



Methodologies of resistance: Facilitating solidarity across difference in inter-movement encounters*

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abstract

This paper analyzes how Latin American social movements organize to build solidarity across difference. It asks what kind of organizational practices and discursive resources are mobilized in the meeting between heterogeneous social movements. By examining the meeting logics of two inter-movement meetings that took place in Peru, the meaning of methodology for facilitating communication across the political, cultural, but also epistemic and ontological differences between the meeting participants is examined. The analysis is based on activist research at two inter-movement meetings, the 13th Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounter (XIII EFLAC) and the 5th Dialogues between Knowledges and Movements (V Diálogos). I argue that the meeting logics of both encounters strove to bridge difference and create solidarity. By understanding difference differently, however, methodological decisions resulted in different outcomes concerning the possibilities of dialogue across difference, as I illustrate by examining the place and role of *mística*:

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By emphasizing the exchange of experience rooted in affect, the V Diálogos suspended rigorous borders of identity and allowed for practices of recognition that fostered solidarity across difference. The XIII EFLAC, in turn, celebrated co-presence as dialogue. Though it articulated a deliberative logics that foregrounded dispute, the performative celebration of solidarity overshadowed the challenge to solidarity voiced through the *mística*.

Organizational practices for ‘other’ possible worlds

In an interview with Michael Hardt and Alvaro Reyes, the Uruguayan social movement scholar Raúl Zibechi argues that in the organizing efforts of marginalized communities and social movements in Latin America, a society becomes tangible that ‘has different ways of organizing itself, including its own system of justice, forms of production, and organizational models for making decisions’ (Hardt and Reyes, 2012: 176). Contrary to the ‘official society’, which is ‘hegemonic, a colonial inheritance, with its institutions, ways of doing’, this ‘other’ society is ‘visible only when it moves’ (*ibid.*).

Critical Latin American research has argued that in the organizational practices of this ‘other’ society, different worlds are enacted that potentially offer more democratic modes of organizing and being (see Escobar, 2008; Dinerstein, 2015; Entrepueblos, 2016). According to Zibechi, one of the central characteristics of these ‘other’ modes of organization is the facilitation of horizontal communication between different groups that ‘until that point had never gotten together’ (Hardt and Reyes, 2012: 169). It is this *getting together across deep difference* that is increasingly seen as strength of contemporary social movement organizing in Latin America (see Santos, 2006; Conway and Singh, 2011).

In this paper, I trace how this ‘getting together’ was organized in two inter-movement meetings, both of which took place in Peru and explicitly aimed to foster solidarity across difference to build counter-hegemonic alternatives: the 13th Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounter (XIII EFLAC)¹ and

1 The XIII EFLAC was attended by about 1400 women from Latin America, the Caribbean, and other parts of the world. It took place from 22-25 November 2014 in Lima, Peru.

the 5th Dialogues of Knowledges and Movements (V Diálogos de Saberes y Movimientos, V Diálogos).² While the first meeting was part of a long tradition of feminist organizing on the continent (see Alvarez et al., 2003; Restrepo and Bustamante, 2009), the second was embedded in the alternative political projects emerging in the region in the wake of the World Social Forum process (Daza et al., 2016).

My primary research question is what kind of organizational practices and discursive resources are mobilized in the encounter between heterogeneous social movements and what effects they have on the possibilities of fostering dialogue and solidarity across difference. I conceive of the two inter-movement meetings as characterized by meeting logics³ that foreground prefigurative emancipatory practice and the recognition of difference. I illustrate the effect of the distinct meeting logics by scrutinizing the role of *mística*⁴ at both meetings. I argue that deep difference can be bridged in meetings between heterogeneous social movements when rigorous borders of identity are suspended and opportunities for sharing collective experiences and affect are created. This, however, necessitates a radical transformation of organizational practices that goes beyond the mere addition of methodologies assumed to be rooted in ‘other’ worlds. The argument I make in this paper is based on activist research with the social movements in question.⁵

2 The V Diálogos took place from 21-23 September 2014 in Lima, Peru. The meeting was attended by 60 social movement leaders, scholar activists, and artists from Peru, other Latin American countries, Europe, and Africa.

3 To grasp the interplay between the discursive level of meaning-making, the organizational decisions taken, and the interactional level of doing, I put forward the concept of ‘meeting logics’. The concept is explained in more detail in the subsequent section of this paper.

4 The *mística* is a pedagogical and cultural practice that has been popularized in Latin American social movements by the Brazilian Landless Rural Workers’ Movement (see Máximo Prado and Júnior, 2003; Issa, 2007). While the *mística* can take many forms – from theatre performance to spiritual ritual, collective offering, or a merging of all of the above – the aim is generally to foster a ‘subjective experience in collectivity’ (Issa, 2007: 126) for those participating.

