Cartographies of remembrance and becoming in the Sierra de Perijá, Venezuela

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This article examines the role of memory performance in participatory mapping in indigenous communities, in particular in terms of driving radical action for territorial rights. By examining the links between memory performance, processes of identity formation and the social constructions of landscape, the article suggests that greater critical consideration should be given to participatory mapping as process, as opposed to participatory maps as products. This is particularly important in the current push for land, resource and territorial rights among indigenous peoples in Venezuela and beyond. The article is based on a participatory mapping project conducted with indigenous residents of the Yukpa community of Toromo in the Sierra de Perijá, Venezuela, in the years 2007–2011. The mapping process inspired the speaking of memory, which in turn articulated with autochthonous debates regarding land rights and development strategies. By drawing on Ricoeur’s conceptualisation of memory and narrative identity, the article presents and critically analyses memory performances of violence, exile and deceit, which reflect memory themes constitutive of a ‘duty to remember’ and ‘a duty to map’ so often expressed by Yukpa.

Key words  
Venezuela; Yukpa; memory; indigenous rights; participatory mapping

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The place where we are standing now is Yuk Otúpto. Yuk Otúpto is where the chiefs and the warriors in the past, the ancestors, where they would hide with (bow) and arrow to wait for the enemy. That is why this place remained in our roots. Because it is the location where they were hiding, waiting for those coming to invade the land. So this story remained, and the point remained, here where we are standing. (Jesús Peñaranda, Toromo, Sierra de Perijá, Venezuela, 17 July 2011)

Introduction

When Jesús Peñaranda Hijo told me this story, we were standing on the shoulder of the crumbling asphalt road that links the Yukpa community of Toromo with Machiques, the dusty and sprawling capital of the municipality of Machiques de Perijá, at the intersection with the dirt road that winds through the tree-studded plains of the hacienda Rincón. The heaviest of the winter rains had ended but the dry season hadn’t quite begun. Peñaranda Hijo and I were sweating in the piercing sun but just a few kilometres to the west, clouds hung low over the Perijá, a rain shower was crawling slowly across the foothills and the air was pregnant with the acrid smell of melting asphalt. It was that hesitant time of year when the unpredictability of the weather seems to mirror the liminality of life itself, here in the tumultuous indigenous communities in the Sierra de Perijá and the plains of Lake Maracaibo in western Venezuela.

I had been living in Toromo for three summers by this time, working with residents to map Yukpa territory while researching the Yukpa’s strategies to reclaim their ancestral lands from the haciendas (ranches) in the Maracaibo plains. I had come to know both Jesús Peñaranda Padre, quite well. Both have served as caciques (chief; yuwakputo in Yukpa) of the Sector Yukpa Toromo-Tütari, the sub-division of Yukpa territory that was the site of this mapping project. Hijo has been a leader in the struggle for territorial rights for more than 20 years, while Padre, as the Yukpa will say, is one of the ‘last remaining elders’ with extensive knowledge of Yukpa history. During the mapping workshops, Padre would often work shoulder to shoulder with his son, murmuring one toponym after the other to be mapped and then taking breaks to relate stories of Yukpa’s past, which Hijo would then retell in his own way, and in his own place. In so doing, father and son would perform strategic ‘memory work’ through their literal and figurative mappings of ‘the past onto a real landscape’ (Crang and Travlou 2001).

I share this vignette to illustrate the topic I wish to address here, namely the role of ‘arts of memory’ (Crang and Travlou 2001; Le Goff 1992) in the...
imagning and representation of indigenous landscapes, and, by extension, in the re-production of indigenous identities. By examining the articulation between memory performance, identity and landscape, I seek to explore the potential significance of memory work in contexts of struggle and rapid social change, when the mapping of the past onto landscapes of the present take on the greatest urgency (Graham 2002; Sarmento 2009; Schramm 2011). Instead of attempting to disentangle memory from action, I suggest, following Moore (1998a), that resistance to state policies hinges critically on ‘social memory’ of past repression, and that landscapes are thus inevitably embodied with stories of intimate entanglements of power (see also Moore 1998b). More specifically, I draw on Ricoeur’s work on memory and narrative identity (1991 1994 2000 2003) to suggest that participatory mapping elicits performance of memory, and that such selective conjuring of memory in turn remakes and profoundly shapes indigenous identities and strategies of contestation and territoriality (cf. Cole 2001; Gordon et al. 2003; Marcuse 1962; Offen 2003; Sutton 2008).

The indigenous land rights struggle in Venezuela gained new impetus with the new Constitution in 1999, which provided collective rights to indigenous lands. This gave way to a plethora of participatory mapping projects, but scant progress has been made in terms of actual land titling. Nevertheless, even though Yukpa voiced scepticism about the significance of these maps alone for territorial designation (other documentation is also required by state authorities), they still enthusiastically embraced the mapping project. In order to explore this apparent contradiction, I suggest that Yukpa’s great desire to map is shaped, in part, by the role of this project in facilitating performances of memory and attendant re-productions of indigenous identities. In other words, by creating a proverbial stage for the speaking of the past, participatory mapping projects can be thought of as venues for both memory-making and map-making; i.e. I think here of mapping as ‘anxious’ inscription of socially constructed knowledge that includes ‘the remembered, the imagined, the contemplated’ (Cosgrove 1999, 2; see also Cosgrove 2006).

