West) through control, regulation, direction of and scientific research on ethnomedicine. Nor does it preclude opportunistic exploitation of indigenous medical knowledge and resources (much less protect against it) through international ethnopharmaceutical research—a Western biomedical-capitalist practice that has really only been brought to international attention in the 1990s and no doubt remains unresolved (1998:638).

This indicates that medical pluralism does not necessarily guarantee equal power relations between medical traditions. Indeed, medical pluralism may even perpetuate social inequalities that determine health and illness. The adoption of the new paradigm of medical pluralism in development policy may foster an illusion of agency and intellectual exchange that may obscure the social inequalities and government failures in health care that compel individuals to seek more affordable and accessible alternative therapies (Broom et al., 2009:704). This dynamic may propel *criollo* people to seek indigenous therapies, as I observed in the case of a teenage boy with epilepsy whose family sought an herbal remedy from Pedro: a wine made from *manaca* (açai) berries. His father cited the unavailability and expense of biomedical pharmaceuticals as a major motivating factor.

The Bolivarian state, recognising that increasing access to biomedicine often contributes to a loss of interest in and the failed transmission of indigenous medical knowledge, has simultaneously promoted the use of indigenous medicines in order to construct a form of medical pluralism. This medical pluralism acknowledges the ethnic and cultural diversity of the nation, but may also be a response to the expense and structural constraints of state-funded biomedical services. Taking into account the ethnic and cultural diversity of Amazonas, most anthropologists have argued for programs that integrate indigenous and biomedical systems, collaborating with indigenous communities and training indigenous health practitioners (Jaro, 1997:337; Toro, 1997:335; Zent, 1997). This project requires an intercultural dialogue based on intermedicality, an “anthropological understanding of ethnomedicine as a complex of knowledge and practices already developing (with its own agency)” (Greene, 1998:642).

The continuing political dominance of biomedicine ensures that even when local practitioners are integrated into biomedical health care systems, their knowledge is often devalued and their approach made more objective – “the epistemological basis of traditional medical knowledge is seriously violated” (Lock and Nguyen, 2010:65). To redress this exploitative and ethnocentric situation, Greene proposes a notion of ‘intermedicality’, which refers to “a contextualized space of hybrid medicines and socio-medically conscious agents” (Greene, 1998:641). In this conceptual space, all forms of medical knowledge are acknowledged to be the product of socio-cultural and historical forces, and the agency of ethnomedical practitioners is recognised; their knowledge is not merely absorbed by the biomedical model as far as it is shown to be efficacious. The Hiwi examples I have given reflect an intercultural medical space in

Amazonas that approaches intermedicality, but fails to fully achieve a decolonial medicine in which alternative medicines are respected and acknowledged due to continuing structural insufficiencies in biomedical provisioning.

5.4. Conclusions

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that Amazonas is an intercultural medical zone, characterised by biomedicine and various indigenous medical traditions. Hiwi people maintain their own beliefs and practices regarding illness and health, while also electing to use biomedical resources for physical illness. I have described how Hiwi notions of the human body, health, and illness are pluralistic and health is viewed as a product of environmental, social, and individual well-being. Illnesses may have multiple causes including a loss of vital force, an imbalance of hot/cold energies, sorcery, or spirit contamination. Healing consists of restoring balance to these elements and strengthening vital force through the application of plant remedies and the transmission of energies which the shaman achieves using psychoactive substances, orations, water, sucking, and blowing.

Based on two ethnographic case studies, I have argued that Amazonas is an intermedical zone, although this view proliferates among indigenous, rather than biomedical health practitioners. Hiwi individuals employ both shamanic and biomedical concepts and treatments to combat illness and maintain health. In this perspective, biomedicine is perceived as a medical tradition produced in a particular socio-historical context and possessing considerable political-economic power. Hiwi individuals choose among these medical alternatives, which, far from being incompatible, exist along a

continuum and are employed based on judgments about the nature and cause of illness which dictate the appropriate medical resource to be used.

This intercultural medical zone may be understood using the lens of intermedicality, where medical traditions with diverse histories and social context come together and influence one another. I have examined Hiwi shamanism and biomedicine in light of recent developments in national Venezuelan society and colonialism. Indigenous medicines have recently gained respect and political capital due to indigenous activism and the revalorisation of indigenous culture within the Bolivarian government's political vision of a pluriethnic national society. In this sense, choosing indigenous medicine may be an assertion of an indigenous ethnocultural identity with value and political rights. Despite the constitutional recognition of indigenous medicines, biomedicine continues to dominate state discourse and practice, while struggling to practically incorporate indigenous medical understandings or practices that refuse to be assimilated within a scientific paradigm. I have also positioned this intermedical zone within the context of colonialism and continuing social inequality. This perspective reveals that medical pluralism may obscure and even contribute to the structural lack of biomedical resources in impoverished, rural areas, which may necessitate the maintenance of alternative medical knowledges and practices.

Indigenous medicines offer an alternative vision of human existence as intricately intertwined with the natural, spiritual, and social environments we inhabit. This holistic vision indicates that health is a delicate balance among diverse elements, opening up possibilities for the development of a decolonial biomedicine that reaches beyond its

sometime reductive conceptions of human life. As I have shown, biomedicine alone has a limited ability to construct a meaningful narrative of illness experiences for Hiwi people, who consider biomedical and shamanic treatments as complementary healing systems that are effective for different types of illness and persons. This indicates the potential for a decolonial global medicine, that would acknowledge and address this diversity of meaningful human experiences of illness and well-being.

6. Cosmology, Conviviality, and Christianity: Hiwi Morality in Myth and Sorcery

Christianity is an important aspect of contemporary Hiwi life. Many Hiwi people maintain a Christian identity while simultaneously subscribing to more specifically Hiwi notions of cosmology and morality. In this chapter, I ask how Hiwi manage intercultural aspects of morality and cosmology, given the extensive history and ongoing influence of missionary contact and what this indicates about plural moralities and complementary cosmologies? I explore this dynamic in light of two Hiwi creation myths recounted to me during fieldwork. By analysing these myths, I argue that Hiwi individuals negotiate among Christian and Hiwi spheres of meaning by emphasising similarities and interpreting these distinct moral worlds as complementary. This complementarity is possible within the encompassing nature of Hiwi morality, which focuses on promoting conviviality and social harmony. A common characteristic of Amazonian peoples, this emphasis on living well with others allows Hiwi people to draw conceptual links between Christianity and Hiwi shamanism, and to encapsulate both of these moral and cosmological orders in their everyday lives. In accordance with the fluidity and pluralism that underpin the Hiwi lifeworld, and the emphasis on conviviality, individuals perceive these different modalities as complementary spheres of meanings, rather than incommensurate moral worlds. My discussion draws upon the anthropology of Christianity, including the work of Fenella Cannell (2005, 2006) and Joel Robbins (2007), and the anthropology of morality and conviviality, including the work of Thomas Csordas (2013), Overing and Passes (2000). In the last section, I discuss how Hiwi notions of sorcery and shamanism also express this particular form of convivial morality and align with Christian notions of charity and generosity.

The influence of missionaries on Hiwi people has been profound and long-lived, both on the *llanos* of Colombia and Amazonas, Venezuela. The Jesuits first penetrated the region in the 17th century, followed by other Catholic orders including the Dominicans, Capuchins, and Augustines (Morey, 1970:33). Missionaries lured indigenous people onto the missions with manufactured goods and offers of protection from slave raiders and colonists, but also applied military force to raid independent communities and capture prisoners (Morey, 1970:30; von Humboldt, [1814-1825] 1995:223-225). This barbarity was justified by the missionaries' ultimate goal of salvation and their racist view of Hiwi people, who Jesuit missionary Rivero describes as:⁴⁴

restless people and thieves, without houses or hearths or farms, walking forever in continual hustle and bustle, like Gypsies, sustaining themselves with roots of trees and fruits like animals (1883:215-216).

This ethnocentrism also excused the often harsh conditions of the missions: cultural beliefs and practices were discouraged; traditional diets were changed; diverse groups were brought together and forced to work under threat of corporal punishment (Morey, 1979:83). For these reasons, Hiwi people frequently left the missions and resisted recapture by the Spanish military (Rivero, 1883:405-409).

⁴⁴ For more information on historical accounts of the llanos by missionaries, see González Gómez (2015).



Plate 21. Cathedral of 'María Auxiliadora' in Puerto Ayacucho.

Since early colonisation, missionaries have remained an important authoritative influence for Hiwi people, with the sanction of the Venezuelan state. The Law of Missions (1915), which shaped state policy until the New Organic Law of Indigenous Rights of 1995, saw indigenous peoples as backwards or 'adult children', promoted assimilation and cultural homogenisation, and gave Catholic missionaries almost unlimited jurisdiction, administrative, and civil powers in indigenous territories (Kuppe, 1996:162). The development of the indigenous rights movement in the 1990s, the New

Constitution, LOPCI, and the establishment of MINPI have reduced missionaries' authority in the region. The state itself has become hostile to foreign missionaries; in 2005, Chávez expelled the New Tribes Mission (NTM) from Amazonas, accusing the group of imperialism towards indigenous peoples and entering Venezuelan territory illegally (*Chávez Moves Against US Preachers*, 2005). Indigenous activists since the 1970s have also voiced their hostility towards foreign missionaries who exert power in 'indigenous' regions and encourage assimilation among indigenous peoples. However, Hiwi people identify as Christian and continue to have regular contact with the many missionary groups that remain active in Amazonas. Diverse brands of Catholic and Protestant missionaries, including Jesuits, Salesians, and the New Tribes Mission have worked in indigenous regions and most Hiwi people have some contact with Christian ideas, narratives, and worldview that continue to shape wider Venezuelan national society. Many Hiwi people identify as Christian or employ aspects of Christian narratives, cosmology, ritual, and morality in their daily lives. These individuals may simultaneously subscribe to more specifically Hiwi notions of morality and cosmology.

6.1. Hiwi Christianity and Shamanism: Complementary Systems of Meaning

Metzger claimed 50 years ago that the "introduction of missionary Christianity has effected no radical changes in either belief or behaviour among the Guahibo" (1968:228). Metzger supports this position by arguing there are no traditional religious institutions that Christianity could replace, there is no urgent need for change, the Christian ideal is foreign and meaningless, and the adaptability of the social and technological system inhibits structural changes in the value system. The predominantly

Catholic missionaries' methodology is also an inhibiting factor: they only translate the bible into Guahibo (only a few are taught to read, as too much education is considered unnecessary and even dangerous) and they do not improve the material conditions of the Guahibo, due to the prioritisation of limited resources. The result is that biblical meanings are largely unintelligible (sentences are translated rather than concepts) and the missionary influence is limited to preaching, with little to no further training (Metzger, 1968:228-229).

As we saw in the introduction, missionaries have played an active and authoritative role in indigenous lives since the 16th century, and it seems likely that the Hiwi worldview has incorporated some aspects of Christianity. Yet anthropologists, as Robbins (2007:6) notes, often ignore or downplay the role of Christianity in convert societies, viewing it as a thin veneer over more enduring cultural beliefs owing partly to our discipline's tendency to continuity thinking. Cannell (2005:340) points out that Christianity is often undertheorised because its meanings appear obvious and form part of the cultural background of many anthropologists. Cannell asks us, what difference does Christianity make? Although Christian missionaries were handmaidens of colonialism, a decolonial perspective cannot dismiss Christianity as merely a thin veneer that barely obscures the more traditional foundations of indigenous peoples' cultural life. Rather, we must also consider the meaningful ways that people use and incorporate Christian meanings in their lives and identities.



Plate 22. A painting in the Galeria del Arte, Puerto Ayacucho uses Christian symbolism to make sense of colonisation.

Many Hiwi people practise some form of Christianity, either Catholicism or Protestantism, and maintain personal relationships with *criollo* missionaries who visit the community. My main participants are well versed in biblical stories and celebrate Christian holidays, such as Easter and Christmas, by visiting relatives, feasting, drinking, and dancing. The community of Santo Rosario has a Protestant church that missionaries have recently renovated, which a small group of community members

regularly uses for prayer meetings. Pedro was educated by the Summer Institute of Linguistics, a bible translation group associated with the New Tribes Mission, during which time he helped to translate the bible into the Hiwi language.

Catholic missionaries visit Santo Rosario regularly to perform the catechism and provide support for the community. On one such visit, the three missionaries were met by a small group of Hiwi people, of about seven adults, the majority of whom were women with small children. The VCR and television were out of order, so the catechism did not take place. Instead, the few Hiwi people in attendance broached issues facing the community, such as a recent malaria outbreak, the difficulty of sourcing medicines and an individual who was combining alcohol and antibiotics. The Catholic missionaries promised to help, reflecting the well-established link between Christian missionaries as authorities and the treatment of sickness.

Many missionaries have been historically antagonistic to shamanism and the continuation of indigenous cultures, which were seen as dangerous primitive beliefs and an obstacle to conversion. Protestant missionaries, and particularly the NTM, discouraged Hiwi people from consuming *dopa*, *huipa*, tobacco, and alcohol, wearing traditional clothes, and performing shamanic rituals. My main participants remember this attitude from their own lives, despite continuing to practise Hiwi shamanism and plant healing.

They [missionaries/Christians] said it[shamanism] was a lie, because they didn't believe. — Clemente

This hostility has lessened with many missionaries, particularly within Catholic orders, taking a more relaxed and culturally sensitive approach to proselytising. Hiwi people do not seem to consider shamanic beliefs and practices to be incompatible with the Christian doctrine. Indeed, some Hiwi people include Catholic rituals within their repertoire of cultural customs. “This is also our custom,” says Miguel in a conversation about Hiwi life. He is showing me a photo of himself participating in a cultural dance in traditional bark cloth clothing, while telling me about the importance of the catechism. For him these aspects of identity are overlapping, rather than separate and conflicting. For Hiwi people, religious affiliation is perceived as a personal choice and part of most people’s lives. As community leader, Pedro engages with missionaries and manages the Protestant church building, but does not share other community members interest in bible study. He prefers to talk of spirituality, which he perceives to be a unifying force beneath all religions.

Although many people acknowledge that Christian influences have profoundly shaped Hiwi life and caused numerous people to stop practising their cultural traditions. Young people are less interested in learning about shamanism than studying and working outside the community. Pedro regrets not learning more about plant medicine from his grandfather, but as a young man he was more concerned with making a life for himself and his family. Clemente has filled an exercise book with his *oraciones* in an attempt to pass on his knowledge to his children, but they do not have much interest. The fluidity and informality of Hiwi teaching and learning processes, based on personal autonomy, means that the instruction of young people depends on their interest and enthusiasm for learning.



Plate 23. A nativity scene in a Puerto Ayacucho primary school suggests that the intertwining of Christian and indigenous narratives may be common in Amazonas.

I am not arguing that this represents the loss or extinction of Hiwi culture. Rather, Hiwi people are adopting new knowledges and incorporating selected elements of Venezuelan society and culture into their worldview. This represents an evolution of the Hiwi lifeworld and shamanism that includes Christian notions of cosmology and morality. This is a common characteristic of Amazonian indigenous peoples and reflects their cultural adaptability. As Brown explains:

This openness to exotic knowledge is part of the highly nuanced, dialectical ballet by which Amazonian peoples incorporate and, at the same time, define themselves against the differences of others. In the colonial period, selective

borrowing (what used to be called 'acculturation') became an even more necessary strategy for cultural survival (1991:406).

Adopting Christian ideas is a selective process for Hiwi individuals, which does not prevent Hiwi people from maintaining indigenous beliefs and practises. Hiwi people consider religious affiliation a private matter and the principle of personal autonomy in Hiwi society allows people to practise any religions they may wish. Christian conversion may cause changes in the social organisation and the reinterpretation of shamanic beliefs. Luzar and Fragoso note that religious conversion among Amazonian peoples is a form of cultural change that:

involves the re-interpretation of indigenous cultural motifs, the creation of cultural hybrids, and the reorganization of allegiances and social networks both within individual indigenous societies and in their interactions with outside groups (2013:309).