5 I have conducted 31 in-depth interviews, ethnographic research during four fieldwork stays – including activist research at both meetings – and analyzed a

In the following, I first give an overview of the theoretical underpinnings of my analysis and of the discursive and political context of the two inter-movement encounters. I continue by showing how the two meeting logics define difference differently, leading to distinct strategies of how difference is to be bridged and solidarity created during the meetings. To illustrate the effect of the two meeting logics, I discuss the role and effect of *mística* in both encounters. I end with an evaluation of what the two distinct experiences can offer concerning critical knowledge for fostering practices of liberation that take the recognition and respect for the different social worlds Latin American social movements are embedded in as starting point for counter-hegemonic struggles.

Meeting logics

I have chosen the two inter-movement meetings in question because in Peru, people as distinct as indigenous and peasant communities affected by mining projects in their territories, LGBTQ activists demanding an end to discrimination⁶, feminists fighting for an end to violence against women, and young people struggling for better working conditions have spearheaded large-scale mobilizations in recent years (see Arce, 2015; Hoetmer, 2012). Indigenous and peasant actors have sought to build alliances to urban social movements because the intelligibility and legitimacy of their demands is regularly denied by state authorities and in public debate (see Drinot, 2011; Silva Santisteban, 2016). There have been moments of cross-movement convergences in the context of state-sponsored committees (see Greene, 2010), the resistance to extractivist projects (see De Echave and Diez, 2013:

variety of documents, focusing in particular on the two reports on the meetings compiled by the organizers.

6 I use the abbreviation LGBTQ for 'lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer' activism to identify the movements that struggle for the rights of those whose sexuality or gender is perceived as deviant and who therefore experience discrimination and violence. In Peru, the issue of intersex activism has not (yet) been articulated in social movement mobilization, which is why I do not use the abbreviation LGBTQI (for a similar reasoning, see van den Berge and Cornejo Salinas, 2012: 9).

98–99), and as part of transnationally connected organizing against neoliberal capitalism (see Flores Rojas, 2011a).

But due to the country's history of violence as well as social and political polarization, mistrust towards those unknown or seen as different is high and social and political mobilization difficult (see Theidon, 2004; Hoetmer, 2006). Therefore, Peruvian social movements on the Left have faced enormous challenges in cross-movement organizing (see Grompone and Tanaka, 2009; Hoetmer, 2012; Pajuelo Teves, 2004), which is why they have had to develop explicit organizational practices of bridging difference and building solidarity.

As the two societies Zibechi describes are not autonomous societies untouched by each other, but 'partially connected heterogeneous social worlds' (de Lima Costa, 2013: 84) embedded in coloniality, the encounter between them is, even in the supposedly open spaces of emancipatory organizing, inevitably characterized by dynamics of exclusion and marginalization. Marguerite Waller and Sylvia Marcos, examining encounters across difference in the transnational feminist movement, argue that often, it is not a lack of desire for engaging with the 'other' on horizontal terms that reproduces a colonizing stance, but the inability to destabilize one's certainties (Waller and Marcos 2005: xxv), which 'makes opacity feel like transparency and ignorance like knowledge' (*ibid.*).

Social movement scholars as well have increasingly argued that research should not assume that knowledge and recognition easily flow between heterogeneous social movements once they gather face-to-face. They propose to focus on the meeting between activists as focal point for forming and maintaining activism (see Polletta, 2002; Chabot, 2010; Haug, 2013), some taking their cues also from organization studies literature. But even though in organization studies, meetings have been a category of research since decades (see Schwartzman, 1989), they have generally been perceived as a failure of the organizational structure (Haug, 2013: 707). Social movement scholars, on the contrary, propose to pay attention to the interactive processes of meetings as an essential aspect of the (re-)production of social order and collective identity (*ibid.*: 709), including examining the role of power and conflict within the internal spaces of and between social movements. Empirical studies have,

consequently, examined the decision-making processes of social movements from a deliberative-democracy (see della Porta, 2005; Haug and Teune, 2008) or cultural perspective (see Flesher Fominaya, 2016; Baumgarten et al., 2014). These studies, however, by focusing on the interactive aspect of social movement meetings, pay less attention to how the interactions observed are connected to the discursive and social fields in which the meetings are embedded (Leinius et al., 2017: 11-14).

The concept of ‘meeting logics’⁷ I propose builds on the work of Christoph Haug (2013), who, in his research on social movement meetings, has identified the logics of organization, institution, and network, and Jeffrey Juris (2012), who has examined the spatially grounded logic of aggregation within movements like #Occupy. I add a poststructural focus on examining the discourse on the meeting, because the latter shapes the social reality that steers organizational decisions, the behavior of those organizing and facilitating the meeting, the norms guiding interaction, what is perceived as disturbance and how it is reacted to during the preparation, implementation, and evaluation of the meeting.

A focus on meeting logics also opens the analytical gaze towards the various dimensions that shape the meeting and its dynamics, for example its explicit rules and program, the – often contradictory – expectations of what is supposed to happen at the meeting by the organizers and participants, the spatial organization as well as the intersubjective relations developed.