That is to say, by drawing attention to ‘mappings’ as context-dependent spatial practice instead of maps as ontologically stable representations (Kitchin and Dodge 2007), we can conceptualise mapping as occasions for ‘collective remembrance’ (Grasseni 2004, 706) as well as for landscape-making. In other words, through the body, the story and the arts of the memory performance by Peñaranda Hijo, Yuk Otútpo was being produced as a site of memory (lieu de memoire; Nora 1989; see also Crang and Travlou 2001). At the time I was listening to Peñaranda Hijo sharing his story of Yuk Otútpo, I was struck by the contradictions between the imaginary topographies of the past and the harsh realities of the present, but I came to understand that his speaking of the past could shape action in the present: that such memory performances were integral to a broader process of wrestling a ‘milieu of memory’ from the disparate traces of Yukpa memory that have been violently, but not completely, erased from this landscape and absorbed in the abstract space of capitalism (Schramm 2011). For landscapes such as the plains of Lake Maracaibo are inherently unstable and contested pictorial metaphors (Bentley 1984; see also Cosgrove 1984; Cosgrove and Daniels 1988), always in the process of becoming (Ingold 1993).

Only a few years ago, this landscape, which Yukpa see as their original land and the State of Zulia as the breadbasket of Venezuela, was a monotonous paean to cattle ranching, a place marked by gravelly ranch roads, barbwire fences, and cattle standing mutely beneath the spreading branches of ceiba trees (Copáifera pentandra). But in recent years, Yukpa of Toromo and other communities have occupied many of the haciendas, mapping not only the past but also an alternative spatial practice onto the ranching landscape. Entire Yukpa families and their supporters will enter ranch lands and build shelters overnight, and then refuse to leave despite death threats from landowners and their hired help. Through a combination of sympathetic publicity in state-controlled media, pressure on hacendados (hacienda owners) from national government agents coupled with offers of compensation, and the patient endurance of the Yukpa occupants, the hacendado eventually concedes. This is a process that landowners and local government officials call invasions or land occupations, but which the Yukpa refer to as ‘rescuing’ land that is rightfully theirs. In the case of Toromo, a dozen or so haciendas have been partly or wholly reclaimed since the election of the late president Hugo Chávez, and, although land titles remain unclear, the haciendas are now effectively controlled by Yukpa families.

I begin this article by more fully explicating the associations between memory, narrative and action, before turning to a review of relevant literature in critical cartography and participatory mapping, including a brief discussion of current advances (or not) of demarcation in Venezuela. I next present and discuss cases of memory performances that took place during this project, structured by tropes I have called violence, exile and deceit, which reflect the memory themes constitutive of the ‘duty to remember’ so often expressed by Yukpa. I conclude with a brief discussion where I suggest a way forward to conceptualising participatory mapping as process, where memory work may play a central role in fomenting radical action.
Memory, narrative identity and radical action

I build here, in part, on Ricoeur’s conceptualisation that the path linking history to action can... be traveled in either direction: from story to action, to the extent that story – according to Aristotle’s formulation – is mimesis praxis; or from action to story, to the extent that action is, in one way or another, a demand for story. (1994, 22)

The concept of memory ‘work’, therefore, is crucial, in the sense that memory is made to matter through performance, such as in the case of Peñaranda Hijo’s storytelling at and about Yuk Otúpó. In other words, memory is made active and comprehensible through the body of the speaker (Connerton 1989; della Dora 2008).

This leads to two suppositions: first, memory performance can be understood to work to shape formations of identity, and second, memory performance can be thought of as narrative that links past to present to future, thus providing the potential of linking imaginary with radical action. To return to Ricoeur (1991), memory contributes to the formation of ‘narrative identity’, i.e. we are speaking here of the proposition that identities are in part formed through the process of plotting and speaking stories of self and others: ‘the sort of identity to which a human being has access thanks to the mediation of the narrative function’ (Ricoeur 1991, 73).

Relations of power play a significant role in manipulating identity through the control of memory; that is, Ricoeur refers to the instrumentalisation of memory through which both memory and forgetfulness are subject to an intense manipulation by power. ... Here, one cannot separate memory and identity, whether this is individual or collective, better yet, one cannot think of identity without memory. (Hannoum 2005, 126)

But on the other hand, as memory is forced and manipulated by power through the productions of sanctioned and official history, such as the heroic narrative of the founding of Zulia, memory can be made to work ‘instrumentally’ through narrative to reclaim a subjugated history. ‘The issues at stake’, says Ricoeur in his Budapest lecture, ‘concern memory, no longer as a mere matrix of history but as the reappropriation of the historical past by a memory taught by history and often wounded by history’ (Ricoeur 2000; see also Graham 2002; Sarmento 2009).

Peñaranda Hijo’s speaking of memory thus profoundly matters, in the sense that his performance reproduces an identity of the Yukpa as warriors intent to defend their land through violent struggle at a site that still remains. This appropriation of a memory wounded by history – or perhaps more accurately, this compulsion to reclaim memory, as in Peñaranda Hijo’s insistence to not only perform the story of Yuk Otúpó, but to perform it here, in this particular site of memory (Nora 1989) – is reflective of what Ricoeur calls a ‘duty to remember’, which, in turn, stems from an inherent quest for justice to address the trauma of the past:

It is justice which extracts from traumatising remembrances their exemplary value, turns memory into a project, and it is this project of justice that gives the form of the future and of imperativeness to the duty of memory. (Ricoeur 2000, 107)

In other words, Peñaranda Hijo’s performance of memory works to produce landscape because memory lives in landscape (Fordred Green and Green 2003), but his performance also produces a specific Yukpa identity. In so doing, Peñaranda Hijo through his story was laying a ‘path linking history to action’ (Ricoeur 1994, 22) and performing what Herbert Marcuse called ‘one of the noblest tasks of thought ... the orientation to the past tends toward an orientation to the future: the recherche du temps perdu becomes the vehicle of future liberation’ (1962, 17–18, 212). In this context, then, the concept of performance becomes central, in the sense that the memory work described here is not simply a retelling of the past but an iterative and unstable co-production of identity and landscape; that is, performances are both contextual and situated in-place, they ‘escape the instance’ (Butler 1997, 3) but are also constitutive of the mutable relationships between past events of repression and violence, the materiality of landscape and the body of the storyteller.

