
# Indigenous Autonomy in Contemporary Colombia and Implications for the Return of Ethnographic Material[4]

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This paper analyzes my on-going project of the return of ethnographic material in the context of the cultural and ethno-educational projects developed by the Siona people in response to Colombia's indigenous policy. I conducted my major fieldwork in the 1970s, recording over 150 narratives in Siona language. I returned several times to the Putumayo until 1992 when the region became the center of armed violence. Since 2012 I have been involved in the return of ethnographic material, focusing on the native texts and their potential contribution to the language revitalization project proposed by the *Asociación de los Cabildos del Pueblo Siona*/ACIPS, the pan-Siona indigenous organization. As could be expected, the economic, environmental and social context has altered beyond imagination over the last five decades, and the Siona struggle to survive, physically and ethnically in a region that has been permeated by armed violence and characterized as a "war-zone" (Maybury-Lewis 2002; Ramírez 2002; 2011). Their communities and their political organization have been involved in a complex field of negotiations with the State, non-governmental organizations, extractive industries and diverse armed groups (paramilitaries, drug traffickers, military and guerrillas). In particular, cultural revitalization projects have been key in negotiations with the State and NGOs, not only for the guarantee of rights and autonomy as an indigenous people in Colombia today, but also for economic productivity. This paper reflects upon the reception of the return of ethnographic material in the light of their efforts to develop such projects aimed to ensure their ethnic and physical survival.

When I initiated my doctoral research with the Siona of the Buenavista indigenous reserve on the Putumayo River in 1970, they appeared to be a process of assimilation as they integrated into the

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local economy. Petroleum extraction in the region began in the 1960s and was bringing important changes with the completion of the road from the Andean city of Pasto to Puerto Asis on the Putumayo River. Mestizos were flooding in from the highlands and spreading up and down the Putumayo river, invading Siona territory and surrounding their settlements. The last shaman leader, *cacique curaca*, had died in the 1960s and none of the elders felt capable to lead the communal *yajé* (*Banisteriopsis* sp., *ayahuasca*) rituals that enacted their relations with the natural and invisible worlds. Along with the rituals, language, traditional dress, and material culture were being abandoned, as the Siona formed diverse social and economic relations with their non-indigenous neighbors.

My doctoral research centered on the shaman's role in serious misfortune and translation of complex concepts and notions of shamanic cosmology (Langdon 2014). Although most Siona were bilingual, their worldview and logic were not translatable into Spanish. As a result, I undertook learning the language in order to understand their discourse and interpretations of critical events and serious illness. During three years, I dedicated half of my time to recording, transcribing and translating narratives, and the other half in visits to households to accompany ongoing illnesses. The narratives proved to be extremely rich for the transmission of knowledge about the shamanic world as well as for revealing poetical features of oral performance (see for example Langdon 2013). Because of my extended work on the texts, the elders with whom I worked came to understand my interests, and we developed a true dialogic relation as they initiated and guided the sequence of narrations that became the basis of our discussions. Not only was I told mythical and historical narratives about shamans, but also personal experiences of shamanic apprenticeship, journeys to other realms of the universe, dreams, and illnesses caused by sorcery. In addition, a young Siona, Felinto Piaguaje, who had learned to write his language and recorded over 40 tales from the elders in the 1960s (Mallol de Recasens 1963; Mallol de Recasens and Recasens 1964-5), shared his texts with me. With great nostalgia, his narrators described times when the cacique *curaca* guided them and organized festivities and rituals with hunting, fishing, and change of the different seasons.

The 1970s was a period in which Indians in Colombia were characterized as ignorant savages and a sign of an uncivilized past (Pineda Camacho 2010). Their rights were not recognized by the State, and they suffered from various forms of discrimination (Chaves Chamorro 2002, 2003). The Siona were well aware of their low status, and often claimed that, as Indians, they received lower

prices in Puerto Asis for the sale of their crops. The youth told me that they were ashamed to speak their language. Certainly the status of the Indian at the time was one of the reasons that they attempted to blend into the local *campesino* culture.