I argue that this dialectical dynamic of cultural adaptation and reinterpretation of the Hiwi lifeworld operates among Hiwi people today. My main participants adapt and reinterpret aspects of Hiwi and Christian cosmology and morality to form a fluid but complementary system of meaning. Hiwi morality emerges in myths and concepts of sorcery, and reflects the flexible matrix of Hiwi social ethics.

To explore this dynamic, I turn to the anthropology of morality and a concept of Amazonian convivial sociality grounded in intimate social relationships. Csordas (2013) argues that the anthropology of morality must first tackle the problem of evil. To develop an etic category of evil that does not rely on unreflexive Christian notions, we could conceive of evil as a cumulative category constituted of ethnographically

established indigenous concepts and a substantive category with a structure flexible enough to avoid universalism and essentialism while accurately describing the particular of each instance (Csordas, 2013:534). Parkin (1985:6) argues that morality in general pertains to what a society perceives as conducive to happiness and well-being, while evil reflects suffering and crisis. I understand Hiwi morality through the development of a Hiwi concept of evil or morally wrong actions, which expresses the moral imperative to live convivially with others. Overing and Passes (2000:13) argue that anthropologists have discounted the value of intimacy and conviviality in the everyday life and social organisation of Amazonian peoples because of an ingrained Western conceptual distinction between the emotional and social, the latter of which the social sciences have largely defined by hierarchy, institutions, roles, and rules. The decolonisation of anthropology requires a serious intercultural dialogue with indigenous peoples in which we listen to indigenous voices and examine how they attempt to construct a harmonious society through intimate everyday relations with others. To correct this bias, Overing and Passes define a general Amazonian notion of the good life as the:

achievement of a high level of affective contentment....among those who interact in daily intimacy. The social itself is defined as a *personal, intimate, harmonious* space of interaction, and judgement of it is ever geared toward the success of its affective life, and the comfort of it (2000:17).

As Overing and Passes (2000:18) note, this convivial sociality involves the creation of tranquillity in everyday life and work through the privileging of social intimacy and positive emotions of love, amity, compassion, happiness and generosity, which are seen as promoting fecundity and generative energy. They argue that this moral imperative to

live convivially is based on the equivalence of emotional and social aspects of communal living.

In other words, their ‘emotion talk’ is also ‘social talk’ in that they consider the management of their affective life *vis-à-vis other people* to be constitutive of moral thought and practical reason (Overing and Passes, 2000:3).

Through this lens, it appears that the Amazonian concept of the moral person, which I will elaborate in the following sections in light of Hiwi data, is founded in social relationships. A moral person is one who manages their emotional-social relationships by transforming their negative emotions towards others into positive emotions that are conducive to social harmony. This personal responsibility for creating a tranquil social life represents the twin principles of autonomy and solidarity that structure Hiwi life. This is compatible with a Christian subjectivity that posits a personal interiority connected to religious morality, which has also contributed to the development of psychology as a domain of Western thought (Cannell, 2006:18-19). As Pedro remarks, there are many ways to the source of the spirit:

Christianity, shamanism, and spiritualism are like a source of water that many neighbours can make a canal in to draw water to their houses. But the spirit is the same, [it is] just tapped in different ways. Anyone who says they are not the same, doesn’t really know—Pedro

From this perspective, Christianity and Hiwi shamanism are compatible, not only with each other, but with the central precept of Hiwi life: living well with others. In other words, Hiwi people are able to synthesise elements of Christian and Hiwi cosmology and morality within a complementary system predicated on conviviality.

6.1.1. Myth of *Caalivirinaí*: The Tree of Life

In this section, I give detailed accounts of two Hiwi myths about the creation of the world, told to me one evening by Pedro while we chatted on the patio of his tourist posada. I quote the myths in full, using Pedro's own words, which I have translated from the Spanish and lightly edited for clarity. Pedro is an engaging and talented storyteller with a light-hearted style that suits the often-humorous content of Hiwi myths. In the following section, I analyse these texts for their expression of Hiwi cosmological principles, conviviality as morality, and their intersections with Christianity.



Plate 24. An artist's interpretation of the myth hangs in the public library of Puerto Ayacucho.

Yes...well, my grandparents told this...The first being that existed on Earth, Kúwai. Kúwai was a man, a man who, translated, is to say the creator, the

father of all of creation. He is called Kúwai. Well then, after that, the wife of Kúwai, they were a couple then. Indigenous history is very similar to what the bible talks about, which talks about Adam and Eve, it's very similar to this. Well then, in indigenous culture, they are not called Adam and Eve, but Kúwai and Pabeduwa. Well then, these two persons existed as the first were, where all human races were born. Later then, Kúwai had Matsuldani and Tsamani and Econé, how do you call this, Palameco, they were five men and three women. Children of Pabeduwa and Kúwai. Now history begins with Kúwai, before he existed, nobody knew anything. It begins with these two persons. They [grandparents] say that Kúwai was a man, the greatest shaman, he was like a god, well, who knew how to, put simply, convert himself. This shoe, to put it this way, he could convert it into an armadillo <whoosh> it goes walking away. He had power, for this he is called Kúwai. Then, Kúwai had his children and I say that, that he could do many things and from here goes the history and, how do you call this, the belief here in Amazonas, the hill of Autana, that was the tree of life. He discovered it, they say he discovered this, because my grandparents said that the history, that in the headwaters very near this mountain that we are speaking about, of the Guaviare, there is a site, a very large savannah where there was a community of shamans. Kúwai and his children lived there. Then, always, indigenous people or could be, these shamans had indigenous characteristics. Kúwai, then, they say that he lived in this community and he meditated often, thought frequently. Then, the boys grew up. They say that this Palameco, son of Kúwai, is the father that forms and discovered iron to form an axe, to form a machete, all that is an implement of iron. Later then, Tsamani is the god of *artesanía* (Spanish), woodwork, all that is of canoes, boats, everything that is of wood. Aha, later then, the mother of all *artesanía* was Econoba, who discovered this for women, how to make baskets, *ganchitos*,

all these things, good, and like this they were formed and these persons went on having children. ⁴⁵ Then, they were eating, there were forest fruits, for example, *temari del monte*, pineapple, all that they found, roots, they ate, they were more vegetarian than carnivorous because they had not discovered how to hunt an animal to eat meat. ⁴⁶...Neither did they have agriculture. In the beginning there was no agriculture...only forest. But there existed the tree of agriculture, which is the tree of life that until now they believe is Autana. Aha. It is called, or they call it Caalivirinai. Then, they say, they lived like this, well, where there was food, they used *bachaco*, ants, they ate spiders, they ate *moriche* grubs, they ate fruits, but there was no agriculture because it had not been discovered. Well then, one day, they say, the animals, for example, monkeys, they say that monkeys talk, the *lapa*, the animals were like people, they could connect to each and talk, and each one had their culture, for example, monkey culture, deer culture, the culture of the species of the animal, each one was like a tribe and each one in agreement with his or her culture, walking over this in agreement with their culture.

Well then, the little *lapa* was always like a pet, or like a servant in Kúwai's house. She went out in the night to look for fruit on the mountain, along the rivers. They say that over there on the Guaviare [River], she crossed the Orinoco to look for food on that side. Towards Autana, towards the Atures [Rapids], and crossed <whoosh>. And [she was] pursuing the monkey, there is a nocturnal monkey that we call Kuchikuchi. He was the one who knew where the tree was, because he walked, he is the monkey that walks all night

⁴⁵ *Ganchito* refers to a clothing hook or fastening.

⁴⁶ *Temari del monte* is a native fruit of the jungle.

on the mountain, looking over and searching for fruit to feed himself. Well then, he discovered where Caalivirinaí was. In the Caalivirinaí, he ate pineapple, plantains, *temari*, all types of lettuce, *guama*, because this tree had all this fruit. It was like a market, like a centre, a market. He went and told nobody about it, he was miserly and the *lapa* arrived in the early morning <oof!> he was sleeping in a hammock, but the pineapple, oye but, what fruit was this that Kuchikuchi eats, because it is very fragrant. It smells delicious, what could it be? Well then Kúwai who is the father of all, told the *lapa*, “Tonight you go, how is this called, to follow Kuchikuchi, to see what it is, to discover what he is eating.” Then, Kuchikuchi went out at nine, he went, and the Little *lapa* was over there when he sensed that he left, he went below, he Kuchikuchi as he went by the branches, making sounds <whoosh> making noise from branch to branch, and the little *lapa* below. Kuchikuchi had said <inaudible> a vine crossed from the coast of the Orinoco to the other side of the Colombian coast to Venezuela. It’s a vine that they call *matapalo*.⁴⁷ And the monkey crossed over there and the little *lapa* threw himself in the river and came out. When he arrived here exactly there was a tree, but a gigantic, gigantic tree. Up above there was a platform, which was where this type of...*conuco* with every type of food, pineapple, lettuce, sugarcane, yucca, plantain, all that we can see was there in just one *conuco* and not in the ground, but up in the canopy of the tree. A mysterious tree. Well then, according to history, and they say that the *lapa* arrived and looked around and ate the peel of a pineapple and a plantain that the monkey threw from above. He looked around this and made a *catumare* <inaudible> and went back to the house, carrying what he had discovered to where they

⁴⁷ Strangler fig.

were.⁴⁸ Then Kúwai, Kúwai spoke with Palameco, the god of iron and Palameco did not wish to give the axe, or anything that he had because he said that it was in his belly, not like this, no. He had this in the power he managed that he had inside himself and had no way to take it out. And Kúwai knew what to do, they say he invented the mosquito, this *blanquito* that enters by the nose, making one <ah choo!>. Then it began there. Kúwai created and formed the mosquito from this and <whoo> he sent it. Then the mosquito went out and <broof> it penetrated Palameco and made him vomit, his stomach turned and <arghhh foo!> a little of the axe, pure iron and <eehh> in the vomit he threw out axes, machete, everything made of iron. Then, Kúwai said, “Good, look at this and this”. Tsamani arrived, all the persons had been looking around and they did this and they went to cut down the tree.

They say that they began from 6 in the morning with the axe on the tree, ta, ta, ta, ta. And when 6 in the evening arrived they returned to the community, where they arrived fatigued <oof!> they remained very tired, the work was very difficult. And the next day when they arrived the trunk was healed, they couldn't see a cut or anything, it closed. And then, Kúwai arrived and invited the race of *bachaco*, the ants to collect the splinters of tree that were falling and take them away. And my grandfather says this is so mysterious this thing and for this we have the mountain ranges from there, from Brazil until Guayana, that is the bark, the parts of this tree that formed it, for sure. Then, something mysterious. Then, the *bachaco* until today, for this reason, in a crop they reclaim their right and eat the leaves of the orange tree, of all that

⁴⁸ *Catumare* is a general term for a woven basket for carrying produce over the shoulder.

comes, reclaiming this because they were put to work to form the rocks, but they did not give them food, what they forced themselves.

Then, says the history, Kúwai was like the god of power, after he had used his work, they were slaves, they arrived and <shoo> converted themselves into an ant, became an ant. Later then, they discovered the tree was already rocking and had not fallen. They say there was a vine, a vine that connected the top of the tree towards the atmosphere above, the clouds, a large vine. Then Kúwai sent first for the toucan, the toucan arrived and cha, cha, cha, he could not break it, because he tired very quickly. Then Kúwai said, “<whoosh> convert yourself into a bird that is going to be called toucan, going to be called toucan.” He said that the axe that he handled is the beak that he has. Then he sent for the carpenter that also was another person. He said, “Good now you” and began to chop the vine many times into pieces so the tree would fall. He couldn’t do it either. Then Kúwai arrived <humpf> converted him into a bird they will call carpenter bird⁴⁹ and all the time his work will be to perforate wood because this is what you are, how is it called, the characteristic of this bird is to peck at wood. Because this is the beginning that they had. Then the transformation converted him into a bird and he followed the work that they had. Later then, Kúwai arrived and called the race of, that is called Materi. Materi is a squirrel, a rodent. Good, then, Materi arrived and grabbed hold ra, ra, ra, ra, ra, ra, ra, ra, ra and rapidly like a machine. When he bit the vine, he came like this, and the great tree fell. Look at this, they say that it had the seeds of plantain, yucca, everything. From there they all collected the seeds of pineapple, plantains, all that we see

⁴⁹ This seems to be a type of woodpecker.

here in Amazonas State and the world. They say that they collected it and from this moment, Kúwai said to Tsamani, Tsamani was a very white person, he was *catire*.⁵⁰ Well then, he said, “Good, already from there and going forward we cannot live together. You Tsamani will go towards this side and form a people. You Palameco are going to go here and make a people in agreement with the colour of each one of you, forming a race. And this will be the race of you and they are going to multiply over the earth. The race of whites, race of blacks, the race of all these things, they would give birth to the children of Kúwai, because despite the fact that he was one, he said that they would give birth to whites, blacks, others were brown, different types of colours of persons. And he planted the same, then to each one he gave their seeds and made them leave the house to go make their city. Then, one put down roots in the north, another for the south, the east, the west and they separated to fill all of the planet Earth. Later then, according to the history [they] say that from there all things commenced.

⁵⁰ Blond, fair-skinned.



Plate 25. The stump of Caalivirinai (Cerro Autana) as it appears now, shrouded in mist.

6.1.2. Myth of the Creation of Rapids on the Orinoco River

Well then, my grandfather said, that this was the beginning and later then, this was before they left for above to transform themselves into these bright stars, they were there, they were in the headwaters of the Orinoco, over there near Manaus, Brazil. How is this called, Cajuyali had a *conuco*, Cajuyali was the cousin of Kúwai. And he lived in a *conuco* and had a wife. Well then, indigenous people always go out in the early morning. There it went

beginning, what is this called, adultery, when another man takes the wife of another. It began there. Well then, there was another that was called a man, who was called Acuculi. Acuculi was the first man that let loose, what is it called, to steal the woman of another, how is this called in Castellano...Adultery. He began the first adultery. He let this loose, a man named Acuculi. He committed adultery with the woman of Cajuyali, cousin of Kúwai in the upper Orinoco. Well then, Cajuyali was a man who had much force of shamanism, after Kúwai, because Kúwai was very old, well then, now the power was in Cajuyali, cousin of Kúwai. Well then, he came listening because <inaudible>. He took, Acuculi, took the woman of Cajuyali and came down the Upper Orinoco, and the name of the woman that Acuculi stole was called Tomali. Well then, they came down and when they said it became midday. When indigenous people work from the early morning, we go to the *CONUCOS* in the early morning, by twelve o'clock, much hunger, we go for the house. At 12pm, we are in the house. Well then, Cajuyali was in the conuco and came back at 12, when he came back the woman was not in the house. Already Acuculi has carried her off and Acuculi is a man who fished for the community, he was a fisherman. Well then, he arrived in the bongo, in his canoe and put in the woman and took her down the Orinoco by river. Well then, as this man [Cajuyali] was a man of very strong shamans, he wanted to detain, tried to detain them so they couldn't escape.

Well then, this Cajuyali formed the rapids that are in the middle Orinoco, and closer to here, he formed another rapid, close to Atabapo. And this larger rapid that he formed to try to block their passage so they couldn't escape is the Atures. It is more than six kilometres long and almost a kilometre and a half wide. It is not navigable. No this rapid is very ugly.