Thus the duty to remember can be understood as ‘the claim raised by victims of a criminal history; its ultimate justification is the call to justice owed to victims’ (Ricoeur 2003, np). As the elder Marco Nutiez said following one mapping workshop, succinctly crystallising the links between memory and action: ‘This was the land of our grandparents. We need to stand together to rescue the land. It is our duty as indigenous Yukpa to fight for our land.’ In the words of Hannoum, ‘for Ricoeur, the issue of representation of the past begins with memory, not with history ... The difficulties of a national community or its political body require that memory be commanded, ordered’ (2005, 127). By conceptualising the mapping process as constitutive of theatres for memory performance (cf. Crang and Travlou 2001), for the speaking of what was as they produce imaginaries of what will be, we arrive at a better understanding of the profound desire of Yukpa to map. Since mapping can be understood as a driver for the performance of memory, I suggest that map-making and memory-making become entangled to the point that we, perhaps, could speak of a perceived duty to map.
Participatory mapping and indigenous land rights in Venezuela

As representational objects, maps have served the interests of power by erasing indigenous landscapes from colonial times to the present (Barr 2011; Bryan 2011; Sletto 2009a, b). Maps were complicit in early state building and in the colonial project (Biggs 1999; Craib 2000; Godlew ska 1988; Scott 1999; Sparke 1998; Winichakul 1994), and maps play a central role in supporting the hegemonic productions of capitalist space at the exclusion of indigenous and other alternative spatialities (Duncan and Ley 1993; Monmonier 1991; Rundstrom 1990, 1991, 1993; Sheppard 2005; Thower 2008; Wood 2010). But maps not only shape our conceptualisation of the proper structuring of the world. Maps are inherently ideological representations that reflect the social contexts and interests of their creators and cartography is a social practice used to reproduce dominant conceptualisations and pasts, presents and futures (Crampton 2001, 2010; Harley 1989; Pickles 2004; Sparke 1998).

Participatory mapping, then, attempts to invert the power of maps for counter-hegemonic projects: to provide greater say by communities in economic development planning; to document situated knowledges for purposes of cultural preservation; and of course to advance struggles for territorial and resource rights. A common goal of such ‘counter-mapping’ (Peluso 1995) is to represent indigenous toponyms, histories and conceptions of landscapes more fully than in maps produced by state or corporate actors. As cartographic representations of indigenous knowledge, such maps can serve as powerful, rhetorical and political tools to support indigenous and other local communities’ land rights struggles – a claim that, in part, explains Yukpa’s enthusiastic embrace of the mapping project (see e.g. Chapin and Threlkeld 2001; Chapin et al. 2005; Harris and Weiner 1998; Herlihy 2003; Herlihy and Knapp 2003; Parker 2006; Poole 2003).

However, increasingly, indigenous people and cartographers approach participatory mapping practice not only with empirical rigour but also increased reflexivity about the social implications of the process of map-making. Such projects face the difficulty – or impossibility – of representing dynamic, indigenous conceptions of space and time in rigid Cartesian terms (Rocheleau 2005; Sletto 2009c, d); the risk of imposing Western forms of boundary-making and territorialisation (Bryan 2011; Parker 2006; Sletto 2009a, b); the potential appropriation of indigenous knowledge in knowledge management systems of development institutions (Schroeder and Hogdson 2002); and the risk of making indigenous knowledge visible in ways that may facilitate capitalist expansion in indigenous lands (Wainwright and Bryan 2009). It is also necessary to critically examine the socially contingent and iterative process of map-making in order to escape easy assumptions about the ontological stability and mimetic nature of maps (Kitchin and Dodge 2007).

In part because of these critical considerations, indigenous people and their supporters have now developed a more realistic view of the potential of such projects to further the land rights agenda. In the case of Venezuela, indigenous people have found inspiration in Chapter VIII of the 1999 Constitution, which followed, to a large degree, established precedents in international law (Alarcón et al. 2007) and led to the Ley de Demarcación y Garantía del Hábitat y Tierras de los Pueblos Indígenas in 2001, the Ley Orgánica de Pueblos Indígenas (LOPCI) in 2005, a new ministry of indigenous affairs, and a national and various regional demarcation commissions charged with the titling of indigenous lands (Alarcón et al. 2007; Caballero Arias 2007; Caballero Arias and Cardozo 2006; Caballero Arias and Zent 2006). However, only 32 titles have been awarded under the Ley de Autodemarcación, and only to small areas instead of the larger swathes of communal lands called for in the Constitution (Caballero Arias 2007). In all, only 1.7 per cent of the country’s indigenous population have received titles to their original lands (Caballero Arias and Zent 2006, 7). The Yukpa are a case in point. Their territorial claims extend from Tinacoa in the north roughly 50 km to Tokuku in the south, but by autumn 2011, only one title had been awarded to the small Yukpa community of Shirapta. Considering their limited acreage and the restrictions on resource and development rights, these titles are most reminiscent of those provided under the Agrarian Reform Law of 1960 when Venezuela was still pursuing an overt assimilationist indigenismo policy (Caballero Arias 2007; Herrera Salas 2005; Mansutti 2006).