With the exploration of petroleum and change in demographic patterns, the Siona had become a minority in their ancestral territory. Their population was drastically reduced in the initial part of the 20th Century due to epidemics, and by 1970, the some 300 remaining Siona were dispersed along the Putumayo River in small settlements of families intermingled with or surrounded by colonist neighbors. Buenavista was the largest community in 1970, with 22 families numbering approximately 140 individuals. In the late 1960s, the first Siona governor along with the Summer Institute of Linguistics' missionary negotiated with the Office of Indian Affairs to make Buenavista a *resguardo*, or indigenous reserve. The political organization was organized under the governor and secretary; both positions were elected by the community and received salaries from the Colombian government.

Because of its reserve status, Buenavista represented an important refuge for the Siona in the face of the colonists' growing domination along the river. However, with the increasing integration into the local economy and the abandonment of language, shamanic rituals and other traditional practices, I predicted that the Siona would soon disappear into the mestizo society when I left in 1974.[6] I did not foresee the extraordinary revitalization of ethnic identity and shamanism in the 1990s. Siona shamanism has not only revived within the regional *curanderismo* networks composed of mestizo and indigenous shamans serving as healers in Colombia's popular medical system, but is highly visible on the national and global level as part of the association of the "ecological Indian" with Indigenous movements (Ulloa 2005; Conklin and Graham 1995) and neo-shamanic circuits that have grown over the last three decades (Caicedo Fernández 2010, 2013; Langdon 2012). Neo-shamanic interests and State discourse on the value of indigenous culture, ecological wisdom and spirituality combine to influence the revival of shamanism, and, the shaman has become the primary

6 Before I left Colômbia in 1974, I gave to the Instituto Colombiano de Antropologia e Historia copies of all the recordings of the narratives as well as Siona produced baskets, ceramics, shamanic implements and other materials that had been given to me. My search for this material in 2012-2013 with the responsable authorities indicates that the tape recordings have been lost or misplaced along with a number of the artefacts. Pictures of a few that I donated can be seen at https://coleccionetnograficaicanh.wordpress.com/category/etnia-siona/

expression of performance of cultural distinctiveness for the Siona. Shamanic performances are once again part of the secular as well as the spiritual well being of the group (Langdon 2016).

Although cocaine and guerilla activities began in the late 1970s in the region, the 1990s was marked by increased cocaine production and a new wave of immigrants. The decade was the most violent, as new actors arrived to dispute control of the region, among them paramilitaries and drug lords from Medellin and Cali. Guerillas, controlling much of the region in the 1990s became known as a "third drug cartel" (Ramírez 2011: 54) and managed to hinder expansion of petroleum extraction, particularly on the Putumayo below Puerto Asis around the remaining Siona communities. With coca production diminishing in Bolivia and Peru because of US intervention, Colombia became the largest producer by 2000, and coca cultivation was criminalized and violently repressed (Ramírez 2011:56). The Indigenous populations were caught in the crossfire, suffering violence and assassinations from all sides as well as irreparable environmental degradation, bombings and landmines in their territories (Corte Constitucional 2009). In 1994, areal fumigation of coca plantations with the toxic herbicide glyphosate began and increased significantly during the next 10 years. It was an important strategy of the Plan Colombia implemented in 1999, originally defined as a policy of investment for social development, deactivation of violence and the construction of peace. However, it became a counterinsurgency strategy in which fumigation was central to efforts to drive out the guerillas and take control of the region so that petroleum extraction could progress. In spite of the adverse health and environmental impacts, spraying has continued until the present, including the fumigation of indigenous *resguardos* or reserves. In the face of this violence, Siona families began to migrate in the late 1990s to the urban areas of Puerto Asis and Mocoa, living in conditions of poverty, without adequate sanitation or health services (ACNUR 2006).