Well then, he put in all these things. But Acuculi was already with Tomali, because this woman also had power. They could mock the force of Cajuyali. And this is how they were formed, this Rapids of Caribe, the Ventana Rapids, Rapids of Manteca Beach, and like this until the ocean. Once he arrived there Cajuyali felt mocked, he realised that he could not because already his age was very advanced, his force, his energy was exhausted in his body. He could not fight back to block her. They arrived. Well then, and formed, how is it called, the last one that was to arrive in Bolivar city, for where, in this launching point of the Orinoco, the last rapids. Well it was when Cajuyali cursed Acuculi, and put it, he said <suuarr!> Like this he managed the power of Tsamani, like a curse, “You are going to be a little animal that forecasts from the sea to the coast of the Orinoco above, beating like a dog”. There this little duck, when he comes, when there is much rain and the river rises, he makes a noise, “howowowo, howowowo”. He begins to flap on the banks of the Orinoco. They say this is Acuculi that is making the river grow bigger, the Orinoco. Already the indigenous people know, they say that the river is growing because Acuculi is flapping, it is the curse that he was left with, the signal that the Orinoco is growing bigger is when the duck begins to flap. And well, there above in the clouds, this that you see, soon you are going to see...Lightning, like this <brrr> without thunder, this is not thunder, but a lightning flash, this is called Tomaliwa. Tomaliwa in the ocean navigating in her canoe, this is the curse that she was left. She forecasts in the morning if there will be a strong sun that will hold stifling heat, much heat. Now the indigenous [people] say “Tomaliwa naja vi tame rivier icotiasané ataju”. It is a strong heat, and there will be much temperature because she is announcing with the lights of this lightning without thunder, when there is no thunder, no noises, but simply bright

lights. They say that Tomaliwa is announcing that this heat is going to come. It is here, the summer is close. Well this is one part of the history of this.



Plate 26. The Atures Rapids as seen from El Mirador de Monte Bello in Puerto Ayacucho.

6.2. Conviviality in Hiwi Myths

In this section, I analyse the preceding myths and the various equivalences that Hiwi people draw between the Hiwi cosmogonic vision and Christian narratives of creation. I argue that this reveals the ways Hiwi individuals incorporate Christian meanings into their intercultural worldview. These myths reflect the dangers of negative emotions, such as selfishness, jealousy, and anger to the conviviality that Hiwi people strive to create in order to ensure the tranquillity of social life. The flexibility and plurality of the

Hiwi worldview may explain the ease with which individuals draw analogies among Hiwi and Christian narratives.

In the first myth, Pedro compares Kúwai and Pabeduwa to Adam and Eve, because both represent the first human beings whose descendants populated the world. Most Hiwi agree that Kúwai is an important creator-god-shaman who thought the world, the mountains, land, plants, and animals into existence (Metzger, 1968:202).⁵¹ Kúwai is the head of an extended family of “creator-culture-hero-civiliser beings”, who are the creators and owners of various knowledges and technologies (Metzger, 1968:203). The number, names, and relationship between these sibling spirit-gods varies among individuals due to the flexible nature of Hiwi mythology. Other Hiwi spirit-gods are analogous to biblical figures, a point that my Hiwi participants are quick to make, highlighting the similarities between different Christian and Hiwi systems of meaning. According to Clemente, Purunamunae is like God, because he made a woman pregnant with his thoughts and the child was Matsuldani, who is like Christ. Clemente tells stories about Matsuldani and calls his spirit down in his healing work as a *dopatubinü*. Matsuldani was a very powerful shaman, who defeated Palameco when he grew angry and decided to kill all human beings. Tsamani and Matsuldani used their powers to steal his weapon, lightning. Unaware of this, Palameco tried to strike them down when they confronted him, but his lightning had no effect or force. He tried three times unsuccessfully, until Tsamani and Matsuldani claimed their turn. They struck him with their power and he fell down. Palameco survived but is now only able to make angry sounds with thunder; he is powerless to harm people.

⁵¹ Kúwai is also a culture-hero for the Cubeo and Arawak, indicating cross-cultural contact and affinity.

Kúwai and Pabeduwa live in a community with animal-spirit-people, who lived as humans until they were transformed into their present incarnation as animals. These animal-spirit-people are the owners and grandparents of each species, and their animal characteristics now reflect their personal characteristics. For instance, the diligent and hardworking Bachaco is transformed into the energetic ants who take their nourishment from Hiwi gardens as reward for their work in carrying away pieces of the Tree of Life. This reflects a Hiwi worldview in which human relations with the natural and spiritual world are paramount; Hiwi society is embedded in complex relationships of obligation with all forms of life. Christian conversion often changes indigenous land use and environmental beliefs in ways that negatively impact indigenous lands and biodiversity (Luzar and Fragoso, 2013:309). In this context, the maintenance of a Hiwi view of an interconnected world of relationships is significant and may be tied to Hiwi people's everyday immersion in the natural world which offers food and resources to sustain life.

The convivial mode of communal living among Amazonian peoples includes cosmological and intercommunity relationships, which has often been overlooked by social scientists (Overing and Passes, 2000:6). Spirits, mythical figures, and outsiders are often destructive, chaotic, and dangerous to the construction of tranquillity and social harmony. For many Amazonian peoples, these forces are inherently destructive of sociality, until they can be transformed into life-giving, generative energy through the intervention of human agency. As Overing and Passes describe it:

This in fact is the paradox facing many Amazonian people in their daily construction of the sociable, fertile conditions for sociality: it is not an

unusual cosmogonic vision that all forces for life, fertility, creativity within this world of the social have their origin in the dangerous, violent, potentially cannibalistic, exterior domains beyond the social (2000:6).

This paradox manifests itself in the first myth, which addresses the moral imperative to share with others for the good of the social group. Palameco refuses to provide Kúwai with the knowledge of iron and its products, guarding its secrets jealously and preventing Kúwai from cutting down the tree of life. Kúwai obtains this knowledge through trickery, sending a mosquito into Palameco's nose, causing him to vomit the knowledge of axes, machetes, and all iron instruments. This obligation to help others is at the heart of Hiwi morality, which privileges social well-being and harmonious relations among people: the aim is always to live well with others.

These myths reflect the importance of convivial sociality and the dangers of violating this principle. Myths were once told frequently, usually by grandparents who would regale and entertain their grandchildren with these stories until late at night. This practice is less common today, as young people are more drawn to technology, such as television and computers, than to traditional means of storytelling. However, many young people are recuperating this practice to reinforce their cultural identities and salvage their indigenous heritage. For example, some young people studying social sciences write these stories into their theses. At the Indigenous University of Venezuela, elders are invited to visit occasionally to teach these stories, among other forms of traditional knowledge. Some tensions arise over this process, as *criollo* educational structures dictate that lessons occur during the day, which sometimes conflicts with these all-night marathon myth-tellings. These stories permeate Hiwi understandings of

daily life, reinforcing the norms of social behaviour within and among families that form a community.

Hiwi convivial sociality is predicated on the common Amazonian assumption that emotions and rationality are both embodied and intertwined; cognitive and affective processes, thoughts and feelings, mind and body are inseparable (Overing and Passes, 2000:19). The danger to this Amazonian model for harmonious living is the eruption of negative emotions and actions within the individual moral agent, which may threaten the fabric of Hiwi society; “Anger, always conceived of as an interactive, relational state, is understood as a sign of violence and aggression against others” (Overing and Passes, 2000:20). This aspect of Hiwi convivial morality manifests itself clearly in the myth of Cajuyali and the first act of adultery. In the second myth, Acuculi and Tomali commit the first act of adultery and attempt to flee the wrath of Tomali’s husband, Cajuyali, a powerful shaman. In general, Hiwi people do not celebrate a marriage with a ceremony and are free to leave or dissolve a marriage if they wish, an attitude that contrasts with the rigid sanctity of Christian marriage. Hiwi people are less concerned with adultery as a sin in the Christian sense. Although adultery is discouraged and seen as destructive of social harmony, Hiwi people may also attribute fault to a husband who leaves a wife alone for lengthy periods. Indeed, ex-partners are obligated to accept at least the children of a failed marriage and offer them hospitality when they visit. Rather, the immorality lies in the actions of Cajuyali, who allows the destructive emotions of jealousy and revenge to overwhelm his self-control. These dangerous emotions manifest themselves in the turbulent waters of the Orinoco rapids that he creates to prevent Acuculi and Tomali from escaping. In this way, Hiwi mythology links social disruption to natural and spiritual violence, reflecting the dangers of negative emotions to Hiwi

society. This myth reveals that anger, jealousy, and hatred are threatening to social cohesion and happiness. Cajuyali fails to transform these emotions into something more positive, committing an immoral act by expressing negative emotions in a close kin relationship.

Hiwi society recognises that these asocial forces simultaneously endanger social life and provide the primal conditions for social life. As Overing and Passes (2000:22) note, the transformation of these disruptive forces is a personal responsibility and anger emerges from within only when not properly contained and a collective state of tranquillity is not maintained (Overing and Passes, 2000:22). Ruptures in convivial relations both generate and result from uncontrolled negative emotions, such as anger, hate, shame, and guilt. These dispositions simultaneously reveal the presence of “an untamed malicious cosmos...the fragility of the affective life expected within the convivial sociality, and the dangers, either structural or psychological, involved when ill will erupts” (Overing and Passes, 2000:22). For their part, Acuculi and Tomali mock the power of Cajuyali, an example of hubris and inappropriate laughter. As Overing argues, laughter and humour serve to cement solidarity, but there is a stress on laughter that unifies, rather than divides the group (Overing, 2000:76). Mocking another person in this way is dangerous to conviviality. For this, Acuculi is transformed into a duck whose flapping heralds the rise of the river in the wet season and Tomali becomes the soundless lightning that forecasts the stifling heat of summer. Their simultaneous emergence every year reflects the relationship between the two, serving as a reminder of the devastating consequences of unleashing one’s anger. This mythic transformation of anger, jealousy, and mockery into the natural rhythm of the seasons with which Hiwi people measure time also mirrors the moral imperative for Hiwi individuals to apply

reason to their emotions and convert dangerous emotions into the socially cohesive emotions of love, empathy, and generosity.

6.3. Hiwi Morality and Christian Sin: Shamans, *Brujos*, and Conviviality

In this section, I consider the dark side of the social obligation to live convivially with others, sorcery, to draw out the intercultural connections Hiwi people make between Christian and Hiwi moral codes. Hiwi people generally attribute serious illnesses and death to sorcery by individuals living outside the community, which aligns with the Hiwi ethos of personal autonomy and egalitarianism. As Metzger explains, the Hiwi approach to the supernatural is “pragmatic, individualistic, and problem-oriented” (Metzger, 1968:207). Sorcery expresses the belief that all people are somewhat malevolent and that misfortune arise from aggressive acts of others (Metzger, 1968:208). Sorcery is a manifestation of dangerous emotions of hate, anger, jealousy, and selfishness. The shaman is called upon to find the sorcerer, make them stop or effect a cure by entering a consuming *huiipa* and *dopa* to speak with spirits or gods. The shaman identifies the sorcerer as either one with whom the victim has had problems, or more vaguely, as someone belonging to a distant village (Metzger, 1968:209). Sorcery is a dynamic theory, there is no formal or coercive doctrine and the “situational variability of beliefs is built-in, permitting the understanding and explaining of occurrences in terms of empirical observations, the breaking of taboos, supernatural interference, and bad luck.” (Metzger, 1968:210) For Metzger, the theory of sorcery is consistent with the lack of rigidity in the social system as a whole. Sorcery is a moral

theory, of what is good and bad, which slightly dampens ambitions (fear of envy), and expresses individuality (Metzger, 1968:211).

An important principle of Hiwi shamanism, and Amerindian shamanism in general, is the obligation to use one's power to heal and protect the people, in contrast to witches or sorcerers who are selfish and only take care of themselves (see Payaguaje, 2006:71). The *dopatubinü* is an ambiguous figure who is capable of both causing and curing serious illnesses. People may fear a *dopatubinü* as sorcerers or "Satanists", reflecting their dual capacity for good and evil. This characterisation of shamans as Satanists may reflect the influence of Christian missionaries, who perceived shamans as consorts of demons. Good shamans are obligated to help others whenever possible. For example, Clemente uses his power to divine whether he should make a trip to cure a patient in Santa Elena de Uairén. He smokes three or four cigarettes, thinking about it. It is dangerous and expensive to travel (there are smugglers; the National Guard may extort money from travellers). While smoking a cigarette, he connects himself with the Lord (*el Señor*) in order to see the best path (*el camino bueno*). Being a shaman involves knowing how to look for 'the good path' and avoiding 'the bad path'. Clemente decides not to travel to Santa Elena because his divination revealed that he was unable to help this woman and he could not afford to waste the journey. If a divination reveals that Clemente would be able to heal a patient, he feels obligated to make the journey to prove himself as a good shaman, rather than a *brujo*.

This obligation to help others is also reflected in the financial arrangements surrounding shamanism. In the past, shamans never set a fee but accepted payment in kind from his

patient's family. A larger payment would be expected if the person was close to dying or the healing required a large amount of time. Nowadays, shamans may set a price in *bolívares*, but this is still based on the financial resources available to the patient. People give whatever money they can afford, although Clemente complains that this is often a relatively small amount (Bs.F. 20), given the effort that this work requires. This concern with a shaman's reputation and the harm that can be engendered by perceived capitalist interests or material greed is discussed by Sosa as an expression of the Hiwi principle of the value of the person.

Above all, he was interested in his own prestige, his reputation as a good shaman. He did not think about things he was going to get, but rather worked just to do good. If he was not this way, he was not a good shaman (Sosa, 2000:40).

Clemente affirms that he divines and heals with the power of the Señor, which is manifested through his body, breath, and words in order to heal, but does not belong to the shaman himself. Here, Clemente is making an explicit link between Matsuldani and Christ, who both live in a celestial paradise and from whom he draws his power to heal. Shamans are capable of rising up through the various levels of reality to the highest point, which is the realm of the spirit-gods, Kúwai's family, who ascended to the sky. This domain is manifested by the constellations: Kúwai is represented by what we call the Pleiades; Cajuyali is reflected in Orion's belt (see also Kondo, 1974:57-58). Clemente recognises three levels of reality (upper, lower, earth) that seem to resonate with and reflect the Christian worldview in which good souls rise up to heaven and evil souls descend into hell below. Far from detracting from his shamanic abilities, Clemente's capacity to straddle both Christian and Hiwi worlds, to draw on diverse spheres of religious meaning, imbues his healing work with more power.

Selfishness, anger, aggression, and jealousy are all negative emotions that threaten the social harmony of the community and may cause illness in multiple ways. A *brujo* or sorcerer who gives into these emotions may send spirits to penetrate and sicken someone's body for vengeance or personal gain.⁵² Hiwi people perceive sorcery as involving an act or spell, actual practices involving prayers, candles, animal blood and other objects. Sorcerers are usually located outside of the community and are only vaguely identified, if at all, reducing the likelihood of actual violence against an identified member of the group. As Csordas argues for Navajo witchcraft, Hiwi sorcery reinforces solidarity within the community by defining the 'bad', "prevents undue accumulation of wealth by those who fear jealousy, puts a check on the power and influence of ceremonial practitioners, and is a means of social control against 'acting mean' and in favor of social cooperation" (Csordas, 2013:531). The sorcerer is the embodiment of evil precisely because they reject the Hiwi moral imperative of empathy, conviviality, and generosity by acting for personal and, as such immoral, reasons.

Passive acts may also be a source of evil and consequently illness and social disruption. The failure to observe food restrictions or social obligations makes a person more vulnerable to attacks by evil spirits and sorcerers. Evil is here conceptualised as external, originating in the natural-spiritual world outside of human control and volition.

⁵² The direct translation of the Spanish word '*brujo*' refers to both sorcerers and witches. Anthropologists usually define Amerindian complexes as sorcery, as witchcraft is often associated with inherent powers, while Amazonian sorcery involves knowledge gained through visionary experiences. Although I am aware that these are distinct concepts, I compare some of the literature regarding their social dynamics and functions, which suggests similarities between the two phenomena.