In Venezuelan law, the term territory is eschewed in favour of hábitat (habitat), which, by law, refers to the space needed for indigenous cultural and economic reproduction and not to the rights to occupation a given extent of land. By not providing for rights in a territorial sense, the Constitution limits one of the most fundamental rights demanded by indigenous people (Leal 2007). The restriction on indigenous territoriality stems from the state’s fear of territorial disintegration and threats to national security and defence (Leal 2007; Silva 2007), and the lack of progress in land titling is in part due to inconsistent and changing bureaucratic requirements. The lack of economic support for the large and unwieldy demarcation commissions, with their changing membership from often conflicting government agencies, NGOs, and academic and indigenous representatives, also contributes to their dysfunction (Herrera Salas 2005; Leal 2007; Silva 2007).
Participatory mapping in the Sierra de Perijá

Yukpa in Toromo are fully aware that the demarcation process is stalled, and they know why. In the words of Peñaranda Hijo, ‘the (regional) demarcation commission has not completed any projects at all’. He and others often told me that participatory mapping projects rarely translate into land rights because of the poorly administered titling process coupled with resistance to indigenous land rights in national and regional government. Still, even while knowing that a map in and by itself would not lead to a land title, Yukpa in Toromo made it clear they were eager to develop ‘their own map’ of their territory.

The project slowly emerged during research stints in Toromo during the summers of 2007, 2008 and 2009. I had previously conducted a mapping project with the Pemon in eastern Venezuela (Sletto 2009a 2009b 2009c 2010 2011), and during my initial visit to Toromo I approached the principal cacique to express my interest in conducting a study of their land rights struggle while assisting with a participatory mapping project. This led to a series of community meetings led by the chiefs of Toromo and outlying communities, known as ramales, where we established the structure and goals of the mapping project. Our methodological approach would draw on strategies common in such work (Chapin and Threlkeld 2001; Chapin et al. 2005; Herlihy 2003; Herlihy and Knapp 2003; Poole 2003; Sletto 2010), starting with workshops where the map would increasingly be refined before it would be digitised and designed using Geographic Information Systems (GIS).

The project began in earnest in summer 2010 after a community meeting on 23 June, where community leaders and residents determined what types of sites should be mapped, in what locale the workshops should be held, and the logistics of invitations, transportation, and the tentative dates and times of the workshops. Because all workshops would be held in Toromo, project leaders would recruit residents from smaller, outlying communities to participate in the project during their frequent visits to Toromo, which necessitated a flexible and often impromptu schedule. The following day, children in the community under the supervision of school teachers sketched mental maps of Toromo and also drew the symbols that were eventually used in the final map (Plate 1). On 24 June, the first of a series of three community mapping workshops was held, where 18 adults began the process of sketching natural features onto 4×3-foot printed sheet that included topographic contours and principal highways for reference. By first sketching the natural features, especially streams and mountains, onto the topographic map, participants were better able to map hunting and gathering areas, sacred places and other sites with more limited geographic extent (Plate 2).

Following the initial three workshops, which were held at the local vocational school, community leaders recommended we relocate the work to the home of Jesús Peñaranda Padre who, at approximately 75 years of age, had difficulties climbing down the steep trails from his home to participate in the workshops.
Community leaders decided I should continue the work with a ‘technical team’ composed of 12 residents who had demonstrated the greatest interest in the mapping project. This meant that the mapping project would be directed by a self-selected group of residents who, in turn, would defer to a smaller group of principally elder men, in particular the former chiefs Peñaranda Padre and Peñaranda Hijo. Thus by following this directive of community leaders instead of pushing for broader participation of women and youth, as in the case of the Pemon (Sletto 2009c), the project was completed quickly and elders’ knowledge was privileged. However, the ensuing map reflects a particular, gendered and generational conceptualisation of the Yukpa landscape.

As the mapping workshops proceeded throughout the summers of 2010 and 2011, Francisco Romero, one of the members of the technical team resident in the ramal Ayapayna, and I began to systematically collect GPS coordinates to facilitate accurate digitisation of the map. In winter 2010–11, the map was digitised in ArcGIS 10 using an SRTM 90-metre digital elevation model, the sketch (base) map and 242 GPS points as reference. A printed version of the resulting draft map was revised in summer 2011 in workshops in the vocational school and also at the home of Peñaranda Padre. At this point, additional toponyms and GPS coordinates were added, partly as a result of a decision made in community council the previous winter to extend the Yukpa land claim further east to encompass the haciendas Rincon and Capitancito. Following a community meeting where the map title and accompanying texts and photographs were approved, and where the original sketch map was returned to the community, the map was revised again and the final version delivered to Toromo in summer 2012 (Plate 3).