The situation in the Putumayo remains critical, in spite of data indicating the reduction of coca production and the peach accord reached between the guerillas and the State. In 2009, Siona were declared physically and culturally endangered because of the violence and displacement (Auto 004 of the Corte Constitucional (2009). However, the Siona are surviving and have grown as a political force due to the Constitution of 1991. The Constitution recognizes the pluriethnic and multicultural character of the State, granting indigenous peoples increased rights and autonomy. It confirms collective ownership of indigenous territories, called *resguardos*, with the right to use them as they

see fit, including prior informed consent for development projects proposed for their lands.[7] In addition, the Constitution recognizes the *cabildo* as the form of indigenous governance, and a group of Indians may request the formation of a *cabildo* independent of association with a particular *resguardo*.

In comparison to the one existing reserve in 1970, today there are six Siona resguardos and 12 *cabildos*. The most recent census reports a total of 2,578 Siona (ACIPS 2012a:40). This growth is not due to increased birthrate, but to the "re-ethnization" process among *mestizos* in the region in the face of the heightened status of the indigenous peoples (Chaves Chamorro 2002, 2003). While in 1970 *mestizo* identity received higher status than that of the indigenous, the new constitution has caused a reversal, and many people are rediscovering and identifying with their indigenous roots. Buenavista has grown from the 22 families in 1970 to 161 (ACIPS 2012a:40). Although the original families of Buenavista internally distinguish between themselves as ancestral occupants of their territory and the "recently arrived", the identification of the newcomers as Siona is an important political strategy for the group. Two of the most recent *cabildos* are found in Puerto Asis and Mocoa, created by displaced families because of the violence and environmental destruction.[8] Some 28 families live in Mocoa and another 45 in Puerto Asis (ACIPS 2012a:40). They have not lost ties with their home territories, and there is constant movement between the indigenous rural communities and urban areas (Musalem 2015).

The Constitution gives a positive value to indigenous identity not seen before in State documents and associates it with the ecological Indian:

> ….. the new Constitution recognized the native's territorial difference and autonomy relying largely on their role as keepers of the ancestral knowledge that allows the continuity of the biological diversity contained within their territories. *Los territorios indígenas* (indigenous territories) were finally

7 Contradictorily, this does not include sub-soil resources, which belong to the government.

8 For instance, in 2013 the guerrillas broke an accord they had with the Siona of Buenavista and invaded the resguardo, forcing several families to flee to Mocoa and Puerto Asis.

> recognized as the spaces of custom and tradition but also of preserved 'ecological places'. (Carrizosa 2015:24)

These rights are based on the success of demonstrating cultural distinctiveness in the form of customs and practices (Jackson 2007; Graham 2014). Several scholars of the indigenous rights movement have observed that in Colombia, as well as other countries, Indians must be recognized as different in order to become citizens with ethnic rights (Ulloa, 2005). Gros (1998) has defined this situation the "paradox of Indian identity". Indigenous peoples must claim a collective identity expressing cultural differences based on unique tradition, law, language, collective territory and particular relations with the environment. In this sense, "claiming and successfully securing these rights requires a performance on the part of Colombian pueblos that powerfully indexes such isolation and marginality, geographical and otherwise, …." (Jackson 2007: 210). As Chaves Chamorro observes (2003:122), indigenous identity has become associated with a set of fixed traits, customs, practices and meanings, and shamanism has emerged as a central expression.

During the 1980s, when Indigenous groups in Colombia were organizing and gaining force in national politics, there was concomitant growth of interest in shamanic powers among urban professional groups. Amazonian shamans were particularly valued for their great wisdom and knowledge and began to lead yajé rituals, or "*tomas de yajé*", organized by psychologists or others for urban middle class professionals in the highland cities (Caicedo Fernández 2009, 2013). Shamanic networks between lowland Indigenous shamans with non-indigenous groups began to grow and the demand for their participation, as well as provision of the substance yajé, increased throughout the country. By the early 1990s, several Siona elders were responded to this opportunity, reviving yajé rituals and establishing alliances in major cities such as Bogotá, Cali, Medellin and Pasto. In the late 1990s, the Unión de Médicos Indígenas Yageceros de Colombia/UMIYAC was founded as a result of a meeting organized by the NGO Amazonian Conservation Team and a Quichua indigenous organization that gathered together the shamans of the regional ethnic groups (UMIYAC 1999). Several Siona shamans participated and since then, through their association with UMIYAC, have not only travelled throughout Colombia, but also to Spain, Brazil, Canada and other countries to conduct yajé ceremonies. Not only have these networks resulted in national and international

recognition, but they also generate financial gain and have come to represent an important source of individual income.