Because every ‘encounter is mediated; it presupposes other faces, other encounters of facing, other bodies, other spaces, and other times’ (Ahmed, 2000: 7), the interplay between the discursive, organizational, and interactional levels of the meeting – the meeting logics, in short – needs to be supplement with a careful analysis of the context in which the meeting develops.

7 I use a poststructural understanding of logics as ‘the type of relations between entities that makes possible the actual operation of that system of rule’ (Laclau, 2000: 283), aiming to identify the underlying ‘rules or grammar of the practice[s]’ (Glynos and Howarth, 2007: 136) that co-constitute both the meetings and the subjects participating in them.

In the following, I therefore show how the meeting logics of the two meetings were shaped by the embeddedness of the meetings in very specific discursive fields and historical trajectories. I illustrate the interplay between the discursive, organizational, and interactive levels by analyzing the role of *mística*, discussing whether spaces for actual dialogue across difference were opened.

The meeting logics of the two inter-movement encounters

Recognizing the diversity of Latin American feminisms: The XIII EFLAC

The 13th Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounter (XIII EFLAC) is part of a series of Latin American feminist meetings that have been organized in regular intervals since 1981 with the explicit intention to create an open space for feminists of the region to meet, share their experiences, and forge common struggles (Curiel and Espinosa Miñoza, 1998: 4). The deep rifts within the region's feminisms are regularly enacted at the EFLACs. Nevertheless, a concern for ensuring that the heterogeneity of the diverse feminisms existing in the region can be expressed has guaranteed the continued relevance of the EFLAC for Latin American feminist organizing (Abracinskas, 1998: 54; Curiel and Espinosa Miñoza, 1998: 8)⁸. As a consequence, the EFLAC has no overarching institutionalized organizational structure. Decisions are taken by the final plenary at the end of each encounter, and the topic and methodology of each encounter is left to the local organizing committee.

Methodological choices have always been one of the main points of contention (see Restrepo and Bustamante, 2009; Curiel and Espinosa Miñoza, 1998). This holds true for the organization of the XIII EFLAC as well, which was spearheaded by the three largest Peruvian feminist NGOs,⁹ which were striving to mitigate the simmering conflict between autonomous and

8 Unless indicated otherwise, I translated all quotes that follow from Spanish to English.

9 These were the Flora Tristán Center of the Peruvian Woman (Centro de la Mujer Peruana Flora Tristán), the Movimiento Manuela Ramos (Manuela Ramos Movement), and the feminist human rights organization DEMUS.

'institutionalized'¹⁰ feminists within Latin American feminisms through their organizational choices. This included the decision to focus on 'Encounters in Diversity' as overarching theme of the XIII EFLAC. The struggle over the meaning of 'diversity' propelled the Peruvian organizers to not only strive to integrate both autonomous and 'institutionalized' feminist positions¹¹ but also to try to bridge the divide to other women's movements not necessarily identifying as feminist by emphasizing the value of heterogeneity for emancipatory struggle in the Political Manifesto published before the actual encounter.¹²

The discursive emphasis on the value of diversity was translated into the methodology of the meeting: The three thematic sections 'critical interculturality', 'sustainability of life', and 'body and territory' were set as

10 I use the translation 'institutionalized' feminists for 'feministas institucionalizadas'. Other authors have either chosen to not translate the term at all or also have used 'institutionalized' feminism (see Alvarez, 2000; Alvarez et al., 2003; Vargas, 2016). The term denotes feminists working in large NGOs or in state institutions, who are generally characterized as being middle-class, urban, 'white' or mestiza, and university-educated. The term is often rejected by those identified as 'institutionalized' for evoking charges of depolitization and cooptation. During the VI EFLAC in 1993, the first critiques of Latin American feminisms losing their autonomy and becoming 'institutionalized' emerged. The dispute came to the fore in 1996 during the VII EFLAC in Cartagena, Chile (see Alvarez et al., 2003: 556). Due to the 'trauma' of Cartagena (*ibid.*: 560) the meeting logics of the EFLAC have, since then, been generally oriented towards facilitating an 'open dialogue between all positions' (Comisión Organizadora VIII EFLAC, 1999: 13).

11 While previously denoting mainly the relative distance or proximity to state institutions and NGOs, autonomous feminists have in recent years increasingly proclaimed that 'institutionalized' feminists are not only defined by their affiliations, but also by their 'ideological, political, material dependency' (Curiel 2009 in Espinosa Miñoso et al., 2014: 25) on colonial power relations and the subordination of those perceived as different, especially indigenous, Black, lesbian, or 'popular' women. Those identified as 'institutionalized' feminists have forcefully rejected this allegation.

12 Already during the preparatory phase, however, critique was voiced that the language of the Political Manifesto was too academic (13 EFLAC, 2014d: 29), while others complained that the traditional focus of the feminist movement on subjectivity and rights was watered down because of the emphasis on interculturality and intersectionality (*ibid.*).

transversal themes, providing the structuring axes of the first three days of the four-day meeting: They served as the topics of the morning plenaries and of the self-organized workshop taking place during the afternoons of the three days. Prior to the XIII EFLAC, three regional feminist meetings were organized to counteract the tendency of the Peruvian feminist movement to focus on the capital Lima, to visibilize the existence of feminists in the regions, and to invite women activists from indigenous and rural movements to participate in the encounter (13 EFLAC, 2014d: 32).

