Weaving Women’s Testimonio and Territory

in La Comuna Ancestral Las Tunas

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In Memory of Jahaira Isabel Ponce Del Peso.

*Salimos de casa sin saber si volvemos.*

*Contamos sus historias: Que vivas nos queremos, Que vivas nos amamos.*
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To La Comuna Ancestral Las Tunas.

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I feel nourished by the care and support I have been offered. Their impact is carried through my words and thinking.
Introduction

I was welcomed to La Comuna Ancestral Las Tunas, or the Ancestral Commune of Las Tunas (see Image A1), where exchanging stories was the dominant form of communication. Un “buenas, ¿cómo le va?” on the beach, on the sandy streets, and at the restaurant, opened the can of stories of the long legacy of territorial resistance and connection to the entorno and community. The Comuna invited you to listen to the thread of environmental protections and their stories come from a long lineage of resistance and resilience. Yet, I only heard male voices as the spokespersons for the stories of territory and resistance.

I was in the Comuna in November 2022 as part of the research component in my study abroad program in Ecuador. The Comuna is located on the coast of Ecuador (see Image A2), in the parish of Salango, cantón Puerto López, province of Manabí. The Comuna was established in 1937, and encompasses the precincts of Puerto Rico, Las Cabañas, Las Tunas, and Ayampe (See Image A3). In 2012, Las Tunas recognized its ancestral identity and named itself Comuna Ancestral, or Ancestral Commune. They subsequently changed their alienation from the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock to the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE), or Confederation of Indigenous Identities of Ecuador. The Ecuadorian 2008 Constitution establishes government autonomy for Pueblos y Nacionalidades Indígenas (Indigenous Pueblos and Nationalities) of Montubio¹ peoples:

*Que, la Constitución de la República vigente establece que las comunas del pueblo montubio tienen el derecho colectivo de crear, desarrollar, aplicar y practicar su propio derecho, además de desarrollar sus propias formas de convivencia y organización social, y de generación y ejercicio de su propia autoridad (Constitución de la República del Ecuador, 2008, artículos 56 y 57).*

That, the current Constitution of the Republic establishes that the communes of the Montubio people have the collective right to create, develop, apply and practice their own law, in addition to developing their own forms of coexistence and social organization, and

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¹ Indigenous identity of ancestral peoples in the Ecuadorian coast.
the generation and exercise of their own authority (Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador, 2008, articles 56 and 57).

The Constitution defines and protects the right of Las Tunas to have collective territory. I employ a meteorological metaphor to understand the organization of Las Tunas (see Graphic B1). First, the umbrella (see Graphic B2) is the Comuna Ancestral Las Tunas that is made up of four precincts: Puerto Rico, Las Cabañas, Las Tunas, and Ayampe. The umbrella of Las Tunas forms part of the cloud of the parroquia, or parish of Salango. The parish is under the sky of the cantón of Puerto López which forms part of the province of Manabí. There are 22 cantons in Manabí (see Image A4). Manabí is one of 24 provinces of Ecuador.

I was guided down the line of storytellers, each speaker revealed and unraveled the legacy of environmental storytelling—the Comuna becoming a community by protecting their land from hungry land-grabbers, owners of big Haciendas. To the additional episodic territorial resistances against foreign encroachment of territory. To the present with threats from the tourist developers targeting the Río Ayampe. As I was taken down the line of inquiry I found the predominance of male voices. I was pointed to men elders—abuelos—as holders of knowledge, as the oracles of territorial narratives and knowledge. The abuelos construct a single masculine hegemonic narrative that forces alternate epistemologies to the foreground. Yet in these silences, women’s testimonios exist and flourish.

I had begun to talk to Byron Delgado, community partner in my research and host, about how the Comuna became a territory of ancestral memory and collective land. He led me to Don Saúl Deldago, Byron’s dad who held this knowledge because the narratives were passed down to him from his elders. The web of masculine inquiry expanded: to previous presidents of the Comuna, to the creator of the anthem of the community—Alfredo Pilligua—until I reached the Presidente de la Comuna, Lino. In these conversations, I found it was not enough to ask: where
are the women? The women have a presence, but how are their stories and voices represented? In my trajectory, the voices of women were represented by Judith Mero, the leader of the volunteer program I participated in while conducting research. She was the one who brought up that Ayampe was changing, she is stoic, hardworking, and kind, but is her voice uplifted as part of the dominant narrative? I heard from an additional two women in November 2022 that I came across by happenstance; Graciela Tomála, because I was looking for her dad, an elder of Ayampe and Doña Anita, who was retreated in her mercadito.