**Cultural and Educational Projects and Return of Ethnographic Material**:

Although the 1991 Constitution is considered to be one of the most advanced in Latin American, granting "collective rights" for "collective subjects" for indigenous peoples and giving specific rights to land, education, health, culture, jurisdictional autonomy and language (Jimeno 2012), indigenous organizations and communities must seek external financial resources in order to secure their rights and goals. One step for this has been for indigenous groups to construct *Life Plans* (*Planes de Vida*), a policy of community development proposed by the National Organization of Colombian Indians (ONIC) in the late 1990s. These plans have been instituted as a participatory strategy for indigenous communities to express their demands regarding their constitutional rights, and they are considered to represent the collective, unified and political position of the group (Carrizosa 2015: 15). With the aid of external consultants, they are constructed through a participatory process of community reflection and identification of cultural goals. These goals then become the basis for the development of specific projects submitted for governmental and non-governmental funding.

In 2003, the pan-Siona association ACIPS, with headquarters in Mocoa, was recognized by the Minister of Interior (ACIPS 2014). Its primary goals are those of promoting culture, values and traditional norms and representing the interests of the communities whose *cabildos* belong to the Association. It serves as an important mediator between communities, the government and NGOs, and its survival is dependent upon the harnessing of funding. Since its beginning, ACIPS has gained resources for a number of projects, initiating with the first *Life Plan* (Portela, et. al 2003), financed under the Plan Nacional de Rehabilitación – PNR in an agreement with the University of Cauca. Subsequent projects funded by national and international agencies have aimed to revitalize traditional agriculture practices, food habits, family and community organization, indigenous leaders, and ethnoeducation (ACIPS 2014).

The Life Plan outlines seven "pillars of community well-being": traditional medicine, native language, subsistence, territory, environment, collective control, and thought (*pensamiento*) (Portella,

et. al 2003). Although the *cabildos* are governed by an elected group of officers led by a governor (*governador*, *alcalde mayor*, *aguaciles*, treasurer, *fiscal*), shamans are recognized as traditional authorities and responsible for the group's well-being. Following the popular neo-shamanic designation for lowland shamans who conduct *yajé* ceremonies, they are called *taitas,* however, the role attributed to them in the *Life Plan* draws upon the traditional role of *cacique curaca* as protector of Siona communities and association between shamanic practices, Siona thought and management of the environment and territory.

The presence of shamans in decision-making processes and development projects is central to their negotiations within the communities as well as with outside agencies. The ACIPS is led by a President with a powerful and respected *taita* father-in-law, who participates in meetings with *cabildo* representatives as well as with governmental and non-governmental representatives. He often conducts *yajé* ceremonies for these officials once the formal meetings are over. The coordinated action between the President of ACIPS and his father-in-law demonstrates the way in which shamans play a political role as spiritual authorities and protectors of the community. As traditional authorities, they are given an important voice in community meetings, particularly those that are organized by ACIPS, and they conduct *yajé* rituals following the meetings to continue the discussions and deliberations.

Revitalization of the language and narrative performance has been given priority in both the *Plan de Vida* and the subsequent *Diagnostic Rescue Plan* (*Diagnostico Plan Salvaguarda*), financed by the Minister of Interior as a result of the Constitutional Court's verdict that the group's physical and cultural survival is endangered (2009). Both plans have also been the justification for the ethno-education projects developed by ACIPS, and the elders and *taitas*, who still speak the mother tongue, have an important role as repositories of memory and culture. Oral narrations in Siona language are highly valued as manifestations of their culture and thought. Felinto Piaguaje, now a *taita*, was designated as *Agente Comunitario Bilingue* in the first Ethnoeducational Project and placed in charge of organizing narrative material. The project's coordinator, Felinto and other *taitas* visited Siona communities in 2010, promoting the importance of language and culture, filming elders' oral narrations and conducting yajé ceremonies. A video documentary produced in 2012 demonstrates the

importance of the relation between shamanic rituals, *yajé*, language, culture and ethno-education (ACIPS 2012b).