Persons are perceived as more vulnerable due to youth, old age, or gender, which affect the amount of vital force an individual possesses. Hiwi morality focuses on protecting the weak and helping those in need. In these myths and in many conversations regarding the morality of shamanism, it seems that Hiwi people perceive immorality in the failure to act to aid someone who is suffering or starving, or to welcome people into your home.

On the other hand, these negative thoughts and actions may also cause the subject to sicken, becoming the victim of their own hostility and hatred. In this way, a perpetrator of evil is transformed into the victim of evil, who may be cured by a shaman, neutralising the threat to conviviality and restoring the subject to health and harmony. Illness thus acts a moral indicator and punishment, reminding Hiwi people that the health of the individual, society, and environment are intimately connected. As Csordas explains of the Christianised Ewe people and Catholic Charismatic Renewal movement in North America:

in this conception of evil there is a decentering of agency and responsibility: diabolical evil originates outside the individual even though a person must to some degree collaborate with and consent to it; sin opens one to the influence of evil, and evil tempts one to sin (2013:528).

For Hiwi people, as well as Catholic Charismatics, the effect of this transformation of perpetrator into victim, shifts the focus from the individual to the spiritual realm where shamans and spirits battle each other. Simultaneously, the moral focus becomes affliction and healing, rather than guilt and repentance (Csordas, 2013:528). As we saw in the above section, spirits are conceived as the spiritual residue of evil people or animals that lives on after death; it is a continuation of their predatory nature. In this

sense, spirits may be seen as a dangerous rejection of Hiwi principles of reciprocity, generosity, and the promotion of social well-being. They are often invisible but can be heard, they imitate animals, people, the wind, anything, but they are intent on harming people and can physically affect people. They are also the cause of illness – bad shamans call on them and send them to hurt or make sick their enemies, good shamans call on good spirits to eliminate the bad spirit from the body of the patient. Or, as Pedro puts it, “Good always triumphs over bad”.

This idea of evil spirits causing illness resonates with Christian notions of the pollution or corruption of the individual soul. However, morality is conceived as being embedded in the natural, spiritual, and, above all, the social world. Hiwi people are more vulnerable to spirit contamination if they refuse to meet social obligations to family and elders, fail to respect the spirits that inhabit the forest and rivers, and violate food restrictions. The Hiwi obligation to share and help the less fortunate resonates strongly with Christian notions of charity and generosity. However, I argue that this social responsibility is more central to Hiwi everyday life as it is linked directly to individual, social, and environmental health by means of shamanism. As Overing and Passes conclude:

Ultimately, that dangers to the convivial sociality prove to be the very forces through which it is created, and these are as much the affective as the structural conditions of its existence. As the peoples of Amazonia recognise, these matters of affect require constant work, vigilance, and even suffering to maintain (2000:24).

The Hiwi form of conviviality involves the paradox that close kin relations who are so central to the maintenance of social harmony are also the most vulnerable and

potentially dangerously violent if this harmony breaks down. Thus, Hiwi morality privileges social and emotional relationships with others, and defines immorality as the failure to transform negative emotions into those conducive to conviviality. In everyday life, this avoidance of negative emotions may be observed in the indirect means of censure employed by Hiwi people. For example, *criollo* missionaries may be asked to intervene, as in the case of a young man who was drinking while taking malaria medication. In this way, negative comments and criticisms are not directly expressed among close relatives, avoiding bad feelings and confrontation. In the past, people who refused to contribute to community projects and engage in reciprocity regarding work and food distribution, were visited by the shaman or leader, who would censure their behaviour privately in the case that indirect shaming failed. Indeed, the ideal of family and community harmony is visible in the tranquillity of the quiet afternoon, when women engage in tasks such as grating manioc, while the older children return from school and play with their young cousins. These relationships are characterised by warmth, affection, humour, and gentle teasing. For Hiwi people, this is a time of fun and relaxation, when people are quick to make a joke or laugh at the children's antics. This is compatible with a Christian focus on charity and generosity towards all people, but takes it further into the very fabric of daily social interactions. Indeed, Hiwi conviviality becomes the very framework in which Christian notions of morality intersect with Hiwi values, forming a complementary system of meanings.

6.4. Conclusions

In this chapter, I explored how Hiwi people negotiate both Christian and shamanic cosmologies and moralities in their everyday life. I have shown how Hiwi people navigate an intercultural world of meanings and values drawn from different socio-

historical contexts. Hiwi people emphasise the similarities over the differences between these two traditions, arguing that both moral worlds are valid spheres of meaning. This may be a reaction to centuries of missionary political-economic domination and religious hegemony, reflecting the recent revalorisation of indigenous societies and worldviews (see Chapter Seven). I analysed two Hiwi myths in order to compare Hiwi cosmology and morality to the Christian variants that simultaneously permeate Hiwi everyday life. My analysis of sorcery as a complex of moral values and meaning also sheds light on the Hiwi convivial morality, which exists alongside Christian notions of good and evil.

While Christian morality emphasises charity and generosity, Hiwi notions of morality are embedded in complex relationships with relatives, spirits, and the natural world. The obligation to share and work collectively towards common goals is central to the Hiwi lifeworld. The focus is on conviviality and harmony, which is produced through intimate relations with kin and affines that unify the social group. Hiwi cosmology expresses the relations between human society and the natural-spiritual world, explaining the origins of every plant and animal species with which human life is entwined. This lends a specific character to Hiwi cosmology that warrants the persistence of Hiwi forms of spiritual communication and manipulation in the search for balance and health.

The adaptability and openness of Hiwi people to new forms of knowledge is one of the main themes of this thesis. My participants' flexibility in negotiating the various spheres of meanings that structure their contemporary lifeworld enables them to retain a Hiwi

vision of cosmogony and moral values and position them as a complementary system of beliefs to those of Christianity. Hiwi mythology or beliefs are fluid and vary among individuals. This indicates that Hiwi mythology constitutes a diverse pool of meanings that may be alternatively emphasised or elided depending on the context of the teller. In the next section, I further explore how Hiwi convivial morality manifests in the sphere of sorcery, a cultural complex that co-exists alongside Christian meanings.

7. Hiwi Epistemology: Spirits, Subjectivity, and Science

Despite centuries of colonisation supported by Western sciences and technologies, Hiwi people maintain and develop their extensive knowledges of the natural, social, and spiritual environment according to their own standards of rationality and logic. These standards resemble other Amerindian groups, although indigenous groups are always diverse, constantly evolving, and far from epistemologically homogenous (Semali and Kincheloe, 1999:24). Even within a single community where individuals share a socio-cultural and linguistic context, different individuals may have a variety of interests, understandings, perspectives, plans, and access to the power to enforce their views (Sillitoe, 2007:11).

In this chapter, I ask what epistemological assumptions about the nature of the world are held by Hiwi people and how Hiwi beliefs about spirits and emotional experiences relate to epistemological values attributed to science and technology? How could this open science to an intercultural exchange with alternative knowledges and contribute to a decolonial knowledge in which subjective modes of knowing are valued? To answer this question, I describe the elements of a Hiwi epistemology using several ethnographic vignettes and descriptions drawn from various conversations with my main participants. The complexity of Hiwi forms of knowing is juxtaposed with the materialism and rationalism that underlies much of Western scientific knowledge. This discussion reveals that Hiwi knowledge systems are based on radically different assumptions about the nature of the world and human experience. I explore how this subjective and emotional way of knowing is reinserted into the world of everyday consciousness, providing a means of integrating emotional and rational, unconscious and conscious

aspects of psychic experience. I argue that the application of knowledge to real world situations may potentially bring Hiwi systems of knowledge into a complementary relationship with scientific traditions. An intercultural exchange between local and global sciences could be a fruitful endeavour that benefits all of humanity and could evolve into the decolonisation of epistemology by opening science to alternative knowledges.

Hiwi epistemology is based on a shamanic worldview that assumes the duality of spirit-beings and human-beings who exist as distinct but equivalent categories. Such a position relies on subjective modes of experience and cognition including psychedelic visions, near-death experiences, and dreams that form the basis of their shamanic lifeworld and are considered to be a superior way of knowing to everyday consciousness. This knowledge is always re-inserted into the everyday world of social relations and economic activities, about which Hiwi people also possess a wealth of knowledge. I consider how Hiwi people ascribe similarities between shamanism and scientific concepts to assert the validity of their knowledge. In this discussion, I position my work within the literature of Amazonian anthropologists with an interest in epistemology, such as Graham Townsley (1993) and Cecilia McCallum (1996). I also draw on scholars who call for the inclusion of indigenous knowledges within the field of development studies, such as Paul Sillitoe (2007), and Ladislaus Semali and Joe Kinchloe (1999).

The privileging of subjective and spiritual aspects in Hiwi epistemology allows a greater integration of social, environmental, and spiritual worlds, according to the logic

of the Hiwi lifeworld. This emphasis on emotional and private ways of knowing provides an alternative to Western scientific conceptions that assume a sharp distinction between objectivity and subjectivity, with the latter derided as irrational, illegitimate and even false according to Western standards. In making this argument, I am contributing to the rich field of research in psychology that seriously considers the imaginary social worlds that human beings construct. From this perspective, Hiwi epistemology reflects the richness of human ways of knowing, opening up a bilateral discourse on the nature and extent of human knowledge.

7.1. Something to Live by: Hiwi Knowledge within the Context of Everyday Life

Hiwi knowledge-production is grounded in everyday life and experience of the world. For this reason, knowledge is shaped by biographical experiences and is distributed unequally across the community. Women are generally excluded from learning to become a shaman, as this knowledge is seen as the domain of men, who possess a stronger life force and are able to withstand the dangers and threats of retaliation from sorcerers that are inherent to gaining knowledge from visionary experiences. Indeed, Clemente was initially reluctant to talk with me about his shamanic activities and their meanings due to my status as a woman and foreigner. However, knowledge of plants, simple healing prayers, and the economic activities of daily life are the province of those who choose to learn from their elders. Hiwi people also learn from observations of the natural world; modelling spears and arrows on jaguar and dog teeth, learning to make baskets by looking at the pattern of fish scales, making baskets to cook *casabe* in the shape of the sun, learning about the cardinal directions from the sun. Learning to be

a successful hunter, fishermen, or farmer requires observations of plants and animals, their behaviour and habitat. This knowledge persists today and offers Hiwi people an alternative to Western notions of modernity that science and technology underpins, which is particularly relevant given the recent and devastating decline of Venezuela's economy.

And if society falls apart or war breaks out, we'll just go into the bush and live there. We'll teach our children how to live like our parents taught us. —

Pedro

However, this knowledge is conceived very differently from scientific observational methods. For Hiwi people, the spirits of a particular type of knowledge inhabits the body of a knowledgeable person, in line with the Hiwi principle of spiritual substances. Hiwi people may rightly claim that shamans were the original scientists with knowledge of astronomy, botany, anatomy, psychology, and biology. By making the claims that Hiwi knowledge ultimately derives from the same human processes as science, Hiwi people refuse to accept the inferior value ascribed to their knowledge and ways of knowing. This also amounts to an assertion of the validity of Hiwi being and ways of living, which may be converted into political capital in the current Venezuelan project. In this view, Hiwi spirit-gods were the first wise men or scientists, observing, learning, and putting to instrumental use knowledge gleaned from the world around them.

Now it is scientifically, how is it called, what science did is to perfect and convert [iron] into a tool for human use. But in the beginning there was a person called Palameco, who is the true scientist for shamans, who showed what it could be. Then science finds a way to perfect this. — Pedro

Pedro explicitly notes the similarities between indigenous systems of knowledge and science. He recognises the need for an exchange between scientific and indigenous

systems of medicine and knowledge. Speaking of science and indigenous knowledge, Pedro argues:

Because we indigenous people do not have, say, a laboratory. It is simply natural. Well then, we cannot make a bottle, but we can, however, use the bottle, and however, the simple medicine that we indigenous use are the same ones that [science] uses, develops. Aha, it comes from the same plants, because, I say this because once the system of shamanism begins to develop, maybe also it benefits a little [from science] as the preparation of alternative medicine has the sciences. — Pedro

This observation is borne out by scholars who recognise the scientific ways in which indigenous peoples learn, use and transmit practical knowledge about the world. Indigenous people conduct experiments, although these may not be controlled and randomised, the results are formalised to some degree and passed on (Sillitoe, 2007:3). Semali and Kincheloe characterise indigenous knowledge as based in lived experience and trial-and-error experimentation, involving choices about the environment in which they live as a source of food, medicine, and water, which is passed on to next generation and possesses a concept of valuable and non-valuable knowledge (Semali and Kincheloe, 1999:6).

For instance, Hiwi people experiment with the cultivation and technological application of plant medicines. Hiwi people often extract oils and combine plants with others to increase their potency. For instance, *tuatua morada* (*Euforbiáceas* L.), *Chaya* (*Cnidoscopus chayamansa* o *Cnidoscopus aconitifolius* L.), *Flor Escondida* (*Phyllanthus Niruri* L.), lemon juice, and *Anoncillo de Monte* (*Annona Glabra* L.) are combined to make syrup for treating kidney stones and menstrual pain. For another remedy, the

starch of a particular palm is moistened, grated, and mixed with water. The water is then drained off and combined with lemon juice in order to extract the starch. This starch is combined with dried and powdered clay to make a paste that prevents and treats insect bites. This reveals extensive knowledge of plant properties and their manipulation in service of human life.



Plate 27. Pedro shows me the plant Chaya during the preparation of a paste to treat insect bites.

Certain correspondences between local and global sciences are evident in the hybrid or intercultural knowledge that results from historical contact within colonial contexts. In this view, the distinction between local, indigenous, and traditional knowledge on the

one hand, and global, Western, and modern knowledge is shown to be false. Diverse epistemologies demonstrate:

the richness of human inventiveness; to suppose that they reflect different cognitive processes is fallacious, although they do reveal varying preoccupations in life and differing bodies of knowledge (Sillitoe, 2007:9).

The diversity of epistemologies and knowledge systems would be better represented as interconnected spheres that reflect the dynamism of human thought. This diversity is represented by indigenous forms of knowledge, such as that of the Hiwi people, who rely on subjective ways of knowing and whose epistemology assumes a duality of human and spirit worlds. I now turn to an ethnographic description of these aspects of Hiwi epistemology that most sharply diverge from a scientific epistemology dominated by a Cartesian duality of mind and body.

7.2. Spirits and Subjective Experience in a Hiwi LifeWorld

Hiwi people assume the existence of a spirit dimension beyond the ordinary world, which anthropologists conceptualise as non-ordinary states of consciousness. The knowledge and power gained in these states is continually re-inserted into the everyday lifeworld of the community to divine the future and heal the ill. As we saw in the above section, shamanism possesses a pragmatic, “everyday character”, which is often ignored in more exotic or sensationalist accounts (Siikala and Hoppál, 1998:197). Hiwi shamanism is best conceived as a holistic socio-cultural system of knowing about the world which includes knowledge of healing and religious traditions. Like other indigenous shamanisms, it represents a “rich and internally coherent way of understanding the world” (Narby and Huxley, 2001:6). I argue that it is better to

conceive of shamanic lifeworlds, in which some persons become specialists in knowledge of the spiritual aspects of the world.

Early anthropologists tended to view only actual social relations as meaningful and worthy of study, ignoring indigenous experiences of contact with spirits in altered states and dreams as mere fantasy. Visions were regarded suspiciously as untrue and unreal, deceptive and pathological, or as psychological constructs (Noll, 1987, 1985; Boyer, 2000). The logical positivism that dominated Western science and philosophy rejected these experiences as subjective and unreliable as data for scientific study. Even anthropologists who paid any attention at all to beliefs in spirits regarded it as primitive and ignorant. According to Tylor, animism or the “deep-lying doctrine of Spiritual Beings” (Tylor, 2001 [1871]:41) is an early, unsophisticated form of religion in the evolutionary scale that places the Euro-American “civilised man” at the apex.