My concerns of the absence of women’s voices in the narrative of the Comuna grew into queries of the construction of the territorial narrative in Las Tunas and the position of women’s knowledge in the narrative construction. Susy C. Zepeda in *Queering Mesoamerican Diasporas: Remembering Xicana Indígena Ancestries* (2022) similarly traces: “Since the 1970s, Chicana and other women historians of color, have been arguing that the issue is not simply on of exclusion versus inclusion, but rather one of construction” (Zepeda, 2022, p. 9). My interaction with the stories of women in my first time in Las Tunas conveys that women are present in the Comuna, yet their voices of women exist en la oscuridad, in the darkness of the silences of territorial narratives.

I returned to Las Tunas in the summer of 2023 to analyze women’s stories of the territory. Their voices reveal alternate epistemologies on territory. For this thesis, I employ the lens of testimonios to register women’s voices and stories of territory. Ethnic studies have “demonstrated the power of testimonio as a genre that exposes brutality, disrupts silencing” (Delgado, Burciaga, and Flores Carmona, 2012, p. 363). *Testimonios*, as a lens, genre, and methodology, examine the central tensions of territorial narratives in Las Tunas: the construction and (re)production of a masculine hegemonic narrative, the silences in territorial knowledge and narrative production,
and offer of a decolonial territorial imaginary. In my research, the objective is not to focus solely on exclusion/inclusion of women’s testimonio in territorial narratives of Las Tunas, but additionally critique how hegemonic territorial narratives are constructed, silence alternate cosmologies, and express forms of coloniality.

Each chapter grounds testimonios, “the voice, narratives, alignments, and energies that are silenced due to the disciplinary ruptures their existence necessitates” (Zepeda, 2022, p. 9). First, I review my methodologies, rooted in community contributions, reciprocity, and positionality. Next, Chapter 1: Testimonios and the Tradition of Silences: Literature Review discusses the lineage of silences found in ethnic studies and geography scholarly literature and builds the decolonial theoretical framings for the rest of the thesis. Then, Chapter 2: A Journey to Registering Silences in Knowledge Production dives into the case study of Las Tunas to evaluate how hegemonic knowledge production is constructed and consequently, how silences are registered within the dominant narrative. Lastly, in Chapter 3: Theorizing in Silences, I offer an analysis of how testimonios theorize in the silences due to the “disciplinary ruptures,” or the significant disturbances testimonios pose to the masculine dominant territorial narrative. I close with a feminist geography proposition of testimonio-territorio that weaves together testimonio and territory to offer a decolonial direction to narrative and knowledge construction in Las Tunas.

Ultimately I ask: how do testimonios of women of La Comuna Ancestral Las Tunas in southern Manabi, Ecuador shape the territory and, by defying the silencing of their stories, offer an alternate and decolonial narrative of the territory? Just like my family has taught me, I share these stories with care. I move around my thinking avoiding the extractive language of exhuming and rescuing the voices of the women of Las Tunas because of the legacies of colonial
knowledge extraction that I intentionally attempt to move away from. I share this story of interrogating silences in how territorial narratives are disseminated and constructed. The totalizing narratives silence alternate knowledges and stories but the women are not silent. Their testimonios are pushing back on the dominant masculine territorial narratives to put forward reciprocal, multibeing, and care based territorial relationships through their stories.
Methodologies

My connection to Las Tunas began during my semester abroad in Ecuador, as part of my study abroad program's research component. My task was investigating a topic that connects to the environmental, linguistic, or political themes of the semester, producing a monograph, and presenting in Otavalo to my peers and program staff. The program director, Fabián Espinosa, connected me to a project that was being done in Las Tunas that would align my environmental communication interests with environmental advocacy and storytelling. My director emphasized the importance of reciprocity as a researcher, centering the community’s knowledge and agreeing on how to show appreciation for hosting and sharing stories. I had these intentions in mind as I first arrived at La Comuna Ancestral Las Tunas, or the Ancestral Commune of Las Tunas.

I have conducted research in Las Tunas twice, during my semester abroad, and the summer of 2023. In Las Tunas, my research has evaluated the ongoing colonial threat Ayampe developers pose to ancestral identity. Now, the larger context of coloniality and a hegemonic extractive narrative in Ecuador influences the creation of a dominant territorial narrative in Las Tunas. The narrative stifles subversive territorial knowledge, and forces alternate knowledges to silences.