In 2011-12, the *Diagnóstico Plan Salvaguarda*, coordinated by the educational consultant, continued the same strategy of community visits and discussions culminating in *yajé* rituals. This was followed by two short projects in 2012 and 2013 dedicated to the development of a curriculum model tailored for their own culture and needs and funded by the Minister of Education. Lasting three and four months respectively, they resulted in the formulation of the first draft of two cycles of the educational process focusing on the concepts of territory and language.

In interview with the educational consultant in 2014, it is evident that the ethno-educational project has bogged down and a curriculum design intended to fit the needs of the Siona has not been implemented. She complained that the financing from the Minister of Education has been too little and too irregular to give continuity to what they have begun. They submitted no more projects requesting funds from the Minister of Education after 2013, when the consultant left the Putumayo for other employment. The development of didactic material remains an unresolved challenge and the many hours of filming elders narrating in Siona language by the ethno-educational project have not been edited for distribution to the schools. A few narratives were published in the *Diagnóstico Plan Salvaguarda* (ACIPS 2012a), and have been employed by some of the schoolteachers, but there is no other evidence of ongoing preparation of culturally specific didactic material. The Vice-President of ACIPS, who also is the director of education, indicates the need for material, as do the professors, but no new projects have been designed. About half of the schoolteachers, hired by the municipality, are young Siona. None speak the language. Two older men, who speak but don't write, have been hired by ACIPS and circulate between the Siona communities attempting to introduce basic notions of the language.

It is within this context that I initiated the return of ethnographic texts that are an extremely rich source of information about shamanic cosmology, rituals, apprenticeship and ethnohistory. It had been my goal 25 years earlier to begin this work with Felinto Piaguaje, helping him to organize and

publish texts he had registered from the elders in the 1960s.[9] However, this plan was interrupted with the violence of the 1990s. In 2012, I reestablished contact with him and we spent a week in Popayan working on his texts that I had digitized in the 1990s. We managed to finish about 10 translations, and he returned to Buenavista with the printed texts and also all the archives on a USB flash drive, agreeing to continue the work during my next visit in 5 months. It was through Felinto that I learned the details of the ethno-educational project and his role as *taita* and elder in charge of developing didactic material. When I returned in 2013, I travelled to the Putumayo to meet with the ACIPS president and visit my Siona friends who had migrated to Puerto Asis and Mocoa. Felinto was involved in activities with outside educational consultants and had no time to work with me. Sadly, he suffered a major stroke a few months later, affecting his memory seriously.

In 2012, the Archives of Traditional Music of Indiana University digitized the original recordings for me, and during the visit of 2013 I returned copies of the tapes I had recorded in the 1970s. The President of ACIPS received a copy of all of them, and the descendants of the narrators received a CD with narrations by their parents or grandparents. Later that year, through Pedro Musalem, my doctoral student working with the Siona, we distributed USB players that run on batteries along with the narratives on USB flash drives to the bi-lingual *taitas* involved in the revitalization project.

It was evident to me that my ethnographic material is extremely relevant to the project of cultural and language revitalization proposed by ACIPS and its ethno-educational project. However, I hoped that they could define how it could be used once becoming sufficiently familiar with its contents, enabling them to envision possibilities of incorporating it in their project and other activities organized by the *taitas*. In 2014, I gained a small grant from Brazil to finance a workshop for bilingual elders and Siona teachers from several communities along the river. With the aid of my doctoral student and ACIPS director of education, we organized a meeting in Mocoa, paying for the travel expenses of those invited, and the meetings also included other Siona who were interested in participating. Felinto was the honored participant, and we also had the presence of three other