More recently, spirit beliefs have been explored as an expression of a lifeworld that assumes a different relationship between subjective and objective, spirit and human. Mentore and Santos-Granero (2006) argue that a society’s definition of rationality is intimately linked with the system of morality and creativity of metaphoric thinking.

Thus grounded in different ontological and metaphysical assumptions about the world, non-Western theories of knowledge may possibly posit different connections between mind, body, soul, and emotions (Mentore and Santos-Granero, 2006:3).

To get a sense of Hiwi rationality, I describe their relations with spirits and emotions, the domain of shamanism. This differs from scientific traditions, which are based on a

materialistic epistemology that inherently denies or ignores the existence of non-material entities as unquantifiable and immeasurable (Grof, 1985, [1975] 2009). For Hiwi people, spirits are an everyday reality. Vital life force animates and sustains everything, but especially human beings, plants, animals, stars, and rocks. Spirit forces may be positive or negative, and are potentially dangerous. Knowledge of this realm is thus crucial to survival for Hiwi people.

This fertilising, vitalising energy is the source of all life on earth and originates from the thoughts of Kúwai and the first family of spirit-beings, whose visions created the mountains, plants, and animals. In Hiwi mythology, the domain of thoughts, visions, and emotions are crucial to the creation of both human and non-human life because they allow access to the dimension of the original spirit-beings and owners of all plant and animal life. The unification of feeling and thought in the nexus of visionary experience is fundamental to Hiwi epistemology; this conjunction fertilises and creates knowledge. This is revealed in the following myth which describes the birth of Tsamani, the first man and a powerful shaman who taught Hiwi people about medicinal plants and woodworking. It was recounted to me by Pedro and has been lightly edited for repetition and clarity.

Aha and our ancestors told the history of where, how this being came to be, they say that he in order to form himself into the first shaman, the man...the family of Tsamani was five siblings. There was Cajuyali; there was Matsuldani; there was Ibaruwa who was a female, a woman; there was

Pabeduwa⁵³. And all this, these persons could do this type of manipulation, to see visions. Well then, they prepared themselves well because first they did not eat meat, they did not eat very salty things. They cared for themselves, it was like a training and a preparation of the person to have this energy. They could not be contaminated, well then, they were in contact with nature.

They [the ancestors] say that this Matsuldani went out one day to visit a community, he went to visit a community and as the man arrived at a house, there was a lady *señora* making *casabe*, is a natural [food product] from manioc, *casabe*. And the very attentive lady offered him a hammock in the little cabin where she was. Good, well, they were not wearing clothes, because they were, they kept themselves naked. We know that ancient indigenous [peoples] did not wear clothes. And one of the tribes, aha, in one of the tribes that this, in this time were naked. Naked! Well then, he went to bed in his hammock, it was like an inspiration of influence that he felt sleepy and he stayed asleep and inside a profound dream [of] having a system of sexual relations with her in the dream.

Well then, when he woke up, having seen everything he dream with the lady that was making *casabe*. And the history says that he had [produced] sperm, like this, in the dream. And the lady collected this and covered it in a *totuma*, she covered it in a *totuma* there, like pouring it in. The man woke already jumping, “Oye, I think I had a nightmare, a strange dream and I cannot stay

⁵³ Pabeduwa is also a woman and is variously described as either a sister or wife of Kúwai. In a different version of this myth, Kúwai is the father of the five siblings, who are born from his thoughts.

here”, well, it all came out, he says ashamed. Well, he left. He left because he felt very embarrassed. The dream that he had was something very, very strong, well, and it appeared more like something real. But he was in the spirit, I say, because he says that he felt every sensation and expelled all of this. She came to pick up what fell and covered it in a *totuma* and left. When the man says that this is something mysterious, he is not going to go far, because the savannah he saw is so far.

She came and opened the *totuma* and a boy was in there. And she said to him, “Good, look, this man who is going would hide himself, who we see in front of the mountain. This is your father.” Aha. From here came the word shaman, man with power to cure sicknesses and everything, that did not have a father, was not born of having relations, then. And this boy was he who is called the first man, who is called Tsamani. Now then, the word shaman is in Mexico, in well, almost all of the world and almost similar. The word shaman comes from Tsamani who came out of there, of where I am speaking.

This myth reveals a fundamental connection between spirit, thought, and knowledge in Hiwi epistemology. Matsuldani’s knowledge and power are so strong that his dream of sexual relations results in the creation of a son, who is magically grown to adulthood in a symbolic womb and is also a powerful shaman. Although none of my participants claimed to have thought a person into existence, the epistemological links between feeling and thought, spirit-beings and visionary experiences were often suggested to me by personal narratives of my participants. Pedro recounted to me a story of a spirit attack upon his son-in-law, who was attacked by a spirit being while sitting outside his house late at night drinking *aguardiente* (strong liquor). This particular *dowati*

(malicious spirit) inhabits the forest surrounding the savannah on which the community is built and often walks from the forest through the community and back again in the early hours of the morning. The presence of this spirit is betrayed by its whistling but it cannot be seen. Pedro had heard it before and knew it was a malicious spirit. He advised his son-in-law that it was safer for him to be inside the house when this spirit passes by. The son-in-law paid little attention to this warning and the next day was covered in bruises, saying he had been attacked by an invisible entity during the night. They took him to the hospital, where the doctors and nurses confirmed the bruises on his abdomen were consistent with a beating.



Plate 28. The road where a *dowati* wanders at night.

On another occasion, Pedro describes an encounter in a hotel in a town in Colombia where he went to get a toothache treated. He couldn't sleep as a ghost woman kept coming into the room, knew his name and demanded he get out of her bed, throwing him out in the sheet when he refused. He slept on the floor. The next morning, he was saying he couldn't sleep when the cleaning lady told him a woman had died there several days ago. He says she must have been bad because her evil spirit stayed and wouldn't share the bed. He also heard a *dowati* (devil, evil spirit) walking beside him late one night while heading to the *posada* to sleep, it was very dark. He heard it and sensed it meant him harm. This reveals that spirit-beings may appear to be immaterial or invisible, they may be revealed by sight, sound, or only sensed, despite their capacity to physically effect humans. Even anthropologists may sense the presence of spirits: I heard what I perceived to be distant music late one night while staying in the community's tourist *posada*. The next day, Pedro assured me that I heard the sounds of spirits playing music and possibly dancing in the mountains where they live.

As we have seen encounters with spirit-beings can occur during ordinary consciousness and are not restricted to altered states of consciousness. In altered states of consciousness, such as dreams, psychedelic visions, and near-death experiences, one is transformed into spirit and may enter more fully into this other realm. In 2013, Pedro told me of a near-death experience he had in 2009 as the result of serious car accident. I present a summary of his experience from my field notes. Just before sunrise, Pedro was returning to Puerto Ayacucho after an alternative medicine conference in Barinas, which was attended by representatives of many indigenous ethnic groups including Piaroa and Yanomami. Pedro was sitting in the front passenger seat, being the guide as the driver was not familiar with the road, but he fell asleep. The car sped around a blind

corner on the highway in the rain, collided with a truck coming the other way, and rolled down an embankment. Pedro was not wearing a seatbelt and flew through the windshield, badly fracturing his skull, spine, and wrist. He was transported to hospital and remained unconscious for 90 hours. During this time, he says, he saw many things. It was like a dream, but more than a dream.

First, he tells me he saw himself lying in the rain by the roadside; his friends rushing over to his body, crying and calling to each other that he was dead. He tried to speak to them, embrace them, and tell them he was alive, but they could neither see nor hear him. Later, he found himself walking through a beautiful garden in which all the trees were singing and laughing. He realised that, “all the plants have a life equal to ours, they are truly our brothers”. He saw the resemblances between human and non-human, which confirmed to him Hiwi use of plants to heal patients. Pedro brought this knowledge with him when he returned to consciousness and it informed his healing practices and beliefs.

Pedro is particularly knowledgeable about plant species because of his concern with using plants for healing, which is the domain of Hiwi spirit-god Tsamani. There are also plants for almost any imaginable purpose beyond healing: plants which mask a hunter’s body odour; plants for cleansing menstruating or pregnant women; plants for washing hair, depilation, and darkening hair; plants for losing and gaining weight; plants that contain fish poison for fishing and *curare* for hunting; palms for weaving baskets, roofs, coronas, and hammocks. He learnt much of this from his grandfather who was a master shaman and plant healer. He also learnt about plants from personal experiences of

walking in the jungle and observing the habitat and characteristics of the plants. This holistic approach to classification is based on a lived experience of a plant as an intrinsic part of its natural and spiritual environment, rather than a hierarchical classification according to morphological similarities and evolutionary theory.

Each of these plants has its own “substance” or “spirit,” that manifests in its sap, which may be likened to humans possessing different blood-types. Plant knowledge is passed down the generations through informal means of instruction; younger persons learn from parents and grandparents by participating in forest walks, the collection and manipulation of plants. Shamans also learn about plants through observation and experimentation in the ‘university’ of the forest. This is conceived of as becoming aware of the spiritual aspect of the world, which requires the careful preparation and concentration of the mind during a shamanic apprenticeship. Shamans can sense or ‘hear’ the differences between the substances of various plants when they tap on (*picar*, Spanish) them. This is easier to accomplish in the forest, as their energy is contaminated by the influences of humans in the community. Plant substance is also determined by smell and taste: bitter, sweet, spicy, and acidic. Knowledge of substances is necessary to identify which is suitable for treating a particular sickness and allows one to recognise a similar substance in a different tree regardless of its type of bark or leaf shape.

For this reason, it always seems that plant medicines work for many similar illnesses; there is no one-to-one correspondence of plant to disease because illnesses are caused by multiple factors. Pedro compares this process to visiting a pharmacy and asking for medicine for a particular illness; you need to know which substances heal which

diseases. The focus of Hiwi plant healing is on treating the symptoms, which is evident in my participant's descriptions of illnesses: stomach pain, headache, vomiting, or insect bite. Plants are classified generally as warming/energising or cooling/calming. These are either applied to strengthen a similar substance that is lacking or to counteract an excess of the opposite classification. Substances can affect one another because, despite obvious differences in form, human beings partake of the same substances as the spiritual and natural environment. For Pedro, this is confirmed by chemistry; our bodies and the world both consist of chemical compounds such as iron, salt, water, and nitrogen.

Although I am human, the tree is a tree and the ground is the ground, we are all made up of the same substances; there is a correspondence between humans and trees. — Pedro

Hiwi classification involves a holistic view of plants and animals that encompasses an extensive range of criteria, including: mythological origins, habitat, practical and spiritual properties and uses, flavour, smell, and visual appearance, even the 'voice' and 'song' of the plants' spirit owner. Indigenous communities, such as the Hiwi, constitute "true human libraries concerning fauna, flora, and the rest of the regional genetic resources" (Clarac N., 2003:259). Although Hiwi epistemology is grounded in radically different assumptions than Western science, it provides rigorous concepts for the identification and use of natural and spiritual resources in the pursuit of social and bodily well-being.

Hiwi people also employ scientific concepts to understand the world, revealing their ability to adopt new forms of knowledge production and adapt their own concepts to

take into account plural epistemological sources. Pedro's ability to use scientific analogies to support his healing knowledge is characteristic of Hiwi epistemology, which is open-ended and inclusive of knowledge generated in other contexts. In the following excerpt, Pedro compares shamanic preparation and knowledge to a computer.⁵⁴

No, it does not form in a very simple way, it is much...how would I say, it has many windows, then. I always said it's like a computer, for example, when you...a computer, a person who knows how to manage the computer can prevent a virus, which comes from many things, because ... we've realized that in the world, what they call the waves, the shamans know all this and that is why they know there are voices, images, ancestral memories that are there. And in the science of scientists, the devices simply sample it and drop it. Well then, a person trained in computerized management protects your device from any virus. Likewise, the shaman, who does not have a device, prepares the mind because the mind, according to the shamans, has the capacity to shape itself and have power, which is called the power of the mind. That's what the shaman manages. Entering [this state] by means of a drink, that helps you strengthen yourself, like a drug, then. But it does not appear evil, but simply to sample, because that way it's like, like, we are going to talk about it like this: the first science, then. Before an apparatus existed, they used the mind by means of a drink. It was as part of what is the job of the shaman...So that complements the space, it is how one strengthens the body because the mind maybe without any drink, maybe

⁵⁴ Pedro owns an older but functioning desktop computer, although internet access is problematic in the community. The government has also distributed several laptops to members, who are studying at university.

without any drugs, the mind varies a lot, it does not stabilise for concentration. Then the *yopo*, what it does is affirm it, to settle it so that you meditate and want to see something, and this goes <*shwee*> [and is] fixed there. It's like, it's like something that channels it to connect itself over the waves and see, and predict and it is with this attitude that has no variations.

That is the true shaman preparation. — Pedro

In making this statement Pedro recognises the power of Western scientific technology and the knowledge upon which it is based. This recognition is ambivalent: just like shamanic power, scientific knowledge may be used for both good and evil purposes by the individuals who wield it. By asserting that the use of psychoactive drugs and altered states of consciousness constitute a form of knowledge that predates and is the equivalent of Western science, Hiwi people refuse to respect the Cartesian oppositions that divide subject and object, mind and body, society and natural world. In the next section, I explore the characteristics of Hiwi epistemology based on these ethnographic examples.

7.3. Towards a Hiwi Epistemology

In this section, I analyse these accounts to construct a Hiwi epistemology based on radically different assumptions from those of Western sciences grounded in Cartesian dualism. Hiwi epistemology assumes the reality of spirit-beings and importance of subjective states, such as dreams, visions, and emotions. For Hiwi people, knowledge is an aspect of the body and knowing is a process grounded in the body and its capabilities. Hiwi people draw a distinction between immaterial and material aspects of life, but emotions and thoughts are considered to originate in and affect the material body. Thus, the contents of subjective or private modes of cognition are assumed to be

as valid as the knowledge gleaned from everyday consciousness. The emotional valence of these experiences, far from detracting from their reliability, is perceived as confirming the reality and importance of a spirit realm separate from the everyday life of Hiwi society.

Hiwi people do not consider the 'mind' or 'mental' to be interior or separate from and unable to affect the material world. Rather, phenomena that science regard as mental or subjective are experienced as real processes related to the body. Information from the senses, even when received during dreams or altered states of consciousness, are regarded unsuspectingly and experienced as meaningful. Hiwi knowing is thus grounded in embodiment, which is common to Amerindian ways of knowing. McCallum (1996:355) explains that, for Cashinahua people, knowledge is located in the body, in the organs that receive experiences and sensations. There is no separate concept of mind as opposed to body, but rather, it is bodies that think and know, which are processes related to the soul (McCallum, 1996:358). Similarly, Yaminahua people consider shamanism to reside primarily, "not in a type of thinking nor in a set of facts known, but in a condition of the body and its perceptions" (Townesley, 1993:456). Direct experience is the basis of all Hiwi knowledge and the shaman is the master of life experiences, their meaning, and interpretation. This aspect of Hiwi epistemology seems to be common to Amerindian peoples, as Mentore and Santos-Granero explain:

Constituted wisdom brought into human existence to make itself and the world knowable must first locate and be registered by the body. This is true even in those cases in which meaningful knowledge is conceived of as being attainable only through the agency of noncorporeal dimensions of the self (2006:4).