My methodologies follow a timeline starting with my methods from Fall 2022. The timeline begins with the first section, Community Projects, where I describe how participating in aporte comunitario, or community contribution projects shape my research. The second section, Snowball Sampling and Storytelling discusses my past research where I documented environmental storytelling in Las Tunas using ethnographic methodologies such as participatory observations and oral histories. In Testimonios: Alternative and Subversive Lines of Inquiry I explain the next temporal development in Summer of 2023. Here, I describe how I sought out
women’s testimonios, characterizing my process as pursuing and uplifting alternative and subversive lines of inquiry. Finally, I offer my reflections in how my methodologies are rooted in the needs of the community and reciprocity, and informed by my positionality.

**Part I- Community Projects**

I arrived to Las Tunas for the first time in early November, unsure of how the research project would unfold. I met my host, Byron Delgado, a prominent community activist and owner of Wipeout Restaurant and lodge. The lodge sits steps away from the beach facing the Pacific Ocean. A seafood restaurant and bar occupy the first floor, with the second floor devoted to guest rooms.  

I was to stay on the second floor and participate in a community volunteer project where I’d be able to talk to community members and build my research.

The objective was to meaningfully contribute to the environmental and community initiatives of Las Tunas and document their actions. The research project was to unfold while working in the community projects. The volunteer program was a collaboration with community members: Byron Delgado, Judith Mero, Byron’s sister-in-law; and René Zambrano, Byron’s coworker at Fundación Jocotoco (Jocotoco Foundation). The first phase of my methodologies was the community projects completed during the volunteer program. The volunteer activities responded to initiatives that expressed a need for support.

My proximity to community leaders during activities meant that I focused on hearing the histories around environmental education, the environment, and conservation efforts. My participatory observations were through the volunteer program led by Judith. The quotidian turtle monitoring walks helped to establish personal connections with Byron and René, conservation leaders in the community. We shared a passion for socio-environmental struggles, the aligned goals helped establish trust and appreciation. For example, in his car driving on the southern part

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2 Wipeout has added more guest rooms, they are located behind the original lodge and sit above Byron’s home.
of the beach of Las Tunas, is when I asked Byron to share the history of the community and when it was formed. His overview provided the general themes of resistance and ancestrality, which planted a seed of curiosity in me. In tandem, while we were painting fences that protect turtle nests with anti-rust gray paint, Judith Mero, a former resident of Ayampe, mentioned that Ayampe was changing because of foreign influence. She identified the next territorial threat to Las Tunas, and I listened intently, seeing how to connect the narratives that were being shared with me. The paint stained my rain jacket, and the memory and curiosity of those days are similarly marked.

During the community projects, my observations were used to understand the cultural and environmental contexts. I observed the relations Comuneros, or members of the Comuna, had with their lands and their surroundings. For example, I observed the relationships of respect and unity many Comuneros have with the ecosystem and their beings. The monthly community Mingas para el Mar, a community initiative of collaborative labor to clean up the communal beaches reveals how the community is not alienated from their environment—everyone is respected as beings.

Part II- Snowball Sampling and Storytelling

The stories that were being shared in the community projects shaped my curiosity and wonder about the tradition of territorial resistance in La Comuna. I will discuss how I participated in snowball sampling and how I later diverged from Byron’s social network while in Ayampe.

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3 As I explained in the Introduction, La Comuna identified its ancestrality, or ancestral heritage and identity in 2012 when it became a Comuna Ancestral and formed part of Pueblos y Nacionalidades.

4 I am following a tradition of decolonial studies that Aimee Bahng’s Race, Gender, and the Environment class has shown me. Many works have highlighted decolonial relations between humans and their surroundings, beings, and land. See: Max Liboiron Pollution is Colonialism (2021) and Jessica Hurley, “Nuclear Settler Colonialism at Sea,” (2022).
In Las Tunas, Byron Delgado, took note of my interest in hearing the history of Las Tunas and connected me to Comuneros who were open to sharing the territorial history of their community. Byron Delgado has an important position in the community. He currently serves as vice-president the council of Salango, and thus, Byron has rich knowledge of and is appreciated by his community. Parker, Scott, and Gedes in “Snowball sampling” (2019) explain that in snowball sampling, “researchers usual start with a number of initial contacts (seeds)....Researchers, therefore, us their social networks to establish initial links, with sampling momentum developing from these, capturing an increasing chain of participants” (Parker, Scott, and Geddes 2019, p. 3). Byron is the initial seed because his community network provided the paths for my snowball sampling model; Byron pointed me to people he knew to have knowledge on the themes of history, territorial resistance, and environment.