Violence, exile, deceit: participatory mapping and the arts of memory

I turn now to a brief discussion where I attempt to tease out the confluence of storytelling and map-making in Toromo and, in so doing, suggest some of the ways in which the mapping project constituted and was constituted by the arts of memory. I have structured the discussion around three tropes – violence, exile and deceit – suggesting that each reflects different strands of the conflicted, memory-laden Yukpa narrative identity. Specifically, I suggest that the complex deployment of these tropes in Yukpa narratives reflect the changing social and geographic landscape in the Sierra de Perijá and the contentious re-productions of indigenous identities. More pragmatically, I also use these tropes as a structuring device to relate Yukpa history in approximate chronological order, starting with the violent European incursions and occupations of Yukpa lands in the colonial and Republican periods.

Ethnologists classify Yukpa within the Carib group, a family of indigenous people who probably originated approximately 5000 years ago in the Guayana region of eastern Venezuela and from there dispersed northwest...
and also into the Caribbean islands (Portillo 2007, 87; Ruddle 1974; Ruddle and Wilbert 1983; Vargas et al. 2005). It is unclear why the Yukpa migrated so far west, but because of their long isolation from other Carib peoples, their language has become differentiated from other Carib languages and also influenced by their neighbours in the Sierra de Perijá, including the Bari (a Chibcha people whose lands are located just south of the Yukpa territory), and the Wayuu and Aïu (Arawak peoples who populate parts of the northern Perijá, extending into the Guajira peninsula in far north-western Venezuela and northern Colombia).

It bears noting that a smaller population of Yukpa is also found on the western slopes of the Perijá Colombia, where they are known as ‘Yuko’ and also, as in the case of the Yukpa in Venezuela, traditionally live in extended family groups defined by major river valleys, each speaking different dialects (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1960, 162–3; see also Reichel-Dolmatoff 1982). Some elders, especially residents in high-elevation rúmales, related to me how they would cross the Perijá in their youth to spend time with relatives on the other side of the international border. However, today there is no regular contact between Yukpa in Colombia and Venezuela by foot, in large part because of the difficult and lengthy hike, made more formidable now that the majority of Yukpa are settled in the lowlands, and also because concerns about incursions of Colombian guerrillas discourage Yukpa from entering the tallest mountain ranges.

The first recorded encounter with the Spanish took place during the expeditions of Ambrosio Alfinger in the 1540s, when Yukpa villages located near Lake Maracaibo and in the Sierra de Perijá were decimated (Marquez 2005; Ruddle and Wilbert 1983, 46). After subsequent incursions by Capuchin monks (Vargas et al. 2005), the Spanish showed less interest in the region. The first city to be founded in Yukpa territory was Villa de Rosario in 1733; Machiques was not essential continuity of the Yukpa struggles for their recognition of Yukpa rights to land, and instead opened the door to partitioning of indigenous land that was deemed to be vacant ‘wasteland’ (tierras baldías) (Alarcón et al. 2007).

Still, for several decades following this state-sponsored violence against indigenous people, the Yukpa resisted incursions by settlers and miners and left the western plains of Lake Maracaibo ‘unsafe’ for the residents and early ranching families of Villa de Rosario and Machiques (Ortega et al. 1995, 103). As late as in 1917, it was reported that residents of Machiques did not venture south of the River Yaza, located a scant 15-minute drive to the south of the city, because of risk of attacks by the notorious Yukpa (Alarcón et al. 2007; see also Ruddle and Wilbert 1983, 47). It was not until after 1920, when 4500 hectares of land at the foothills of the Perijá were allocated to the brothers José and Joviniano García to form the first major hacienda in Toromo territory, El Capitán, that the pace of dislocation from the plains and foothills accelerated and the Yukpa were forced into the high mountains (Alarcón et al. 2007). Following the establishment of El Capitán, other haciendas were carved out of Yukpa lands in a veritable land rush culminating in the 1970s, when only the highest reaches of the Perijá remained outside the fences and security controls of the hacendados. In 1961, a new constitution led to the establishment of the Reserva Indígena Toromo, a roughly 25-hectare sliver of land in the Atapshi river valley – roughly 0.5 per cent of the acreage granted to the García brothers in 1920. Influenced by the discourse of indigenismo in favour at the time, the first state schools were soon built in Toromo to ensure that the Yukpa would receive ‘proper education’ and assimilate into the Venezuelan state (Ruddle and Wilbert 1983).

During this period of retreat in the early to mid 20th century, Yukpa resistance continued through small and sometimes violent actions. A trope of violence would often emerge in memory performances, reflecting the essential continuity of the Yukpa struggles for their land (Marquez 2005; Ruddle and Wilbert 1983). These performances were often barely prompted by questions from me; they were rather, I would suggest, inspired by the negotiated inscription of culture that was taking place during the mapping project. As one example, during a pause in a mapping workshop, the young woman Jasmeli Gutierrez related the following about her grandfather:

My grandfather fought for this land. He would fight with the workers (on the haciendas) with his bow and arrow. … He would arrive at the hacienda with his arrow, but just to threaten them. The workers finally killed my grandfather, but they didn’t harm us (the rest of the family). In those days, we could not go into the hacienda. We were only allowed to walk on the road. (Parenthetical comments by author)
This memory of valiance in the face of foreign invaders was also invoked by Javier Peñaranda, on the day when Yukpa brought me to Yuk Otúpto and other locations to record GPS coordinates of their proposed boundary between Yukpa *habitat* and Machiques. Javier began to tell this story when we arrived at the southeastern point of their lands, on the banks of Rio Yapon at a site of memory called Kocha Oshirkatpo:

Our grandparents, our great-grandparents, used to live here at this point which we have come to rescue. There is a story that sits here, that people used to live here, but then the *watia* (Yukpa term for foreigner; non-indigenous person) came to shoot the Yukpa. The grandmother who lived here, who was named Kocha Oshirkatpo, she pretended to fall down dead, but she wasn’t dead. … This is why we have come to this point that history has left for us, now it will once again be Kocha Oshirkatpo, here.