The decision to showcase the diversity within Latin American feminisms was moreover expressed in the choice of the panelists for the morning plenaries: They were chosen ‘taking into account the diversity of perspectives, identities, and Latin America political proposals’ (*ibid.*: 43). After the panels, the audience was to be divided into sub-plenaries, in which the topics of the plenary were to be discussed (*ibid.*). The addition of the sub-plenaries was argued for by those in the organizing committee who believed that for actual dialogue across difference to happen, spaces enabling the exchange of experiences beyond the assembly-style format of the morning panels were needed.

Engaging with the interdependency of all emancipatory struggles: The V Diálogos

The 5th Diálogos de Saberes y Movimientos (Dialogues of Knowledges and Movements, V Diálogos) were organized by the Lima-centered Programa Democracia y Transformación Global (Program Democracy and Global Transformation, PDTG).¹³ The PDTG is, according to its self-description:

an environmental, feminist organization of the Left, with a well-developed, clear methodological proposal, which aims to (...) link the biggest number of experiences to construct a proposal of generating ties of articulation. (interview, 05/11/2014)

13 The PDTG, a center for popular education and militant research founded in 2002, identifies as part of the World Social Forum process. Starting as a post-graduate program within the Faculty of Social Sciences of the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, one of Peru’s largest public universities, it moved out of the university in 2007, institutionalizing itself as an NGO to accompany social movements and connect their struggles.

The Diálogos are a format for inter-movement meetings the PDTG initiated in 2010 to develop pedagogical and organizational modes of ‘encountering each other, entering into dialogue, and connecting social movements’ (Daza et al., 2016: 75). The difficulties of constructing alliances across Peruvian social movement struggles led to the Diálogos explicitly experimenting with ‘methodology that goes further than programmatic discussions, the negotiation of agreements’ (interview, 17/02/2013).¹⁴

Drawing on the methodology of the Popular University of Social Movements (cf. UPMS, 2016), Reflect-Acción¹⁵ as well as feminist pedagogical approaches, the Diálogos strive to circumvent the written word by using oral or visual methods to generate knowledge collectively (interview, 19/11/2014). Since 2010, six Diálogos have been organized. The number and background of participants varied, but usually, artists, activist scholars, and activists from Peru and abroad attended, who were part of feminist, women’s, and LGBTQ movements, student, afro-descendant, indigenous, peasant, and shantytown organizations, trade unions as well as political parties and collectives (see Daza et al., 2016: 71-72).

14 In 2003, several organizations of the Peruvian Left, among them the PDTG, strove to organize a Social Forum in Peru. While the project eventually failed, a variety of social movement encounters built on the ties developed during the process were organized, among them the Encuentro Grande in Tambogrande (Great Encounter in Tambogrande) organized in 2004, the Cumbre de los Pueblos - Enlazando Alternativas 3 (People’s Summit - Linking Alternatives 3) of 2008, the Popular University of Social Movements of 2006, and the Diálogos Inter-Movimientos de Mujeres (Women’s Inter-Movement Dialogues) in 2009-2010. The latter two were organized by the PDTG, which also participated in the first two (for more information, see Flores Rojas, 2011b; Bebbington et al., 2008; Daza et al., 2016).

15 Reflect-Acción is a methodology for fostering emancipatory social change developed in the 1990s in Bangladesh, El Salvador, and Uganda and then disseminated transnationally through capacity-building workshops (Archer and Newman, 2003: 5). It is practiced by a transnational network of practitioners of popular education that draws on the methods of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), Paulo Freire’s approach to collective learning, and feminist pedagogy to construct an ‘on-going democratic space for a group of people to meet and discuss issues relevant to them’ (Reflect-Action, 2009).

The methodology of the V Diálogos aimed to challenge the dominant ‘system of capitalist, colonial, and patriarchal domination’ (PDTG, 2014a), which is seen as inhibiting alliance-building between social movements, because it foregrounds logocentrism, or the belief in an overarching order of meaning based on hierarchized binary oppositions, thus perpetuating the hierarchization of difference. Logocentrism is believed to be challenged by engaging with each other bypassing the word as well as fixed identity categories, for example through ‘dance, music, corporeal expressions, the místicas, the exercises’ (PDTG, 2014b: 145). The methodology of the Diálogos, consequently, strove to

recover the important histories, moments, or situations lived, find paths that allow to express them in their complexity and richness, problematize them and create spaces of dialogue for the more plural inter-learning between the subjects. (Daza et al., 2016: 93)

By sharing personal experiences, recognizing the interweaving of individual and collective histories, and learning how they have been shaped by oppressive relations of power, the hierarchization between groups that, according to the PDTG, contributes to fragmentation and polarization is to be overcome.