9 My intention was to aide in a publication with him as author and in honor of the linguist professor, Casas Manrique, who taught him to write.

renowned *taitas*. The workshop was conducted by José Francisco (Pacheco) Piaguaje, Felinto's younger brother and a Siona language specialist with training in ethnolinguistics. For two days, we reviewed four of Felinto's texts, painstakingly looking at the Siona orthography and translating into Spanish. The participants were animated and dedicated and raised several issues central to transcription and transmission of language: how to deal with different dialects in the orthography, cultural relevance of the texts, their use as didactic material and possible other activities. The younger teachers talked a lot about the importance of having Siona texts for their students, the importance of the elders for teaching the language and the need for financial support to transport the elders to different villages for this purpose as well as to purchase video and recording equipment, so that they could do their own research with the elders. The participants received printed copies of what we had worked on as well as digital copies of all of Felinto's texts and my revised thesis that has just been published in Spanish (Langdon 2014). The workshop was filmed for purposes of producing a video.[10]

In an effort to continue exposure to the material for its relevance to their educational and cultural projects, we collaborated in the construction of two other projects that were responses to a call for language revitalization funded by the Minister of Culture for endangered languages. The first was initiated by an anthropologist consultant of ACIPS and aided by Pedro Musalem, following a strategy suggested by the education consultant that involved periods of residence of younger teachers with bilingual elders. The idea was to fund the residence of selected teachers with Pacheco Piaguaje living in Nuevo Amanecer, the multi-ethnic indigenous community on the periphery of Puerto Asis. However, ACIPS negated its support for either project, claiming that the resources for funding the projects, $10,000 (US), were too low for the organization's current needs. The President affirmed in a meeting with us that they were only interested in projects above $25,000. In the end, the proposal was submitted with sponsorship of Nuevo Amanecer, and not ACIPS. After its approval, Nuevo Amanecer leaders refused to allow the funds to be used to finance Siona teachers from other communities. We had hoped that Felinto's texts would be the basis of the material used, but material developed by Pacheco was used, consisting primarily of reading and writing vocabulary lists to

10 Expenses for the event and video production were funded by the Institute for Research: Brazil Plural, funded by the National Institute of Research and Technology program of CNPq (Process 573716/2008-0).

children and interested adults. The second, proposed in 2015 in partnership with the University of Cauca and again with the approval of Nuevo Amanecer, was disqualified by the Minister of Culture for lack of additional documentation that was requested via telephone some months after submission of the required documents.

In 2015, I returned to the Putumayo to distribute the film made of the 2014 workshop in Mocoa in hopes to discover new directions in which the Siona texts could possibly be useful.[11] It was my hope that ACIPS would agree to a public showing in Mocoa, and I contacted both the President and the Educational Director. As normal for indigenous leadership today, the President's agenda was already full with trips and other matters. We met briefly at a juice bar on the day I arrived, along with his father-in-law *taita* and Hugo Portela, the anthropologist who collaborated with the first *Plan de Vida*. Later I individually showed the film in the *taita's* house with a few family members, and subsequently to another participant, the son of an important *taita* who had played an important role in the workshop. We agreed to meet again, but his activities as healer and up and coming *taita* interfered with our second meeting.

Hugo and I also journeyed to Puerto Asis to meet with ACIPS director of education and the bilingual teacher of Nuevo Amanecer. Our meeting with the ACIPS director of education included the Siona teacher in charge of the schools in the rural *cabildos*. I gave them copies of the film for them to distribute to the teachers who had participated. We spent about an hour with them, time to watch the film and listen to criticisms of the education consultant and lack of a curriculum. They reaffirmed the need for didactic material, but had no time for more discussion and left for other meetings. The film was more positively received when we visited the Nuevo Amanecer. Those of the community who had participated in the workshop along with interested others gathered at Pacheco's house to watch the movie. After the movie Pacheco showed us the educational booklets that he was producing and we began talking about the workshop. However, a white snake, signaling misfortune, passed through the middle of the group, interrupting the discussion that we began after showing the

11 Taller de bain coca con el Pueblo Siona del Putumayo, Documentary by Alan Stone Langdon and Esther Jean Langdon, as part of the Project Documentation, Translation and Linguistic Revitalization: Narratives in Bain Coca. Financed by CNPq and National Institute of Research: Brazil Plural.

movie. The snake's entrance in the circle of participants became the center of an intense discussion as to why it has passed in the middle of those present.