Peñaranda’s story of violence and survival reflects, as does Peñaranda *Hijo*’s story of Yuk Otúpto, how intimately the speaking of the past is associated with the body of the speaker: in Peñaranda’s case, younger Yukpa who accompanied us on the expedition that day insisted that he, the respected elder, conduct this performance of memory, and not them. At the same time, this performance also reminds us of the intimate associations between the Yukpa body and the Yukpa landscape: this landscape was originally animated by the body of Kocha Oshirkatpo and now, through the memory work performed by Peñaranda, the site was made alive once again (cf. Fordred Green and Green 2003). This explains in part the insistence of Yukpa that we not only go to this site but that we also hear the *story* of this site: although this land is claimed by Yukpa, it was animated through the speaking of the past through the body of the elder, which had the effect of closing the connection between memory, body and landscape, and, importantly, encoding the land with memory through the speaking of its proper place name (Nakoa Oliveira 2009).

However, the trope of violence and survival in Yukpa memory-making is often accompanied by stories of treachery, which form another, recurring theme accompanying the memory of violence and survival. This memory of valiance in the face of foreign invaders was also invoked by Javier Peñaranda *Padre*, how intimately the speaking of the past is associated with the body of the speaker: in Peñaranda’s case, younger Yukpa who accompanied us on the expedition that day insisted that he, the respected elder, conduct this performance of memory, and not them. At the same time, this performance also reminds us of the intimate associations between the Yukpa body and the Yukpa landscape: this landscape was originally animated by the body of Kocha Oshirkatpo and now, through the memory work performed by Peñaranda, the site was made alive once again (cf. Fordred Green and Green 2003). This explains in part the insistence of Yukpa that we not only go to this site but that we also hear the *story* of this site: although this land is claimed by Yukpa, it was animated through the speaking of the past through the body of the elder, which had the effect of closing the connection between memory, body and landscape, and, importantly, encoding the land with memory through the speaking of its proper place name (Nakoa Oliveira 2009).

However, the trope of violence and survival in Yukpa memory-making is often accompanied by stories of treachery, which form another, recurring theme constitutive of Yukpa narrative identity, namely deceit. At the beginning of one mapping workshop at the home of Peñaranda *Padre*, he told us he wanted to share the following story before we started working. It was his performance of the memory of violence and loss in the face of land grabbing *hacendados*, but also of the treachery that in Yukpa memory accompanied their loss of territory:

When I was a boy, it was when the *watia* came to fund the hacienda Sierritta, that it happened that the *watia* killed two Yukpa. The Yukpa were outraged and they killed 15 *watia* in vengeance. They used just bows and poisoned arrows back then. Then, a (Yukpa) woman went to Hacienda Sierritta to talk with them. She brought crafts (*artesanía*). The *watia* explained that we shouldn’t kill white people. So the woman returned and brought that message to the Yukpa. The (Whites) would give tools and machetes to the Yukpa so that they could work the land. So, when I was young the *watia* was already threatening us. They were already occupying the land. Soon they came to Novito and Kusaren (high in the Sierra) and founded haciendas there. That happened when I was about 10 years old. … The White man brought cattle, clothes, gifts for the Yukpa, so then they couldn’t kill him. (Parenthetical comments by author)

So Peñaranda *Padre*, like Gutierrez, also invokes the symbol of the arrow to reproduce this memory of the Yukpa as warriors. But at the same time he also introduces the iconography of clothes, which were provided to the Yukpa so they literally could conceal their indigenousness. The theme of deceit, then, revolves around the awful tragedy of Yukpa’s naïve acceptance of these ‘gifts’, which brought with it a reluctant but inexorable rejection of their culture and identity: literally, an exchange of arrows for clothes. As Patricio Borquez said during one of the workshops:

They (the Yukpa) sold their land for salt, they sold it for sugar, they sold it for rice. So this land belongs to us. There are Atancha (ancestors) buried here. We say, ‘here were our grandparents’. So now we are rescuing our land.

But the trope of deceit is multifaceted and not simply a reflection of a singular, collective narrative identity. Instead, stories that invoke the deceit of the *watia* are sometimes articulated with another, principal trope, namely that of isolation. Deployments of the trope of isolation are informed by inequities resulting from the dislocation of Yukpa from the Maracaibo plains during the colonial and early Republican period, when a settlement pattern was solidified that still exists, to a more limited degree, today. Family groups would occupy separate river valleys and communication between them would be limited by the rugged terrain, to the extent that violent conflicts would erupt over rights to hunting and shifting agriculture (Halbmayer 2001; Marquez 2005; Ruddle and Wilbert 1983; Vargas *et al.* 2005). Still today, Yukpa sub-divide their territory for purposes of internal administration into sectors corresponding with river systems, including (from north to south) Tinacoa, Aroy, Sirapta, Toromo, Yaza and Tokuku. (Ruddle and Wilbert [1983] recognise eight ‘sub-tribes’ of Yukpa; again, grouped in river valleys from north to south.)