Seeing difference differently

Both the V Diálogos and on the XIII EFLAC put forward the notion of a civilizational crisis which allows for alternatives to the current system to be articulated.¹⁶ But the system that is in crisis is characterized differently in the two encounters, which shaped the conditions under which difference could be articulated: In the discourse on the XIII EFLAC, the system in crisis is defined as constituted by multiple, but separate dimensions of domination:

16 The notion of a ‘civilizational crisis’ points to the multidimensionality of the overlapping crises of which the global financial crisis that began roughly a decade ago is seen as only one aspect of (Gills, 2010; Veltmeyer, 2010). In Latin American activism and critical academia, in particular, the term is used to underline that the climate, water, food, financial, and other crises can be traced back to the underlying crisis of the Western civilizational model (Escobar, 2015: 455; see also Daza et al., 2012).

So, in capitalist-neoliberal, colonial, patriarchal, heteronormative, and racist societies, where relations of domination and oppression rule, our bodies are affected by these relations that leave the imprints of exploitation, subordination, repression, racism, and discrimination. (13 EFLAC, 2014c: 1)

Because these oppressions inscribe themselves differently onto women's bodies, women have different experiences that result in different identities and outlooks. Because difference can be traced back to the distinct dimensions of oppression, difference is, on the one hand, inevitably tied to inequality. On the other hand, it can serve as the entry point for understanding how the different dimensions of oppression work, as a first step to challenging them:

(...) the diversities that characterize our societies are dyed with inequality and violence, and reflect severe imbalances of power, which has consequences for our movements. Evidently, diversity has neither been valued nor understood as a concrete possibility for challenging discrimination in all its forms. (13 EFLAC, 2014c: 2)

An already existing commonality between women is therefore posited, which enables solidarity across difference as soon as women recognize that though their experiences of oppression might be different, they share the 'common difference' of having been subject to violence and oppression.

According to the meeting logics of the XIII EFLAC, this recognition can be fostered by women talking about their experiences of oppression. But because difference is interwoven with inequality and the dimensions of oppression are distinct, the exchange of experiences will inevitably result in conflicts. Learning to manage conflict is therefore a necessary ability for being able to recognize the common ground of women's oppression. This discursive logics can be depicted in the Final Declaration of the XIII EFLAC:

we have listened to each other, we have learned, we have disputed views, positionings, and interpretations. Today in Lima–Peru, we re-encounter each other and we continue deepening our debates and constructing our collective knowledges. (...) we are progressing and this is the richness of our feminisms (...). (13 EFLAC, 2014b)

Listening and learning is as indispensable to building solidarity across difference as is disputing 'views, positionings, and interpretations'. This

echoes a deliberative ethos, which posits debate and dispute as central mode of strengthening the Latin American feminist movements.

What can also be depicted is a notion of teleological progression: The encounter is positioned as ‘re-encounter’, as part of a larger process fueled by dispute. The organizational logics of the XIII EFLAC, centered on the morning plenaries in which the panelists were chosen as representatives of specific differences and expected to represent and articulate the most diverse points of view possible, mirrored this discursive logics of fostering dispute as a means to confront inequalities and be able to recognize women’s ‘common differences’.

The discourse on the Diálogos, in turn, assumes the existence of a system of domination anchored in modernity, which is characterized by one overarching fragmenting logics:

With the Diálogos we understand that this system of domination, strongly articulated and strengthened through modernity, fragments us. It breaks bonds, it isolates and reifies us in order to commodify everything. It creates borders of identity and dichotomous positions in order to exercise more control over people’s life. It hierarchizes us. (Daza et al., 2016: 88)

Positing fragmentation, polarization, and hierarchization as the roots of oppression means that ‘the power to build bonds and commonalities is highly revolutionary’ (Daza et al., 2016: 88).

Difference is not a violent side-effect of oppression and domination, as in the discourse on the XIII EFLAC: People are different because they are embedded in different environments and webs of social relations, and as ‘it is the relations that constitute us’ (PDTG, 2014b: 67), difference is an inherent feature of life. What needs to be challenged is not difference as such, but the ordering of difference in hierarchies of power and knowledge as well as the inequalities that are legitimized by negating and obscuring the relationality of all beings. By fixing difference in homogenizing and dichotomous categories, the multiple and fluid affiliations of all beings are denied.

The discursive logics of the V Diálogos, consequently, are based on positing difference as the outcome of the inherent relationality of human existence. Methodologically, this translates into mapping difference tied to socio-spatial

environments ('territories' in the discursive vocabulary of the V Diálogos) to identify points of possible convergence that do neither negate nor strive to overcome difference. The organizers of the V Diálogos concordantly write in the thank-you letter to the participants of the V Diálogos:

[The V Diálogos] was a space to exchange knowledges, affects, and smiles, enriching through intercultural construction our methodological practices, listening and contributing from the intersectionality of struggles, understanding all struggles as necessary and just and asking ourselves in various moments how to build more bridges between movements, our political practices, and methodological reflections.