Byron continued pointing me to what he saw as prominent elders, and they mentioned abuelos5 I should talk to. However, the snowball samples were incredibly gendered. The abuelos Byron connected me with were men, and the elders that they pointed me to, were men as well. The knowledge of the history that was being shared became gendered too. Parker, Scott, and Gedes explain that this can arise since the “sample is dependent on the researcher’s personal resources and contacts. As potential participants stem from a small number of initial seeds, the research is at risk of becoming distorted very early in the research process” (Parker, Scott, and Geddes 2019, p. 5). For my research, “distorted” is strong diction since the weaknesses of the snowball sampling became a path of investigation to reveal a larger story of narrative and knowledge construction.

The first snowball was Byron facilitating a conversation with his dad, Don Saúl Delgado. Don Saúl is an abuelo of the community, he is recognized as an elder who holds extensive

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5 Spanish for elders. Refers to the generic plural form, but can also refer to a group of just men elders.
knowledge of the story of the formation of the Comuna. Don Saúl offered a narrative that he expressed as the entire history of the territory. I credited Don Saúl Delgado’s oral history in my previous project as the voice that united the themes of territorial resistance and coloniality. The narrative he shared served as the framing that reflects the legacy of environmental storytelling in Las Tunas.

In addition, Don Saúl’s story expressed the urgency to share the narratives of ongoing colonial threats. I hoped to respond to the need of the community to record the ancestral histories of Las Tunas in the face of a territorial threat of foreign developers looking to profit from the natural landscapes. Based on the urgency to disseminate the narratives, a symmetry of sorts unfolded—with the needs of the community and my research avenue. I was seeking out voices that were willing to share their knowledge of the history of the territory and responded to the urgency to document ancestral environmental stories.

After the oral history with Don Saúl, Byron would point me to additional elders, and they too would offer people to follow up on. Byron was following up on my interests and guided me on a path that he viewed to be an objective and dominant form of territorial knowledge. Byron connected me to the former president of the Comuna, Heber Ponce; the author of the community anthem, Alfredo Pilligua; and the current president of the Comuna, Lino Castaño.

The interviews that were not facilitated by Byron still came about due to his recommendations, along with additional advice from community members. In Ayampe, I worked outside of Byron’s social network. Without the facilitation of Byron, I found difficulty in establishing connections. However, I went to community members who usually had their own

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6 Byron knew the people I talked to, yet in Ayampe, there was not a direct facilitation. Byron’s name still helped establish credibility.
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businesses and bought their products to show my interest. I deeply appreciated it when I was
referred to additional community members.

In the Ayampe interviews, I found it difficult to formulate open questions that were not
inductive. I opened the conversations asking for perspectives, yet I found difficulty in forming
questions that did not indicate what I wanted to know. I attempted to create a balance between
asking general perspectives about the territorial conflict, or Las Tunas’ past, and pointed
questions. When an inductive question slipped, I tried to not force a response.

In Ayampe, I was following Byron and René’s recommendation to find Don Raúl
Tomala, a known elder in Ayampe, when instead, I heard from one of his daughters—Graciela
Arcelly Tomala. I share a sliver\(^7\) of this story because while I was searching for an *abuelo*,
designated to have a breadth of knowledge about the past, Graciela illuminated the richness of
women’s *testimonio*, and the gap of women’s territorial knowledge in the *Comuna*. This was a
starting point to the next iteration of my research.

**Part III- Testimonios: Alternative and Subversive Lines of Inquiry**

With the support of the Oldenborg Travel Grant, I was able to return to Las Tunas. I
aimed to nuance my initial research in environmental storytelling with *testimonios*. In this
section, I explain my use of *testimonios* to display alternative and subversive lines of inquiry. I
employ the Chicanx/Latinx methodology of *testimonio*. The Latina Feminist Group guides my
methodologies because their objective is to show the importance of *testimonio*, of sharing
knowledge as a “crucial means of bearing witness and inscribing into history those lived realities
that would otherwise succumb to the alchemy of erasure (Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 2).

My objective is to discuss how women’s *testimonios* bear witness to the gaps and silences in the
hegemonic territorial narratives of Las Tunas.