This separation between river basins was also accompanied by a vertical differentiation, i.e. increasing, geographic divisions within and between family groups in terms of elevation in the Sierra de Perijá (Ruddle and Wilbert 1983). As Yukpa were forced to retreat from the plains, some families would move higher into the upper reaches of the mountain range, where they would adapt their shifting cultivation, hunting, fishing and gathering systems to cope with a
more temperate vegetation regime, including cultivation of *malanga* and hunting of deer. Other family groups would remain in lower elevations, where they increasingly gathered in extended family groups and exploited fish in the lower reaches of the rivers Yapon and Yaza and cultivated corn and increasingly coffee (cf. Ruddle 1974; Ruddle and Wilbert 1983). As indigenisation intensified in the 20th century, schools and roads were built largely in the foothills, benefiting Yukpa who lived in lower elevations more than those in remote communities in the hard-to-reach higher elevations (Ruddle and Wilbert 1983). Even today, communities like Manastara can only be reached after an entire day by mule up steep, rocky and slippery trails, and there is no electricity or running water.

As a result of the building of an access road and schools in Toromo, this settlement attracted Yukpa from surrounding areas and rapidly became by far the largest Yukpa community, with a population of approximately 1000 compared with merely dozens in the outlying communities. Today, this vertical differentiation is accompanied by a clear social stratification. Yukpa in remote communities have, on a whole, less education and lower income than those in Toromo; they are much less likely to speak Spanish; and they are less likely to participate in autochthonous planning processes or in engagements with outsiders.

However, this historical pattern is rapidly and curiously rapidly becoming inverted. It was almost exclusively residents of mountain communities who were responsible for the occupation of the dozen or so haciendas during the 2000s and early 2010s. This has resulted in a rapid change in the settlement pattern and begun to shift Yukpa decisionmaking power into the new communities lining the road from Toromo east to Yuk Otúto. Today, the plains remains a land of cattle ranches, but it is also a place of hastily erected zinc-roofed shelters, kitchen fires flickering in abandoned cattle pens and hammocks hanging from rafters in abandoned and roofless ranch homes; at the entrance to occupied haciendas where Yukpa were once denied entrance, shakily painted signs on weathered wood announce the names of brand-new indigenous communities.

Residents in these new communities tended to perform slightly different memory performances as they recollected these experiences, reproducing the trope of isolation but also framing their struggles to rescue the haciendas within the tropes of violence and deceit. During mapping workshops and conversations about the demarcation efforts, residents of these young communities would reflect on their difficult, previous lives in the mountain communities. For example, Siro Landino, the founder of the new community of Atapó located on the former Hacienda Medellin, said in one of the workshops:

> We lived in Koropo before we moved here. About 60 of us moved here. There are still 36 residents left in Koropo. We moved because of the difficult situation there, and the people who still live there still suffer. There is no road. Organisations never visit the community… If one gets sick in Koropo, one dies. It is really horrible.

At the same time, however, the trope of isolation was often accompanied by stories of personal costs incurred as they rescued their ancestral territory, thus reframing the trope of violence of the Republican era. Edixo Landino, the *cacique* of the new community of Jararamú, located amid the abandoned houses of Hacienda Medellín, would often tell me about the sacrifices they made during the early days of the occupation and he would insist that this new community, and the cultural regeneration he felt it represented, be inscribed in the map. On the first day of occupation, he and his extended family arrived on the hacienda, bringing only machetes, a few tools, cooking utensils and some clothes, and quickly erected rough sheds with palm roofs. They were immediately threatened by the *hacendado* and the National Guard, but they prevailed, ‘fighting like warriors for two years, to recover this land that belonged to our ancestors’. Similarly, the young woman Yolaida Suarez, a resident of the new community of Shuatta located in the former, neighbouring hacienda of Maracay, told me in summer of 2010 as we were walking along the road and discussing the participatory mapping project:

> I was born in Shirimi (a half-day climb from Toromo) but I haven’t been there in 5–6 years. It was very hard to live there. I am scared of walking up there now. So we moved down here in 2000. First we lived just west of where the main buildings of Maracay still stand. The National Guard soldiers came and threatened us. Our men had bows and arrows. The Guardia yelled at us and threatened us. Luckily no one was killed. No one was even hurt. So they said we could stay, but that we have to live right there, and not live anywhere else on the hacienda. Then in 2003 we decided to spread out, we formed more little communities throughout the hacienda. But the owner still had people watching over the houses where Shuatta now stands. We didn’t kick them out until early this year (2010). That’s when they finally left. (Parenthetical comments by author)

Thus memory performances of violence and isolation were informed and shaped by recent experiences, and in turn, these experiences were transformed through storytelling to give them meaning. Action was given meaning through its articulation with landscape, which in turn was embodied by the lives of ancestors and reanimated through the actions of ‘warriors’ such as Yolaida Suarez and Edixo Landino. Still, if we recognise that the arts of memory are intensely political, memory can also animate internal debates and tensions, which, in turn, are brought to the fore through the negotiated process of inscription of culture in maps.
In the case of the Sierra de Perijá, as residents of mountain communities occupied haciendas in the plains, they in effect leapfrogged over Toromo, a community they see as historically privileged. As Daisy Peñaranda, a school teacher in Toromo, said:

Yes, there is a division between those below (occupants of the former haciendas) and us. They say that state projects and works have only come to Toromo; that we have taken advantage of the services of the state. But the thing is, it is we who have had leaders, not them. We have worked.