For Hiwi people, knowledge of the world exists outside of the human being and can be obtained or discovered by people with a prepared mind. Preparation involves a strict diet, no sweets, no chilli, sexual abstinence, and avoidance of menstruating women. Knowledge enters the body and lodges there. Knowledge becomes a part of the person while they are alive but returns to its own place when they die; Pedro explains it is like drinking a cup of water from the river which passes through the body, sustaining it and then leaving. These “spirits of knowledge” go back to their “proper places” in the world when a knowledgeable person dies. Social and productive activities are the instantiation of this knowledge in the real world: a good fisherman knows where each type of fish lives, their habits, what they eat, how to catch them.

Hiwi people distinguish knowledge received from the senses in daily life and knowledge gained in altered states of consciousness, such as dreams, visions, and near-death experiences. Knowledge received during *dopa* intoxication is felt more deeply than something learnt by sight, smell, sound, taste or touch. As we saw in Pedro’s vision, the spirit substances of plants and the spirits which inhabit the world are more directly experienced while in this altered state. Knowledge of the identity of the spirit is the basis of the power of the healer to diagnose and cure spirit illnesses. Equally, the healer must know the identity and how to call upon healing spirit essences to cleanse the patient of these malignant forces. This knowledge cannot be taught; it must be experienced personally while under the influence of *dopa*. The embodied nature of knowledge implies that knowledge is situated and partial, based on the life experiences of the individual and their faculties.

Shamanic knowledge is acquired by a sort of spiritual intuition, by feeling with one's being (*ser*), the inner spirit. This is how the shaman knows the life-essence of each plant, its particular song and voice. This knowledge is known more profoundly when experienced emotionally and spiritually. Shamans enter altered states of consciousness to experience the spiritual reality of the world, the connections between plants and humans. This knowledge is the basis of the shaman's ability to invoke the spirit-beings that own each plant and animal and transmit the healing properties to water, through blowing and praying, which is given to the victim and heals them. Hiwi shamans use *caapi* and *dopa* to enter into "another dimension" and in this state receive information or 'gifts' of knowledge that are given by the spirits.

Pedro's story reveals that spirit-beings may take material form, which makes them capable of physically affecting and even attacking humans. They may be visible, but they are rarely seen except by shamans who have trained themselves to see into the spirit dimension by consuming psychotropic substances. Hiwi people thus recognise a duality between spirits and humans, but these domains are considered to be equivalent. Istvan Praet (2009:738) argues that, in Amazonia, humans and spirits are distinct but equivalent positions that he dubs 'shapes'. Praet (2009:742) explains that these shapes exist on a continuum and are defined by one's moral and cultural conduct, rather than visibility or materiality. Pedro's account of his near-fatal accident reveals this distinction between spirit-being and human-being. His serious injuries catapulted him into the world of spirits; he is transformed from a material being into a spirit being capable of moving in this dimension and interacting with other spirit-beings. His experience revealed to him that trees have a spirit, a song and a voice that makes them the equivalent of humans, despite being a distinct and non-human 'shape'. This is a

common characteristic of Amazonian epistemology and is central to the practice of shamanism. As Praet explains, everyone potentially has the ability to transform or become a Monster, but shamans are the true masters of metamorphosis (Praet, 2009:743). The shaman uses this power to become a Monster to transform patients from illness, conceived as an involuntary Monstrous experience, back into a Human shape: “At the curing rite, he casts off his Human shape and shifts into that of a Monster” (Praet, 2009:744). As Townsley notes for the Yaminahua people:

It is the concept of a type of perceiving animate essence shared by the human and the non-human alike, creating for them a shared space of interaction, which opens up this ‘magical’ arena of shamanism (1993:465).

The principle of shared essences places humans and the natural world on an equal footing, which may limit the human capacity to dominate and exploit the non-human world. Natural science’s concern with the complete mastery of the environment is absent in indigenous knowledge systems. In fact, “the Eurocentric epistemology of studying, knowing (mastering), and then dominating the world seems frighteningly out of place, as it upsets the sacred kinship between humans and other creations of nature” (Semali and Kincheloe, 1999:43).

As Praet (2009:742) notes for Chachi people, Monsters or spirit-beings are distinguished from Humans by their moral and cultural behaviour, that is, their predatory consumption of Humans, indicating that the Amazonian distinction between the two is grounded in specific moral conduct. Many scholars argue that Amazonian peoples commonly distinguish the moral, human world of the community and the natural, spirit-inhabited world of the forest, rivers, and mountains. As Hill (2009:235)

remarks, this Amazonian distinction between the social world of village and the natural world of forest, where transformation is possible, is a common framework for shamanic ritual activities. For Turner (2006, 1992), the location of spirits in the forest zone that borders the human social order of the community provides spirit-beings with a form of liminality that indicates their transformative, chaotic potential. Levy, Mageo, and Howard argue that spirits represent the “contents and logics of worlds of desire, dream, and fantasy—worlds in which morality is tangential at best—existing at the periphery of the work-a-day moral world of common sense” (Levy et al., 2012:16).

From this perspective, the encounters with spirit-beings may be seen as an intrusion of transformative and dangerous energy, representing a rupture in the social fabric of the community. In the case of Pedro’s son-in-law, he became vulnerable to spirit attack by transgressing the norms of Hiwi society. Drinking alone, late at night falls outside of the moral order of the Hiwi community. Alcohol has caused social problems for Hiwi people, who are more likely to engage in violent behaviour when intoxicated, which sometimes ends in imprisonment for drunken fighting or murder of *criollos* and members of other indigenous groups (Sumabila: personal communication). However, Hiwi people highly value personal autonomy and do not usually openly punish or sanction individuals for bad conduct. They may refuse to meet their obligations to those who have not reciprocated appropriately or by reasoning with someone who fails to meet their own obligations. This is often achieved indirectly through discussion with an older relative, community leader, shaman, or even a visiting missionary. In this case, it seems that a passing *dowati* served as chastisement for the young man’s behaviour. This episode reveals that Hiwi people conceive of spirit-beings as belonging to an “extra-moral” domain, “an antiworld in which community morality is irrelevant and thus

negated” and expresses “the dangers of leaving the social domain, of passing beyond its boundaries” (Levy et al., 2012:16). If one transgresses social norms and appropriate moral conduct, one becomes especially vulnerable to these predatory forces that exist at the edges of the tranquil community life. The threat to social order is ever-present in the capacity of spirit-beings to cause sickness in Hiwi bodies and is linked to the expression of negative emotions of anger, hate, and jealousy.⁵⁵

For Hiwi people, emotionally charged experiences or encounters with spirit-beings are regarded as the superior way of knowing if one is receptive to learning such things. Such experiences affect one deeply and permanently change one’s life. According to Pedro, the profound emotions that accompany these visions may fade with time, but the change to one’s soul is lasting. To say that these experiences are purely psychological or imaginary is to deny the depth of feeling and changed perspective that these experiences inspire. For Hiwi people, the purpose of life is learning from these direct experiences in order to live well. The focus is on the journey towards knowledge: *ways* of knowing, rather than *what* you know. This implies that shamanic learning is a process without official end or objective, although one can accumulate a large amount of knowledge. This emphasis on ways of knowing rather than objects of knowledge may be a common feature of shamanic lifeworlds; Townsley demonstrates that Yaminahua shamanism consists of an “ensemble of techniques for knowing”, rather than a constituted system of known facts (1993:452).

⁵⁵ I discussed this aspect of Hiwi social life and morality more deeply in Chapter Six.

This way of knowing, through dreams, near-death experiences, and visions is considered more direct. Unlike Western science, subjective domains of meaning are considered acceptable sources of knowledge for Hiwi people. In fact, knowledge that is drawn from intuition, emotion, or imagination is valued highly. Dreams may presage the future or indicate a course of action. For instance, Clemente was unsurprised when my partner and I arrived in 2013, because he had recently dreamt of a white dove which settled in his hand, portending my visit. Shamans regularly enter into altered states of consciousness with the goal of receiving knowledge from spirit realm. Such knowledge includes diagnosing the cause of an illness and divining the future.

This is a common characteristic of Amerindian epistemologies. Rodd (2003) considers the linkages of power/knowledge among Piaroa shamans, a linguistically unrelated indigenous group that inhabit the same regions as Hiwi in Amazonas. Rodd writes that a Piaroa shaman's power, known as *māripa*, is derived from one's ability to translate knowledge gained during altered states of consciousness induced by *dada*, *caapi*, and *yopo* into everyday life. *Maripa* is an epistemology of a social ecology of beings connecting spirit and material realms. Townsley argues that dreams, visions, and songs are important techniques for the construction of Yaminahua shaman's knowledge about *yoshi*, the animating spirit essences that imbue plants, animals, and humans with their particular, empirically observable qualities as well as their suprasensory volitional nature (Townsley, 1993:453). Similarly, Cashinahua people consider dreams and psychedelic visions to be "an important means of acquiring knowledge and developing consciousness or 'imagination'" (McCallum, 1996:361). For Hiwi people, emotional experiences and encounters with spirits are an important means of gaining meaningful

knowledge and provide confirmation of a Hiwi worldview in which the spirit world informs and shapes the world of ordinary consciousness.

7.4. Science, Cartesian Duality and the Loss of the Subjective

In this section, I elucidate Hiwi epistemology through a comparative analysis with certain strands of the scientific tradition, namely psychology and the social sciences. Through my analysis, I show that Hiwi ways of knowing allow for the integration of subjective and objective forms of knowing, revealing the possibility of a decolonial science that considers all aspects of human capabilities for knowledge through intercultural exchange with alternative epistemologies. As we saw above, Hiwi epistemology privileges ways of knowing that Western science generally considers subjective and consequently unreliable. Science tends to focus on information, facts and data—knowledge in its substantive form. Western philosophical traditions privilege state and substance and imposes a particular view upon the natural world which obscures the importance of processes, relations, and transformations (Whyte, 1978).

Hiwi epistemology distinguishes spirit and matter, but does not make *a priori* judgments about their value and allows for the transformation of one into the other. These shapes exist on a continuum where they are distinct but equivalent. This contrasts with the epistemology of science which assumes a harsh discontinuity of the subject and the object of scientific inquiry. Aronowitz and Ausch (2000) note that scientific tradition grew out of a Cartesian epistemology based on the violent separation of subject and object, nature and culture, which facilitates the domination of nature by humanity and underlies every aspect of Western society (see also Pfeifer, 2009). As Ousselin

remarks, the “thinking subject of Descartes cogito itself derives from an essential distinction between soul and body, spirit and matter, thought and action” (2012:10). These categories are conceived to be diametrically opposed, essentially different orders of being. As Aronowitz and Ausch explain, humanity and nature:

face each other as antagonists: nature is constructed as Other, devoid of any of the presumed qualities of the subject, especially agency (2000:714).

The Cartesian duality that underpins scientific traditions has manifested in a hierarchical distinction between objective and subjective, reason and emotion. According to William James ([1890] 1950), there are two kinds of knowledge: ‘knowledge of acquaintance’ and ‘knowledge-about’. Knowledge of acquaintance reflects a direct experience of the world and its objects, our emotions and sensations which appear obvious and real to our senses. Knowledge-about refers to a more detailed analytical knowledge of how things work, such as conceptions and judgments. But these different types of knowledge are related to one another in an evolutionary schema, where knowledge of acquaintance is the primary level of awareness of an object and knowledge-about represents a more in-depth observation and analysis of the object. In the words of James:

The words *feeling* and *thought* give voice to the antithesis. Through feelings we become acquainted with things, but only by our thoughts do we know about them. Feelings are the germ and starting point of cognition, thoughts the developed tree ([1890] 1950:222).

In this schema, emotion is subordinated to reason, body to mind, nature to human, subjective to objective. In the fields of psychology and social sciences, subjective feelings have often been distrusted and dismissed, as shown by the success and legacy of Skinner’s behaviourism. In this perspective, subjective states or feelings are irrelevant. This movement was at its height in the mid-twentieth century, despite

criticism from philosophers such as Charles Taylor (1985), who argued against the application of the methods of natural sciences to the study of human psychology and society.

Hiwi people's extensive use of subjective modes of knowing contrasts sharply with Western philosophy and science, which has been dominated by the view that only ordinary states of consciousness are 'real' or 'true', and that altered states of consciousness are inferior or pathological (see Tedlock, 1987; Zammito, 2002; Winkelman, 2000). This view is also reflected in Western cultural beliefs: North Americans generally regard dreams as "meaningless fantasies or confused mental imaginings with no true or lasting reality dimensions" (Tedlock, 1987:8; see also Caughey, 1984). Much of Western science is antagonistic to knowledge derived from altered states of consciousness. Some scholars argue that neo-shamanism is a reaction against this oppressive focus on the rational, objective and conscious (Willis, 1994).

Western conceptions of altered states of consciousness have been revised in light of recent ethnographic and phenomenological investigations. Western culture today recognises dreams as sometimes meaningful, in the sense that they are related to the individual and their experiences, but does not grant the same reality value to dreams as ordinary consciousness. John Caughey, among others, argues that far from being objective, the tendency of the social sciences to ignore visionary experiences represents the "ethnocentric projection of certain narrow assumptions in Western social science" (1984:17) and may misrepresent the inner world of a particular culture, where social

relations may be more inclusive and involve interaction with beings that are not 'real' human beings, such as spirits or gods.

Fantasy and dreaming are usually thought to be a "particularly personal process, both because it is a private experience that takes place within the individual's mind, and because it is the product of the individual's psychological needs" (Caughey, 1984:163). In this view, dreams and fantasy have no function "beyond the personal", a cultural belief which has led cognitive psychologists to largely ignore these experiences (Tedlock, 1987:16). Despite this preconception, fantasy is simultaneously a social and cultural phenomenon: "It reflects individual desires, but only as these have been shaped, twisted, and structured by social and cultural forces" (Caughey, 1984:163). According to Caughey, an individual "stream of consciousness is not merely a matter of individual psychology", but is to a large degree a "culturally structured experience" (1984:140). People who belong to the same socio-cultural group generally manifest striking similarities in the content and form of their fantasising or dreaming (see Caughey, 1984).

Hiwi people's ability to have meaningful encounters with spirit-beings in altered states of consciousness is culturally conditioned and encouraged by their epistemological assumptions about the spirit dimension and the meaning of altered states of consciousness. Hiwi epistemology represents an investment and development of techniques of subjective knowing, but this is a capacity available to most humans: "where the cultural orientation is favourable and where instructional techniques are available, most humans can learn to have visionary experiences that American

psychiatrists would characterise as hallucinations” (Caughey, 1984:213). Caughey goes so far as to suggest that “hallucinatory and delusionary worlds can sometimes provide the basis for actual sociocultural systems” (1984:237). Although I disagree with the contention that Amazonian lifeworlds are hallucinatory or delusional, they are clearly often predicated on and supported by the visionary experiences of their inhabitants. Far from being a delusion, the use of both objective and subjective realms of experience enables Hiwi people to integrate emotional, social, and environmental meanings with their everyday consciousness in ways that science does not and cannot offer.

7.5. Shamanism and Science: Complementary Forms of Knowledge

In this section, I explore how science could be opened up to alternative epistemologies that may complement scientific traditions. For Hiwi people, scientific traditions and Hiwi ways of knowing are complementary forms of knowledge production, representing different historical and social contexts. During fieldwork, I heard frequent assertions that shamans were the world’s first scientists; their indigenous knowledge about the world is different yet equal to ‘my’ Western scientific knowledge. In this perspective, shamanic and scientific knowledge are complementary rather than contradictory. At first, I merely assumed that this reflected a strategic assertion of the independence and authority of indigenous culture and knowledge within the national society and culture of Venezuela. While my initial interpretation remains valid, deeper reflection upon the layers of meaning surrounding these statements demonstrates that they are also an expression of a complex and ongoing intercultural exchange between indigenous and non-indigenous people in Venezuela. Furthermore, indigenous self-understandings and evaluations of science inform the debate about fundamental philosophical concerns with

the nature of knowledge and knowledge-production that is central to the philosophy of science and the social sciences. As Macedo explains:

It is through the decolonization of our minds and the development of political clarity that we cease to embrace the notion of Western versus indigenous knowledge, so as to begin to speak of human knowledge. It is only through the decolonization of our hearts that we can begin to humanize the meaning and usefulness of indigeneity (1999:xv).