\(^7\) The full story is the opening for the third chapter.
The line of inquiry I followed in my original research was a path of masculine voices, or following a masculine line of inquiry that shaped the construction of ancestral knowledge and environmental memory. I communicated with Byron my focus to talk, to *pláticar*, with women in the *Comuna*. I refer to this intention as seeking the alternative and subversive lines of inquiry. I made suggestions to follow subversive paths of the knowledge of women that exist outside the hegemonic narratives. Byron connected me to Maritza, leader and schoolteacher in Puerto Rico, her *testimonio* reveals her own narrative of resistance and connection to territory. In tandem, I went back to the original relationships I cultivated in the Fall of 2022, to Graciela Tomala, to Judith Mero. I heard their *testimonios*—the stories and personal reflections, narrating their relationships to their territory. In hearing the *testimonios*, I followed the guidelines that “the methodological concerns of *testimonio* are often around giving voice to silences” (Delgado, Burciaga, and Flores Carmona, 2012, p. 364). I want to be cautious that I will not *otorgar*, or grant, women their voice in the silences; rather, I engage in hearing *testimonios* to register the voices that are theorizing and storying the land in the gaps and silences.

**Reflections: Community Needs, Personal Observations, Positionality**

I reflect about additional factors that inform my methodologies. My initial stay in Las Tunas responded to the urgency to document ancestral environmental storytelling and I collaborated with Byron to ensure that stories will be recorded to encourage the continuous dissemination of them. In the Fall, we agreed to create an anthology of the stories of the *Comuna*, yet because of my short stay in November, I was only able to create a mini-Anthology.

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8 In my second chapter, I will examine this pattern as following a journey to registering silences in knowledge production
9 Nod to another Chicano/Latino methodology, a talk. Since I am following the traditions of Chicano/Latino scholars and activists. For more information on *plática*, see: Cindy Fierros, & Dolores Delgado Bernal (2016). *Vamos a platicar*: The contours of pláticas as Chicana/Latina feminist methodology. *Chicana/Latina Studies*, 98-121.
10 Puerto Rico is a precinct of *La Comuna Ancestral Las Tunas*, it is north of Las Tunas and Ayampe, but after Las Cabañas.
When I came back in the summer, Byron and I decided to continue the inspiration to have an anthology to get more voices and stories.

To craft the Anthology, I relied on Byron’s connections, too. I completed interviews with Byron’s family members and community connections that he identified as having knowledge of the stories of the territory. I looped back to Don Saúl, and we picked up where we left off. I was also pointed to and interviewed his brother, Gerónimo Delgado.

Additionally, we expanded the storytelling initiative to include the community as an audience. The initiative called Chocolate con Historias invited community members to gather over hot chocolate and share their tales of Las Tunas in Wipeout. The collaboration facilitated an intergenerational exchange. Byron invited two abuelas and two abuelos to share their perspectives on the past of the Comuna. Unfortunately, one of the Abuelas was unable to make it, and instead, Don Saúl filled in the role. Doña Leito Tomala, Byron’s mother-in-law, offered the story of women.

Byron and I took the initiative into the local school as well; Don Saúl and I led a thirty minute storytelling workshop teaching young students about the start of the Comuna. These initiatives were a response to the community's need and urgency to maintain their ancestral storytelling. The reciprocity agreement between Byron and I was that I would be interviewing residents and documenting stories of the Comuna while conducting research.

In my time in Las Tunas, I also observed occurrences that had a strong presence of women, in places where I observe how their testimonios and connections to their territory are on display. I am not sure how the observation of the community events will be present in this thesis, but I am including my narration and observations in this section as a personal reflection of a subversive line of inquiry.
Bingo is huge for the women of *La Comuna*. They are competitive, yet in a collective and supportive. In the kitchen of Wipeout, Doña Mercedes, Byron’s mom, or Mama Meche as she is called by her close ones, asked me if I liked Bingo. I answered with an enthusiastic and honest yes, I shared with her the bingo community church event my dad brought us to—memories of joy and service are salient when I think of Bingo in my life. For Mama Meche, it is her *vicio*. She self-described it as her vice, she goes every afternoon. Her family pokes fun at her; Michael and Nexar\(^{11}\) once joked with me that if you want to get her attention, write your message on the back of a bingo card. Mama Meche was not too fond of the joke.