Because all struggles are 'necessary and just', the building of bridges between struggles is set at the central goal of the encounter. The 'revolutionary power to build bonds' is translated into a methodology that foregrounds listening and affect: 'knowledge, affects, and smiles' were exchanged and 'intercultural construction' enriched 'our methodological practices'.

Apart from emphasizing affect, difference is historicized by working together to reveal how difference has been fixed as inequality, constructing an 'ecology of struggles and knowledges' (Daza et al., 2016: 122). By circumventing the identification of categories of difference *a priori*, the recognition of difference is suspended and set as the horizon of collective learning: Instead of presuming to know who encounters each other and under which conditions, difference emerges as interrelated and as anchored in the actual personal and collective histories and experiences of those gathered at the encounter.

In the following, I illustrate the effect of the meeting logics by analyzing the role of *mística*. *Mística* has become a central characteristic of Latin American social movement practices aimed at transcending heterogeneity by creating affective and embodied practices that generate an emotional experience of the collective (see Issa, 2007; Dinerstein, 2015: 186). I show that instead of a universally applicable method of resistance, the function of *mística* within the meeting logics has to be taken into account when evaluating its effectiveness as emancipatory practice for building solidarity across difference.

Mística as mode of (mis-)translating between different worlds

Anchored in the political pedagogy of liberation theology, *mística* describes a ‘political performance’ (Flynn, 2016: 65) comprised of ‘short instances of theatre performance laden with the ritualistic use of symbols’ (Flynn, 2013: 172; see Gouge, 2016). According to Joysinett Moraes da Silva and Rafael Vecchio, the *mística* in the Brazilian Landless Worker’s Movement (MST) is usually centered on performing the life and history of its activists to raise consciousness (Moraes da Silva and Vecchio, 2006: 376). The practice of performing *mística* during social movement gatherings has, however, travelled from the MST to other Latin American social movements, and, in the course of these travels, has been adapted to the needs of the activists enacting it. The term ‘*mística*’ can therefore refer to a variation of political and pedagogical practices, from short political theater performed during a meeting of activists, to the joint singing of a song during such a gathering, as well as to the tangible result of these practices, often in the form of an ‘*ofrenda*’ (‘offering’) displaying the symbols used during the performance. The common denominator of the varied practices called *mística* is the aim to foster a ‘subjective experience in collectivity’ (Issa, 2007: 126), binding the participants together across their differences.

In the meeting logics of the V Diálogos, *mística* functioned as ‘a shared creation of collective recognition, where song and the various spiritualities present invited us to see the importance of these aspects in the struggles of resistance’ (PDTG, 2014b: 4).

The V Diálogos began with a *mística*, set right after all participants had convened: After a member of the Peruvian indigenous-rural women’s organization Femucarinap¹⁷ explained how they used *mística* within their movement, every participant was asked to showcase a symbol that, for them, embodied their struggle (a flag, a patch, some brought seeds, others drew symbols on a paper) and to walk around, finding people whose symbols seemed similar to one’s own. The groups that were formed were then asked to converse about the origin and the meaning of their symbols, finding a

17 The National Federation of Peasant, Artisan, Indigenous, Native and Salaried Women of Peru (Femucarinap) was created in 2008 by peasant and indigenous women previously organized in the peasant federation CCP (Olea Mauleón et al., 2012: 71-74).

common symbol that could represent the group as a whole. This group symbol was then presented and arranged on a woven fabric adorned with Andean seeds displayed in clay pots, flowers, instruments, and spiritual tokens. The groups also shared a wish for the V Diálogos and burned coca leaves together (see figure 1). The *mística* concluded with a song proposed by an afro-Colombian activist and the meeting continued with the organizers presenting the schedule and the main goals of the encounter.



Figure 1: Enacting the *mística* at the V Diálogos (picture: PDTG)

The tangible result of the *mística* was transferred to the main meeting room and set in the center of the circle of chairs that served as space for the plenary sessions (see figure 2). It remained there until the end of the V Diálogos, becoming part of several other practices at various points during the encounter, with people adding symbols or notes. It also served as the focal point of the circle of chairs used for all plenary discussions.



Figure 2: The *mística* at the V Diálogos (picture: PDTG)

The subsequent místicas – there was one mística every morning – were organized by a commission created on the first day of the V Diálogos.¹⁸ Within this commission, composed mainly of indigenous and rural women, tensions arose, because some of the women in the commission felt marginalized by the afro-Colombian activist who proposed the song at the inaugural mística. When they voiced their concerns to the organizers, they did not intervene, justifying their decision by pointing to the marginalized position of afro-Latin rituals in emancipatory activism in Latin America.