Science is an extension or formalisation of the common-sense mode of consciousness or ‘natural attitude’, to which all human beings have access. According to Sillitoe, the local sciences of indigenous peoples lack universal aspirations and are characterised by the “pragmatic rootedness of much of this knowledge, which is contingent on acquiring particular skills necessary to life in certain regions” (Sillitoe, 2007:12). Science often draws on the models and analogies of the everyday lifeworld, transforming these usually unarticulated and intuitive cultural products into more formal and systematic concepts, objects, and methods (Hanna, 2004:352). Scholars have begun to investigate shamanism as a different but equal form of thought and knowledge, particularly in the fields of psychology and neuroscience. Hubbard (2002, 2003) argues that shamanic ideas, such as interconnected and relational cosmologies, resemble and correspond to cognitive processes available to conscious and even scientific modes of thought.

We may understand the similarities between shamanic and scientific processes using Goodman’s (1978) concept of world-making. Overing (1990) employs this theory about art and science to argue that the processes of world-construction in shamanism are radically different but nevertheless equal to those of science. Overing argues that although the facts or content may differ, the processes of world-making in the West and

in the jungle are similar because the same underlying cognitive processes organise all human knowledge: the “scientist, artist, myth teller or historian, and shaman-curer are ‘doing much the same thing’ in their construction of versions of worlds” (Overing, 1990:603). Lévi-Strauss also affirms that scientific ways of knowing are parallel to mythic forms of knowing, arguing that myth provides a logical model for overcoming a contradiction (Lévi-Strauss, 1963:229). He concludes that there is little difference between the mental processes of so-called ‘primitive’ man and his allegedly more sophisticated modern counterparts: the “kind of logic in mythical thought is as rigorous as that of modern science”, with the difference lying “not in the quality of the intellectual process, but in the nature of the things to which it is applied” (Lévi-Strauss, 1963:231).

From this perspective, Hiwi modes of knowing are grounded in different assumptions about the existence of spirits and the importance of emotional reasoning to knowing, but this epistemology is underpinned by mental processes available to all humans. The privileging of experience during altered states of consciousness fits with an epistemological model in which encounters with spirit-beings are profound and often life-threatening. As Overing argues, the symbolic statements of shamanism are judged untruthful or irrational only because they do not fit with our Western notion of one, real, objective world:

The truth of the matter is that the confusion is often ours: it is we who assume this image of a single, unified world, and not they. We try to treat the entire world(s) of knowledge of another culture as one unitary system, as the myth of science says the world (reality) is, and then we wonder why ‘the laws of logic’ do not fit. We label ‘the other’ as obscure and mysterious in

thought process, when it is more probably that we have not understood the relationship between their ‘symbolizing’ and their standards for knowledge and explanation, and the relationship of such standards to practical matters (1990:605).

Whether there are one or more worlds is irrelevant because, as human beings, we only ever know our particular *versions* of the world – which are always embedded in specific frames of reference. The truth of a statement is related to its system of description, rather than what is being described in the world. Thus, different worlds are not reducible to one another, but all are part of a process of knowing (Overing, 1990:605). Goodman maintains a wider concept of truth, not just as it corresponds to reality: descriptions of the world are wrong or right rather than true or false, truth refers to the “rightness of fit” (Overing, 1990:606). Problems that arise in understanding shamanism are due to the “difference in basic metaphysical principles”, rather than the irrationality of others or “illustrations of a universal, rational and unconscious thought process” (Overing, 1990:610).

Humphrey and Onon (2003) criticise Overing’s notion of world-making. They agree with Overing about the creativity of shamans, their construction of new images from previous ones, and the use of moral-emotional categories to identify spirits and their activities. However, they criticise her implication that shamans deconstruct and reconstruct world-versions that are unique and *sui generis*.

However, not only is reality exactly what shamans and other practitioners are aiming to discover, but they proceed from basic concepts of the nature of human, animal, and material existence in the world, which might well be shared by anyone anywhere (Humphrey and Onon, 2003:228).

My analysis indicates that Hiwi people, by attributing value to subjective ways of knowing, have developed a capacity to experience meaningful visions that integrate emotion into reason, imagination and practicality. This is the basis of the Hiwi shamanic worldview and reveals the holistic epistemology that Hiwi people have developed. I argue that a scientific worldview could benefit from expanding its horizons to include emotional and spiritual dimension of human being, rather than remaining entrenched in rational, instrumental technological progress.

7.6. Conclusions

In this chapter, I have explored the epistemological assumptions that Hiwi people hold about the world and how beliefs about spirits and emotional experiences relate to the epistemological underpinnings of a science based in Cartesian dualism. I have demonstrated that Hiwi knowledge is partly based on observation and experimentation, is transmitted to each new generation, and is practically applied to everyday life. This knowledge employs an everyday, conscious mode of thinking that resembles the production of scientific information and theories. I have also demonstrated, using ethnographic examples, that Hiwi knowledge assumes the reality of spirit-beings and the importance of subjective modes of knowing, such as emotional experiences, dreams, and visions. Spirits are conceived as a substantive form of energy which inhabits all aspects of the world and is central to shamanic understanding of the body, healing, and the appropriate place of human beings in the universe. This often extrasensory dimension is best perceived during altered states of consciousness, such as visions, dreams, and near-death experiences, which Hiwi people consider a privileged method of acquiring knowledge and power to affect the spirit world.

I have shown how Hiwi people valuing subjective modes of knowing diverges from Western science and philosophy's exclusion of immeasurable and undetectable phenomena and favouring of conscious, rational, and objective modes of consciousness. I offer a critique of some aspects of the scientific tradition to highlight how Hiwi ways of knowing allow for the integration of all aspects of reason with emotion, conscious with unconscious. This leads me to my second question, how does Hiwi knowledge potentially open a path for science to become more decolonial and inclusive of alternative knowledges. I demonstrate that Hiwi people are able to view Hiwi ways of knowing and scientific knowledge as complementary forms of epistemological production, shaped by different socio-historical contexts. For this reason, my discussion contributes to wider debates in anthropology about epistemology and by comparing Hiwi shamanism to scientific epistemological assumptions I have touched on broader concerns in intellectual debates about the philosophy of science. I argue that an intercultural exchange on equal terms between indigenous knowledges and science would prove productive for both epistemological traditions, as each emphasises different ways of constructing and using knowledge within different social-cultural contexts, expanding our understanding of the diverse range of human knowledges.

8. Conclusions and Synthesis

This thesis has presented a contemporary ethnography of Hiwi people in the southern State of Amazonas, Venezuela. Hiwi people are a diverse population living in cities, and in small communities along rivers and highways. Hiwi people are traditionally subsistence farmers, hunters, gatherers, and fishermen, but today many people engage in salaried work for state and national governments as teachers, nurses, doctors, tour guides. Young people study at university, join the National Guard, and become missionaries. My participants live in small communities surrounded by hills, rivers, and forest where they keep gardens. The National Highway connects these communities to the city of Puerto Ayacucho, a lively intercultural space with multiple indigenous groups, *criollo* people and immigrants from Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East. In this chapter, I first review how each chapter has answered specific questions related to my main research question: How do Hiwi people navigate an intercultural world? In the synthesis section, I consider what possibilities this exploration of interculturality represents for the project of decolonisation.

8.1. Conclusions

In Chapter One I set the scene for this study by introducing my ethnographic field sites and main participants. This was accompanied by a general description of Amazonas State. I provided an ethnographic sketch of Hiwi people living just outside of Puerto Ayacucho, and conducted a brief review of the literature concerning Hiwi people and their characteristic mobility. In this chapter, I also provided an overview of my entry into the field and my investigative methods over the course of fieldwork.

In Chapter Two, I asked how have interculturality and decolonising political movements in Venezuela emerged at this time and how this reflects similar counterhegemonic processes in Bolivia and Ecuador. To answer this question, I provided an overview of significant counterhegemonic processes and social movements in Venezuela, which I explored in relation to similar processes in Bolivia and Ecuador. Recent recognition of cultural, social, and historical diversity opens up political and legislative space for the re-imagining of Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela as pluralistic societies with participatory democracies and economies based in solidarity. I have discussed the role of indigenous activists, who are at the heart of the emergence of this new socio-political imaginary. Under the Bolivarian government, indigenous peoples have gained specific collective rights in the New Constitution of 1999 and LOPCI, which consolidates rights to territory, culture, language, history and society. I have shown that the Bolivarian government employs concepts drawn from indigenous activism, such as plurinationalism and interculturality, which provided a platform for claiming their specific rights as indigenous peoples and the inclusion of all marginalised populations. Plurinationalism refers to the sovereignty of indigenous peoples, who each constitute a nation, with territory and rights to self-determination. Intercultural exchange predicated on equality and respect is essential to the success of a plurinational or pluriethnic society. The success of Bolivarian and indigenous movements lies in their radical new vision of social reality as inclusive and supportive of diversity, where difference becomes a fundamental and constitutive element. I have positioned these movements within the regional context of Latin America, elucidating these dynamics by comparing Venezuela to similar movements in Bolivia and Ecuador.

In Chapter Three, I considered the specifics of Hiwi political organisation at the present moment. I ask how Hiwi people negotiate the intercultural nature of local and national politics, oscillating between their own political philosophy and practices and the new communal councils that promote the Bolivarian government's notion of participatory democracy? Do these political structures reflect indigenous principles of autonomy, debate, and consensus as Bolivarian officials claim? Or do communal councils and government ministries for indigenous affairs represent the flattening of a potential intercultural political system aimed at decolonisation? To answer these questions, I have described the fluid and flexible nature of Hiwi political organisation with its basis in kinship, personal alliances, discussion, and consensus. I have shown how indigenous politics has been central to Venezuelan national politics in recent years and has become part of the Bolivarian government's discourse, a strand of symbolism known as *Guaicaipurismo*. The state celebrates the culture and history of indigenous peoples as part of the national patrimony, contributing to the symbolic valorisation of indigenous people and drawing on an imaginary of indigeneity to legitimise its political project. However, I have also demonstrated how the state has yet to fulfil its constitutional promises in practice to preserve specific indigenous rights to self-determination and political decision-making. On the local level, the state has fostered the development of structures that increase community participation in decision-making. Communal councils are a key part of the NGP and the state's construction of Twenty-First Century Socialism, but such a model diverges from indigenous forms of political organisation. I argued that the imposition of an outside model from the top-down, even if it does approximate a more indigenous form of governance, nonetheless contradicts the constitutional premise which protects indigenous self-determination and political autonomy. Furthermore, I conclude that Hiwi political organisation, based in solidarity,

consensus, fluidity, and negotiation, continues to exist alongside these newer structures and provides an alternative to the militant rhetoric and radical polarisation of the government's discourse.

At a national level, I have discussed how the state was unprepared for indigenous self-determination and initially relied on indigenous civil society organisations to coordinate indigenous political representation. I have argued that this liberal form of pluralism is antithetical to the participatory and protagonistic democracy that the Bolivarian government is constructing, and was soon replaced by MINPI. This organ has become a tool for the implementation of policies in indigenous territories, rather than a means of expressing indigenous concerns at a national level. I have demonstrated that the autonomy of indigenous organisations, such as CONIVE, is also questionable, given the partiality of its members and close alignment with the Bolivarian Revolution. I conclude that indigenous self-determination is still far from assured, as the state tends to co-opt indigenous organisations and limit their autonomy.

In Chapter Four, I asked how Hiwi people organise their labour and engage in Hiwi forms of economic activity while simultaneously participating within the dominant capitalist economy and amid the introduction of cooperatives to promote socialism? What does this intercultural and plural economic situation represent for the decolonisation of neoliberal economies? To answer these questions, I outlined the diversity of Hiwi economic strategies within the immediate families of my main participants. Although they still practise subsistence farming, hunting, gathering, and fishing, these families simultaneously engage with the capitalist economy. Hiwi people

sell excess produce, handmade crafts, shamanic divinations, and their labour to accumulate capital for projects. Food distribution is uncommon now, although communal forms of labour organisation, such as *únuma*, remain an important feature of Hiwi communities. This reciprocal form of labour organisation remains an important feature of Hiwi economies, and I argued that it reflects principles of autonomy and reciprocity, which differ radically from the government's program of cooperatives and Twenty-First Century Socialism.

I contextualised Hiwi economic practices within the Bolivarian state's project of Twenty-First Century Socialism, which draws on the idea that indigenous economic practices are communal and promote solidarity. After a long history of assimilation into a capitalist economy, indigenous peoples are now being assimilated into the government's social economy. I have shown how the Bolivarian government has committed itself to the promotion of indigenous self-determination and the construction of an 'indigenous socialism' based in community-led development and social justice. This involves the creation of cooperatives at the community level to organise community development and labour. I have argued that this project fails to reflect both the indigenous history of their insertion into capitalism and the present reality of pluralism as we saw in the Hiwi case studies. I have demonstrated that the state's socialist project contains a major contradiction in its theoretical and practical development. The Venezuelan state undermines the indigenous economies it cites as an intellectual influence by imposing the non-indigenous notion of worker's cooperatives, which also betrays the constitutional guarantee of indigenous self-determination and development. I concluded that the pluralistic economic approach of Hiwi individuals

and families may in fact provide a better model for Venezuela's social economy than a stylised view of indigenous economic practices.

Despite the centrality of a particular notion of indigeneity to their socialist project, the Venezuelan government has failed to effectively develop the postulates of the 1999 Constitution required to institute a pluriethnic state. I have discussed how indigenous self-determination and self-directed development are improbable without territorial demarcation and within the confines of the cooperative system that is closely tied to state agencies. I have argued that the Venezuelan state continues to deny indigenous communities formal land demarcation, an essential basis for their self-directed economic development which is recognised in the CRBV, as a result the state's immersion in the global capitalism of resource extraction. I have shown that Hiwi economic strategies, which, like all real economies, exist on a continuum between capital accumulation and subsistence, collectivism and private property, may offer a more sustainable model for a social and plural economy. A model based on difference and self-determination would respect the specific rights of different cultural and ethnic groups to envision and work towards their own development, culminating in the true decolonisation of the economic sphere.

In Chapters Five to Seven, I explored Hiwi ways of understanding the world in order to investigate how Hiwi people manage interculturality in the realms of medical knowledge, morality, and epistemology. I asked how Hiwi people navigate plural medical systems with different conceptions of the body, health, and illness within an intercultural or intermedical world? To answer this question, in Chapter Five, I

described Hiwi shamanism and its concepts of the body, health, and illness. Hiwi notions of the human body, health, and illness are pluralistic and health is a product of environmental and social well-being. Illnesses may have multiple causes including physical causes, a loss of vital force, an imbalance of hot/cold energies, sorcery, or spirit contamination. I have shown how healing consists of restoring balance to the body and strengthening an individual's vital force, known as *pe'tajju*, through the application of plant remedies and the transmission of energies which the shaman achieves using psychoactive substances, orations, water, sucking, and blowing.