**Final comments: Reflections on projects, collaboration and survival**

It is impossible to assess the future of my proposed collaboration and its interface with the Siona's projects, objectives and desires. Collaboration is not new to my work. During my fieldwork, I collaborated with the Siona's requests to serve as their first schoolteacher, village photographer and transporter of market goods, not to mention accepting the responsibilities of godparent to several children. I never would have imagined that my short period as schoolteacher would be central to the welcome reception I received with my return of ethnographic material in the form of photos and recordings. The workshop in 2014 was a stimulating and promising event, involving both the young as well as my old friends and former students. The Siona have demonstrated great appreciation for the material as evidence their culture, but it is obvious that ACIPS, as an organization, and the *taitas* and leaders, as individuals, have different needs and agendas that influence the potential of the material.

Environmental degradation, fumigations, land mines and displacement to urban areas, have created a situation of increasing monetary dependence for most Siona, whether in rural or urban areas. Individuals resolve this in a number of ways. Coca production in the rural areas has been one solution for economic survival. Lack of opportunity may be one reason behind the enlistment of the youth in the guerrilla forces (ACNUR 2006). *Taitas* benefit from shamanism as symbolic capital. The group is well known for its shamanic knowledge and production of *yajé*, and most taitas have alliances with groups in the highlands, where they lead rituals and supply *yajé*. Participation in New-Age circuits provides an important source of income for the *taitas* as individuals. Expectations of commercial gain through these new alliances have contributed to increased mistrust, conflicts and rivalries between individual *taitas*.

Culture and shamanism are also symbolic capital for the collective group, as witnessed by the foundation of ACIPS for the defense of Siona culture and territory and with the shamans as traditional authorities. As Albert (2001) has observed for Brazil, indigenous organizations today have risen out of the need to capture external sources of economic support in the form of projects that fund territorial

management, organization of assemblies or encounters, health and education programs and their own institutional survival. Jimeno (2012) has argued that for Colombia, the guarantee of autonomy and indigenous rights depends upon the indigenous organizations' capacity for harnessing external resources through projects. After almost 15 years, ACIPS has developed in political sophistication in the course of developing projects that sustain its goals for the collective good and its own survival. It is a new form of political organization for the Siona, one that strives to unite the dispersed *cabildos* with a pan-Siona unity that did not exist historically, when the political process was fueled by alliances and conflicts between shamanic leaders. As shown by a recent dispute over authority to represent Siona communities in prior informed consent projects with the petroleum companies, I suspect that economic factors play a role in a community's acceptance of ACIPS' authority.

Factionalism and mistrust between communities and individuals have increased due to the violence, armed conflict, extractive activities in the area and the diversity of interests and actors with whom the Siona must negotiate contradictory alliances in order to survive. ACIPS is not immune to these conflicts and rivalries and acceptance of its authority is not automatic. During the time that we were attempting to gain ACIPS' support for the projects submitted to the Minister of Culture, it was engaged in a power struggle with local *cabildos* over the right to represent the Siona people in the process of prior informed consent with a petroleum company soliciting the right to extract oil on two *resguardos*. ACIPS wanted to represent the group as a collective in the negotiations. The two *cabildos* to be affected by the drillings rejected ACIPS' authority, each deciding to negotiate individually with the company. ACIPS is a political project based on its capacity to gather economic resources, but not upon a social reality.

It is within this context of objectives, necessities and struggle for indigenous rights and autonomy that language revitalization projects are inserted, be they initiated by ACIPS, which evidently has placed the development of such projects on the back burner for lack of economic productivity, or by the anthropologist who benefits from small grants, but not those that meet the expectations of ACIPS.

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