At the XIII FLAC, the Femucarinap organized and performed a mística – announced as ‘Ofrenda a la Pachamama’ ('Offering to the Pachamama') in the program but presented as mística during the encounter – as well. The mística took place during the inauguration ceremony and served as transition between the welcoming speeches, given by a representative of the organizing committee of the XIII EFLAC and the mayor of Lima, and the cultural program.¹⁹

The mística at the XIII EFLAC was political theater aimed at translating indigenous and rural women's experiences to the assumed social world of the audience, perceived as predominantly feminist, middle-class, and urban. It articulated the need to build solidarity across difference to end women's oppression, but also formulated a challenge to those embedded in 'official' society: Accompanied by Andean music, Lourdes Huanca, the leader of Femucarinap, narrated the hardships in the life of indigenous and rural women, their struggles and histories, their spirit of resistance and their ties to territory. While she talked, members of the Femucarinap filed in from outside of the tent in which the 1400 participants of the encounter were convened, carrying enormous 'rocks' made of paper and painted with words like 'machismo', 'patriarchism' 'envy', and 'individualism' on their backs, their hands bound by chains made of paper. These burdens chaining not only indigenous and rural, but all women and inhibiting solidarity could only be

18 Most of the subsequent místicas were comprised of singing, dancing, and poetry readings. They also included methods that encouraged the participants to touch each other and share experiences.

19 The cultural program consisted of Peruvian dances and music as well as a feminist Batucada, or percussion group.

broken, so Huanca, if urban women would learn to unlearn and be willing to build ties based on mutual respect and recognition. She urged the women gathered, stating that

[y]ou must learn to understand that the peasant woman just as the woman from the city is wise. We have a powerful soul. Of being able to plant proposals and solutions. This is why we are here, compañeras. (13 EFLAC, 2014a: 00:21:35-00:21:48)

According to the narrative, indigenous and rural women attended the XIII EFLAC to build solidarity between rural and urban women. Translating this call to the performance of the *mística*, Huanca called for the audience to break the chains and destroy the rocks by singling out feminist activists by name and asking them to bring soil, seeds, and water to the enchain and burdened women. Once they received these offerings, the enchain women broke the chains and unburdened themselves from the rocks, symbolically freeing themselves from oppression. The *mística* ended by Huanca changing the words of a popular traditional song, urging all women from 'coast, highlands, and rainforest' to join the struggle.

The *mística* invigorated the audience, which cheered and clapped exuberantly. The dramatic performance of the *mística*, culminating in the breaking of chains, seemed to confirm the existence of a common struggle and of solidarity. The challenge in the words of Huanca, who called urban feminists out for having to unlearn their privileges by listening and learning from rural women and recognizing their differences as source of strength first, in order to then build solidarity, remained largely unheard. Those that recognized the political challenge articulated in the *mística* saw it as inappropriately placed and as disturbing the celebratory character of the inauguration ceremony, as was stated during a collective evaluation I attended several days later.

In the course of the XIII EFLAC, the active participation of indigenous women dwindled, as other conflicts, especially concerning the recognition of sex workers as well the struggle for dominance between 'institutionalized' and

autonomous feminists, took precedence.²⁰ While efforts were made to make the attendance of indigenous women possible during the preparatory process, their presence at the meeting did not seem to ensure their active participation in the proceedings, especially when the debate settled on topics they did not feel interpellated by, articulated in a mode that fostered antagonistic debate and ossified the rigorous and polarized boundaries between the political identities of ‘institutionalized’ and autonomous feminists.

The tangible product of the *mística*, consisting of an arrangement made of flowers, soil, seeds, and figurines rendering the outlines of the continent of Latin America, the feminist symbol, and a vulva, which was located right in front of the podium on which the morning panels took place, remained present throughout the encounter (see figure 3). It seemed to enlarge the space between those speaking on the podium and those listening from the audience, however, rather than connecting those present.



20 During the first two days, indigenous and rural women’s voices dominated the audience slots after the panels and indigenous and rural women were present on the morning panels. They were not represented on the panel of the third day. The solution of the organizers, who noticed the lack of an indigenous or rural woman on this panel, had been to ask an indigenous feminist to moderate the panel. While an indigenous body was on stage and thus, ‘diversity’ was ensured, she seemed not to contribute to opening a discursive space for indigenous women, as only one rural woman contributed in the audience slot. On the fourth day, indigenous and rural women were present, but did not intervene during the final plenary at all.

Figure 3: The mística at the XIII EFLAC (picture: F. Ekerlund)

Methodologies for translating between different worlds

The different role of *mística* in the two encounters illustrates well the challenge of translating between different worlds and languages to build solidarity. It also shows that hegemonic logics based on logocentrism are not overcome simply by adding methodologies of resistance believed to be anchored in ‘other’ worlds if the meeting logics as a whole are not transformed towards taking seriously the multiple ways of how certain ways of perceiving the world and interacting across difference continue to be privileged in social movement meetings.

In the *mística* of the XIII EFLAC, while on the level of speech, the continued separation of countryside and city and the need to learn to recognize the equality of struggles was underlined, it was the performative aspect, culminating in the breaking of chains, that captured the imagination of the audience. The context of the *mística* in the inauguration ceremony might have contributed to its cultural rather than political understanding. Another factor contributing to the audience not hearing the critique might have been the discomfort that acknowledging the challenge that was voiced might have resulted in. Those in the dominant position had the option to not make the effort of translating, especially when it would mean questioning their own normalized practices and asking how these perpetuate and legitimize marginalization and oppression.