I then presented two case studies to demonstrate how Amazonas is an intermedical or medically plural zone, with multiple indigenous medical knowledges, biomedical health services, and missionaries who dabble in medical aid. Hiwi individuals choose among shamanic and biomedical concepts and treatments to combat illness and maintain health. I argued that biomedicine is perceived as a medical tradition produced in a particular socio-historical context and possessing considerable political-economic power. Hiwi individuals choose among these medical alternatives, which, far from being incompatible or competitive, exist along a continuum and are employed based on judgments about the nature and cause of illness which dictate the appropriate medical resource to be used. In my analysis I argued that the reasons for selecting a particular treatment are complex and diverse. Indigenous medicines have recently gained respect and political capital due to indigenous activism and the revalorisation of indigenous culture within the Bolivarian government's political vision of a pluriethnic national society. For Hiwi people, I have shown that choosing indigenous medicine may be an assertion of an indigenous ethnocultural identity with value and political rights. Despite the constitutional recognition of indigenous medicines as part of the national patrimony,

biomedicine continues to dominate state discourse and practice, while struggling to practically incorporate indigenous medical understandings or practices that refuse to be assimilated within a scientific paradigm. I also argued that Hiwi people ‘shamanise’ biomedical concepts by interpreting them through a Hiwi logic that validates Hiwi medical traditions. I then considered how medical pluralism, which is promoted by the state as part of their commitment to protecting indigenous cultures, may obscure and even perpetuate social inequality in access to biomedical treatments. Finally, I conclude that indigenous medicines offer an alternative vision of human existence as intricately intertwined with the natural, spiritual, and social environments we inhabit. This holistic vision indicates that health is a delicate balance among diverse elements, opening up possibilities for the development of a decolonial medicine that moves beyond biomedicine’s often reductive conceptions of human life and health, which have proved to have limited ability to construct a meaningful narrative for illness experiences.

In Chapter Six, I turned to a discussion of Hiwi morality as it is expressed in mythology and sorcery as well as the incorporation of aspects of Christian cosmology. In this chapter, I asked how Hiwi manage intercultural aspects of morality and cosmology, given the extensive history and ongoing influence of missionary contact and what this indicates about plural moralities and complementary cosmologies? To answer this question, I explored how Hiwi people negotiate both Christian and shamanic forms of morality and cosmology in their everyday life. Hiwi people focus on the similarities between these two traditions, positioning these two moral worlds as equally valid spheres of meaning. I have shown how this dynamic reflects centuries of missionary political-economic domination and religious hegemony in Amazonas, as well as the recent revalorisation of indigenous societies and worldviews. To explore this

intercultural situation, I presented two Hiwi myths and compared this cosmology and morality to the Christian elements that also structure Hiwi everyday life. Hiwi myth-tellers note the similarities between the two traditions, pointing to the complementarity of their cosmological vision and moral codes. I also discussed Hiwi notions of sorcery that form a complex of moral values and meaning. This analysis reflected the principles of Hiwi convivial morality, which exists alongside Christian notions of good and evil.

Christian morality is based on charity and generosity, while Hiwi notions of morality emphasise autonomy and sociability. Hiwi people always live in complex relationships with relatives, spirits, and the natural world. I have demonstrated that the imperative to be generous and live harmoniously with other beings underpins the Hiwi lifeworld. The focus is on conviviality, which is produced through intimate relations with kin and affines that aim to forge the social group into a collective. I have shown that Hiwi cosmology expresses these relationships between human society and the natural-spiritual world, explaining the origins of every plant and animal species with which human life is entwined. Hiwi shamanism encompasses notions of convivial morality and a cosmology that includes spirits, aspects which are central to healing and survival.

As I have discussed, this intercultural situation reflects the adaptability of Hiwi people to new forms of knowledge, which is one of the main themes of this thesis. My participants engage with the various spheres of meanings that structure their lives in flexible and versatile ways. I have elucidated how Hiwi people maintain a Hiwi cosmology and morality, while positioning them as a complementary system of beliefs to those of Christianity. I have concluded that this may be because Hiwi mythology or

beliefs are fluid and vary among individuals, indicating that Hiwi mythology constitutes a diverse pool of meanings that may be alternatively emphasised or elided depending on the context of the teller. For Hiwi people, Christianity and their own beliefs form part of a continuum of moral values and cosmological visions that may even affirm each other.

In Chapter Seven, I turned to a discussion of epistemology. In this chapter, I asked what epistemological assumptions about the nature of the world are held by Hiwi people and how Hiwi beliefs about spirits and emotional experiences relate to the epistemological values attributed to science and technology? How does this open up science to intercultural exchange with alternative knowledges and contribute to a decolonial knowledge in which subjective modes of knowing are valued? To answer this question, I considered the epistemological underpinnings of Hiwi society and shamanism. Hiwi epistemology is based on a principle that knowledge is embodied, conceptualised as spirits that inhabit the individual body based on life experience. I have shown that Hiwi knowledge assumes a spiritual dimension of reality that is denied in science due its rational, logical and empirical methodological focus. For Hiwi people, spirits are conceived as a substantive form of energy which inhabits all aspects of the world and is central to shamanic understanding of the body, healing, and the appropriate place of human beings in the universe. This dimension is best perceived during altered states of consciousness, such as visions, dreams, and near-death experiences, which Hiwi people consider a privileged method of acquiring knowledge and power to affect the spirit world. Similarly, emotions are considered to be a significant source of knowledge, when wedded with reason. I argued that this diverges from Western science's favouring of measurable, visible, and objective phenomena over the subjective and privileging of conscious, rational, and objective modes of consciousness.

I have demonstrated that Hiwi people reinsert knowledge gained from emotional states and altered states of consciousness into everyday life. Hiwi knowledge is also based on observation and experimentation, is transmitted to each new generation, and is practically applied to everyday life. This knowledge employs an everyday, conscious mode of thinking that resembles the production of scientific information and theories. Despite these radical differences in methods and techniques, concepts and ways of knowing, Hiwi shamanism constitutes an epistemology based on cognitive processes shared by all humanity, even if science refuses to value the subjective and emotional aspects of human experience. I have argued that an intercultural exchange on equal terms between indigenous knowledges and science would prove productive for both epistemological traditions, as each emphasises different ways of constructing and using knowledge within different social-cultural contexts, expanding our understanding of the diverse range of human knowledges.

8.2. Synthesis: Interculturality and Possibilities for Decolonisation

By exploring the interculturality of the Hiwi lifeworld, I have demonstrated that intellectual traditions from various socio-historical contexts may be integrated, at least partially, with radically different ways of knowing. An intercultural exchange may always involve unequal power relations, but through the actions of social movements, states, and citizens, a space may be created for culturally different actors to engage with one another. This could potentially lead to a decolonisation of political-economies and the sciences, where difference is valued and forms the foundation of an engagement between diverse forms of actors and communities. To achieve this end, we need

extensive ethnographies of intercultural lifeworlds to explore how power can be balanced among groups with different historical and social circumstances. We need to investigate how mutual understanding is generated within cross-cultural encounters and how this may be supported. My thesis makes a fundamental contribution to this debate by providing an ethnographic sketch of one kind of intercultural world that exists among many others.

Hiwi people, like many other indigenous peoples, live in an intercultural world: in their communities they live according to conventions of Hiwi social life and shamanism; moving into the forests and mountains that surround their communities they encounter spirits and animals with their own cultures; and in the world outside the community Hiwi people engage with the structures of Western epistemological traditions and political-economic systems. Hiwi ways of being and knowing are pluralistic and adaptive, characterised by principles of logic that focus on multiplicity and complementarity. Just as Hiwi people historically migrated in and around missions and trade centres, contemporary Hiwi people are capable of moving between the worlds of the community, the forest, and the town, which I have interpreted as interconnected spheres containing different meanings, values, and ideas. This reveals the diversity of human societies and knowledges even within a rapidly homogenising and globalising world. There are possibilities embedded within this rich world of intercultural interaction and learning; a meeting place for potential alternatives to neoliberalism and representative democracy and a space for imagining a decolonising future.

For Hiwi people in this study, human ways of being and knowing are shaped by biographical experience, spiritual, social, and natural environments. This position approaches a social constructivism, where distinct socio-historical contexts, and the knowledges produced within them, become embodied by the humans caught within their webs. In the Hiwi conception of ways of being and knowing, there are always multiple possibilities that exist within a pluralistic universe of beings that includes plants, animals, rocks, stars, and humans. All these beings are imbued with vital force or *pe'tajju* which animates them, but they are also autonomous and radically different categories of being. The role of the shaman is to bring spirit-beings and human beings, social and natural relationships, into harmony with one another. The *criollo* world of capitalism, politics, biomedicine, Christian cosmology and morality, and scientific tradition can be seen as several strands of being and knowing that may be absorbed into the Hiwi worldview. I argue that this paradigm of pluralism and difference forms the basis of Hiwi people's ability to move through the intercultural world of Amazonas, where indigenous ontologies and epistemologies interact with *criollo* or Western ontologies and epistemologies. New knowledges and forms of social organisation may be considered complementary and supplementary to Hiwi equivalents and incorporated where deemed appropriate and useful. In my interpretation, this paradigm is fundamental to the cultural adaptability and flexibility of Hiwi people during times of political and economic change. This paradigm of pluralism and difference offers an example of intercultural exchange that lays the foundation upon which we could build new decolonising forms of knowledge and political-economic imaginaries.

The Hiwi paradigm of pluralism and complementarity provides an alternative to neoliberal models of political-economy, which may contribute to the ongoing debates

about alternative modernities in Latin America. Other possible modernities, such as a Hiwi worldview, emphasise values denied by Euro-modernity such as relationality and reciprocity, the continuity of natural, human and supernatural spheres, the social character of the economy, community values, and personhood. In this scenario the old reference schemes of capitalism, liberalism, and statism cease to be the dominant determining forces in social reality, but do not completely disappear. As Escobar (2010:9) explains, these debates constitute a space for the creation of a 'pluriverse' of multiple realities in the face universal globalisation. Social movements engaged in this process may form a "pluralised panorama of different rationalities: a horizon of activities, resistances, ills and desires that oppose the hegemonic neoliberal order, proposing lines of escape and constructing alternative maps to the colonial-modern logos" (Contreras, 2007:214). By presenting the intercultural world of Hiwi people, this thesis contributes to debates within the New Left movements of Latin America, including the Bolivarian Revolution, MAS, and Pachakutik, which attempt to reorganise society around cultural difference and social justice by opening up spheres in which new knowledge and radically different visions of human existence may be generated through debate and engagement with diverse peoples. The decolonising process is still in a stage of chrysalis, but Escobar claims it represents:

a sphere of action in which people can dream of a better world and contribute to enact it. It is in these spaces that new imaginaries and ideas about how to re/assemble the socio-natural are not only hatched but experimented with, critiqued, elaborated upon, and so forth (2010:13).

The principles of pluralism and complementarity in Hiwi life I have outlined are a contribution to an emerging political imaginary where states, social movements, and political parties engage in socio-cultural, political, and institutional debate about the

possibility of alternative modernities and relational ontologies that may transcend the historical hegemony of European visions of modernity (Escobar, 2010). In Latin America, these concepts are at the heart of new trends promoting political inclusion and post-neoliberal economic development, which could be founded in indigenous worldviews, such as that of Hiwi people. This thesis makes an important contribution to these debates by providing a description of the Hiwi political and economic systems based on pluralism in which the incorporation of difference is fundamental, revealing one possibility for decolonising political-economies.

The opening up of political and economic spheres to debate and cultural differences has been accompanied by debates about alternative knowledges and moralities within the sciences, to which my discussion of the Hiwi lifeworld has contributed. Hiwi people have survived the onslaught of hegemonic ideologies, such as biomedicine, Christianity, and science, and, despite the assimilationist processes of colonisation, have maintained distinct ways of constructing knowledge about the world and human existence. In the face of hostile colonial powers and hegemonic ideologies with the power to control the very representation of reality itself (see Semali and Kincheloe, 1999; Prakash, 1999), Hiwi people have selectively appropriated elements that suit their purposes and rendered complementary alternative ways of knowing in accordance with their pluralistic notions of the universe.

In this thesis, I have discussed Hiwi shamanism as a medical, epistemological, and moral system of meanings, based on a paradigm of pluralism and difference. According to this view, biomedicine complements Hiwi plant medicine and shamanism,

constituting a pluralistic understanding of well-being where plants, spirit-beings, and human society are interrelated and knowledge is grounded in biographical and socio-historical contexts. The complementarity of intercultural intellectual traditions is also reflected in Hiwi cosmology and morality, which incorporates aspects of biblical narratives and Christian morality that coalesce with Hiwi principles of autonomy and collectivism. Similarly, Hiwi epistemology is grounded in the embodiment of knowledge, the existence of spirit-beings, and the meaningfulness of emotionally charged experiences and encounters with the spirit-world, while appropriating aspects of Western scientific traditions and technology. Hiwi conceptions of medical knowledge, morality, and epistemology provide alternative forms of knowledge that integrate various aspects of human being and focus on the complementarity of intercultural ways of knowing. The ways in which Hiwi people negotiate this pluralistic universe provides an insight into the possibility of a decolonisation of the sphere of knowledge that resonates with current debates within the natural and social sciences centring on the inclusion of alternative knowledges and ways of knowing. In this way, my thesis is a challenge to the Western intellectual traditions that have assumed universality at the expense of different perspectives and demonstrates that different knowledges may co-exist, cross-pollinate, and enrich one another. The intercultural exchange of ideas is predicated on the principles of pluralism and difference, which indicates the possibility of opening up Western realms of thought on medicine, morality, and epistemology to alternative or indigenous ways of knowing.

In this thesis, I am not calling for the privileging of local sciences to the extent of extinguishing global science. Rather, I argue that space must be created for respectful intercultural dialogue between the different intellectual traditions. This intercultural

epistemological exchange requires more than the appropriation of indigenous knowledge to extend the scientific worldview or to redress perceived lacks in science by absorbing indigenous perspectives (Whitehead, 2000; Warren et al., 1995). This would be a continuation of the processes of colonisation and assimilation. A truly intercultural science holds the possibility of decolonising our representations of the world and opening us up to new ways of knowing that go beyond our ever narrowing vision of the future. As Sillitoe explains:

We are arguing that we need to draw on the full range of the human heritage as we seek ways forwards in the future that might benefit all humankind and ensure the continued well-being of the planet we inhabit (2007:19).

A possible result of this dialogue is a ‘science by the people’ that includes the diverse arts and technologies for living well socially and environmentally, rather than ‘science for the people’ or institutional science, which has caused ecological destruction, remade the conception of what is human being and how to live, treated the people’s knowledge with contempt, all while ignoring its own cultural foundations (Prakash, 1999:160). De Sousa Santos (1992:44) argues that a post-modern science should enter a dialogue with diverse, local knowledges and allow itself to be influenced by them. In this way, we are able to rehabilitate common sense, as this form of knowledge enriches our lives and: “once articulated with scientific knowledge, it may be the source of a new rationality—a rationality comprised of multiple rationalities” (de Sousa Santos, 1992:45). This thesis reveals the ever-present human capacity to negotiate among multiple perspectives and considers the benefits of such open-ended and pluralistic forms of learning through intercultural exchanges, where contact with specific, alternative knowledges may be built into a deeper understanding of our interconnected world.

Furthermore, my thesis contributes to the project of decolonising the sciences by portraying an intercultural world in which knowledge is situated and conditional, forever evolving and interacting with other traditions. As de Sousa Santos argues the decolonising of knowledge requires the renovation of the social sciences, who have become “mercenaries of the ruling powers”, and the reinvigoration of the project of social emancipation to which they should be committed (de Sousa Santos, 2005:xxii). My discussion of Hiwi medical knowledge, morality, and epistemology represents an important contribution to the decolonising of the social and natural sciences, a critical project as we face increasingly social inequality and potential environmental annihilation brought on the dynamics of rational modernity. By presenting an ethnographic description of Hiwi people as they navigate between indigenous and broadly Western constructions of the world, I have attempted an intercultural dialogue that enriches our understanding of the world. As anthropologists we have an obligation to continue to seek out and explore alternative knowledges in order to dismantle the destructive ideologies of the past and decolonise our philosophies for living well.

9. References

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