On the other hand, while Toromo has undergone a rapid process of acculturation because of the intense indigenisation policies of the 20th century, social change has been slower in remote communities. As a result of their isolation and exclusion from state services, the ‘occupiers’ of the hacienda hailimg from these remote ramales see this as an opportunity to represent themselves as the inheritors of original Yukpa culture: as Edixo Landino said, ‘here is where we have the real Yukpa culture, here in Jararamú; not in Toromo’.

However, Yukpa in the still-privileged community in Toromo will draw on the trope of deceit to, as Edixo Landino would say, attempt to gain control of the emerging communities in the abandoned haciendas – or, as residents of Toromo would say, safeguard the gains made in the occupy movement. The concerns voiced by residents in Toromo stem from the action of some caciques of the new communities, who, suddenly in need of extra cash to feed their family with store-bought food instead of subsistence crops, have ‘sold’ lots of the occupied ranches in often ill-advised transactions. As Cecilia Romero said,

as soon as they invaded the hacienda (Medellín) … they started selling land. Now (the new communities are) just small parcels surrounded by watia and Wayuu. … We might as well have left the hacendado here. We lost most of the land anyway.

And in the words of Peñaranda Hijo, this is history repeating itself.

Just like in the past, they (White people) offered a little bit of money to the Yukpa to ‘buy’ land. Yukpa was drunk, he accepted the money, and the next day the fence was up. Yukpa don’t understand the value of money.

Thus the story of these land sales is infused with the trope of deceit and framed and given meaning through memory of similar treachery in the past.

Discussion

In this essay I have attempted to reconceptualise the potential for action through participatory mapping by shifting attention away from maps as product for instrumental ends to mapping as contextual, social process. I propose that participatory mapping carries a potential for radical memory work, especially when such mapping projects are situated within broader, autochthonous projects of claims-making and cultural recovery. While these performances did not occur simply because of the project discussed here, I have sought to illuminate the confluence of the making of memory, identity and landscape that accompanied and perhaps was amplified by these anxious (Cosgrove 1999) acts of map-making. In so doing, I have conceptualised memory as a performative practice (Connerton 1989; della Dora 2008), an ‘arts’ that operates in and through the body of the speaker of memory (Crang and Travlou 2001). By extending this notion of memory work and drawing on Ricoeur’s concept of narrative identity, I have suggested that the memory performances that accompanied the map-making project fundamentally articulated with contested re-productions of indigenous identities. Thus the inherently contested and contingent construction of maps that takes place in participatory mapping processes, such as the one discussed here, represents a form of simultaneous, symbolic mediation (Ricoeur 2000) of landscape and identity.

However, at the same time I have cautioned that if such projects are approached without a critical understanding of political context and social relations, they run the risk of reproducing or rearticulating uneven relations of power and imposing Cartesian conceptions of space on indigenous landscapes. This is because maps are powerful rhetorical objects: through their claims to mimesis, accuracy and precision, maps tend to obscure the interests of their creators and their hegemonic roles in ordering the world and ultimately shaping our very identities. But conversely, this rhetorical power can potentially be put to good use by indigenous people and their collaborators in documenting and claiming rights to lands and territories lost; that is to say, although memory performances that emerge in participatory mapping projects give meaning to landscapes, these landscapes are not merely socially constructed. They also constitute terrains where real, violent struggles are grounded (Schäuble 2011). If memories are indeed being inscribed through the anxious performances of map-making, it is essential to recall that what is at stake, here in the foothills of the Perijá and in other indigenous lands, is the right to control not only cultural but also material productions of landscape.

So as Yukpa slowly rescue one hacienda after another in their slow advance into lands they lost not so long ago, they construct their own geographies on top of that of the watia. As these material geographies grind and clash, this landscape remains an on-going story: a landscape that is material but also symbolic, a landscape that is always becoming but always, also, of the past. As I lived and worked with the Yukpa in
Toromo, I came to understand that memory profoundly framed and informed their imaginaries, but also their strategies and their actions. Peñaranda Hijos’s storytelling at Yuk Otúto did matter.

That day at the entrance to the hacienda Rincon, Peñaranda Hijos was reproducing an indigenous landscape through his act of remembrance (Ingold 1993) and in so doing, he was using the past to further Yukpa’s quests for identity (Sutton 2008) and to make sense of the present (Fordred Green and Green 2003). But his memory performance also constituted a resource for action. A few weeks later, the hacienda would see a violent confrontation between Yukpa and ranch hands, when an advance party of Yukpa, including Peñaranda Hijos, occupied the hacienda and eventually succeeded in pressuring the hacendado to vacate the land. So Yuk Otúto does remain: it is a place of weeds and gravel and asphalt, but it is also a symbolic landscape invested with memory through the narrative and the body of Peñaranda Hijos. For beyond the story itself, what also mattered was the way in which it was performed, where and especially by whom. Through his act of remembrance, Peñaranda Hijos was not only producing the landscape through narrative but also reproducing what it meant to be Yukpa.

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Notes

1 Jesús Peñaranda Hijos (Son) is so known to distinguish from his father by the same name, Jesús Peñaranda Padre (Father).

2 The technical team included Jesús Peñaranda Padre, Jesús Peñaranda Hijos, Isabel Cruz Romero, Edixo Landino Borke, Francisco Romero, Sandra María Peñaranda, Fulgencio Mindiola, Patricio Borke, Daisy Peñaranda, Javier Peñaranda, Jesús Romero, José Vilchez. The digitising and design was completed by Karen Banks and myself in the computer laboratory of The University of Texas School of Architecture.

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