Additionally, as the meeting logics of the XIII EFLAC posited the visible presence of diverse women as proof of success, measured in dispute, the decreasing participation of indigenous and rural women during the encounter was not perceived:

The indigenous women present in the EFLAC proposed to open a debate about the realities and demands from different visions and cosmovisions: it is necessary to decolonize feminism, propose new forms of relating ourselves, recognizing the contributions of both movements and establishing common points of action: the struggle against all forms of violence, discrimination and racism, the impunity, the violation of human rights. (13 EFLAC, 2014d: 74)

Even though there was no final declaration of indigenous and rural women and the contributions of the indigenous panelists and audience members were rather heterogeneous throughout the meeting, indigenous women are represented in the final report as ‘having proposed to open a debate’. The meeting logics of the XIII EFLAC, centered on deliberation between clearly recognizable groups defined by their identities, presumed homogeneity and anticipated dispute, overshadowing the interactions observable at the meeting.

In the V Diálogos, in turn, *mística* was integrated as pedagogical practice that tasked all participants to actively participate and invest their emotions and experiences in the construction of a collective. The deviation from what was perceived as usual form of communication during social movement encounters in Peru led to feelings of discomfort: One of the academic activists commented that for her, the *místicas* were very uncomfortable, as she was not used to spiritual practice as a way to link struggles. In the collective evaluation of the V Diálogos within the PDTG, this discomfort was deemed productive, as it decentered modern logics.

The organizational decision to establish a commission responsible for developing and facilitating the subsequent *místicas* of the encounter also allowed for the protagonism of indigenous and rural women, who otherwise rarely take on leading roles in inter-movement encounters. It also provoked conflict between afro-Latin and indigenous spiritual practices, showcasing – but not solving – their plurality as well as the continued hierarchization of difference also within and between those part of Zibechi’s ‘other’ society.

The *místicas* alone, however, did not counterbalance the V Diálogos’ emphasis on producing results and the dominance of academic activists in inter-movement interactions: Group work, which was seen as primary space for the exchange of experiences, the creation of affect, and of learning, was conditioned on the need to produce results to be presented in the plenaries. While it opened possibilities for dialogue, it also privileged those familiar with abstraction and systematization, fluent in Spanish and familiar with speaking

in front of large audiences.²¹ The emphasis on affect and positive emotions also made it difficult to voice experiences of discrimination or marginalization, or even disagree publicly with others.

Methodologies of resistance for emancipation from below

In this paper, I have put forward the concept of ‘meeting logics’ as a way to analyze the interplay between the discursive, organizational, and interactional levels of social movement meetings. My analysis of the role and effect of the *mística* in two inter-movement meetings that explicitly strove to build solidarity across difference provides some insights into how methodologies of resistance can be fostered in contexts characterized by coloniality. It also opens new avenues for research that link social movement, postcolonial, and organization studies by focusing on the meeting between heterogeneous actors as embodied encounters, analyzing the continuing relevance of hegemonic logics in shaping meetings, and offering analytical tools for approaching the silences, marginalizations, and exclusions that these logics reproduce.

My analysis has shown that challenging the hegemony of logocentrism through other modes of creating community, like *mística*, is a first step but should not be seen as unproblematically counter-hegemonic in all contexts and situations: By presuming fixed categories of difference that can be represented by social movement actors, as the meeting logics of the XIII EFLAC did, logocentrism is perpetuated and the complexity, multiplicity, and interdependency of identity formation denied. But *mística* can be a tool for fostering encounters across difference. By emphasizing the exchange of experience rooted in affect, the meeting logics of the V Diálogos suspended rigorous borders of identity and allowed for practices of recognition that fostered solidarity across difference. Centering positive emotions and affect, however, limited the possibilities for conflict to be articulated, which might impact negatively on the sustainability of the ties of solidarity created in the long run.

21 This was recognized as a continuing challenge by the organizers in the reflection on the V Diálogos.

Methodologies of resistance that strive to include other ways of being in the world need to pay attention to mistranslations and disturbances, because the latter can serve as an entry point to critically reflecting on the continued hierarchization of difference even in emancipatory spaces. Allowing for disturbances to routine interactions and hegemonic norms to become starting points for collective critical reflection and transformation means ‘slowing down reasoning’ (Stengers, 2011: 139, original quote in English) to allow for that what is going on to unsettle that what we believe is happening. For organizers and facilitators, this means ‘staying with the trouble’, as Donna Haraway has called this stance of ‘learning to be truly present’ (Haraway, 2016: 1, original quote in English). By continuously reflecting on how the meeting logics shape the spaces and the interactions taking place within them and being conscious of disturbances and silences as opportunities for learning and not as obstacles to be overcome to reach the assumed goal of the meeting, methodologies of resistance can unfold their radical potential for other possible worlds.

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