One Saturday, Mama Meche took me to Bingo in Las Tunas park. The community park had tables set up for bingo, only steps from the Delgado Flores teal house. Women were chatting at the tables, with kids running around, waiting for the game to begin. Excitement was brewing when the bingo tables were being sold, and the prizes were being shouted out. Mama Meche and I caught up, she expressed curiosity in my life, and I asked about her role in the community. Only shortly I had found out that she was a lead for her *barrio*,\(^{12}\) a new initiative in the community to organize by sector. Our conversation was taken over by the game, emotions were high and competitive, yet the energy of community and collectivity was present. The presence of women was abundantly clear.

The game began and my bingo skills were not up to par, I was embarrassed to even claim that I was good, or had any luck in bingo. Mama Meche shone, she won Pepsi, pasta, oil, and eggs for her home. The lady next to me saw me struggling and ended up playing my board. She

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\(^{11}\) Michael is Byron’s oldest son and Mama Meche’s first grandchild. Nexar is Mama Meche’s youngest son. Both are artists in the community and my friends.

\(^{12}\) I regret not having talked to Mama Meche more deeply about her role as a leader in her barrio of San Vicente. We only briefly conversed that she organizes activities to bring all the people of San Vicente together, and campaigns that people must be more conscious about waste on the street. In my notes of that conversation, we briefly touched on how her plans in the *barrio* display actions to protect the territory. I did watch on Facebook that Mama Meche was in a press conference of sorts urging the local government to take action to fix the Las Tunas. Link: [https://www.facebook.com/100059242032915/videos/1331269480841540/](https://www.facebook.com/100059242032915/videos/1331269480841540/).
ended up winning me some noodles and oil. The ladies clutter in bingo, the women are showing allegiance to building a supportive community, while getting free prizes to take home. I still see Mama Meche’s WhatsApp stories promoting the daily bingo.

The vignette displays how women subvert normative spaces of knowledge construction. Women gather under a shared passion and in this space, they are not under threat to have their stories and voices spoken over. In playing bingo, women are sharing their knowledge that is not constrained to the spaces reserved for men—such as, in homes where young men ask male elders to share the territorial narrative.

I share my personal observations while in Las Tunas with the purpose of illuminating how my approach to this research is through my lens and position. Similarly, Sophie Chao’s *In the Shadow of the Palms* (2022) narrates her trajectory while in the Marind community in West Papua, Indonesia. She situates herself in the context of investigating “multispecies entanglements of oil palm plantations” (Duke University Press, n.d.). Her narration puts in context how she arrived and carried herself in the community; her investigation is through her positionality. Similarly, my reflection of my methodologies asks, how do I approach the stories? The silences? The knowledges?

I follow the story of silences and territory *cosmovisiones* from my eyes. I have been asked, what voice will you employ in your writing? My personal voice manifests in my footnotes and in my personal narrative. I am inspired by Dr. Max Liboiron and Ross Gay’s use of footnotes. Dr. Max Liboiron in *Pollution is Colonialism* explains that for them, footnotes is a “place for nuance and politics, where the protocols of gratitude and recognition play out…and care work are carried out…and where I contextualize, expand, and emplace work” (Liboiron,
Liboiron is employing a “methodological performance” mirroring their argument “of doing good relations…to show how methodology is a way of being in the world and that ways of being are tied in obligation” (Liboiron, 2021, p.1). I bring it up because I hope to display a similar conversation where my writing and use of footnotes connects to my methodologies and intentions, of sharing stories, engaging in reciprocity and evaluating positionality. Footnotes are also a space for joy and conversation. When Ross Gay came to Pomona, he read excerpts from Inciting Joy, he would read enthusiastically: “Footnote!” and share his reflective thoughts or a joyous quip. In an interview with Chicago Review of Books, Ross Gay describes that his use of footnotes display his curiosity in,

in formal devices by which we might reach across the table to whom we’re speaking, across or out of the page I guess, to kind of shove my reader in the forearm or pat them on the hand and say, our conversation reminds me there’s also this other thing. And that other thing sometimes is the thing (Chaffa, 2022).

I reach out to you, and invite you to my thinking, curiosities, and stories. With the guidance of Dr. Max Liboiron and Ross Gay, the practice of footnotes shapes my personal voice and forms the narrative that I offer.

I cannot separate my personal narrative from my work, my engagement with the testimonios are from my position of an extranjera. I am the outsider, the foreigner, who is responding to the need to connect with the community to hear their stories to preserve their environmental memory. In addition to centering the voices of La Comuna Ancestral Las Tunas, the intention of my thesis is informed by my position as la extranjera. Comuneros residents often mistrust foreigners in Las Tunas as they have historically brought problems to the territory. My Colombian and Latinx background does not guarantee that I am worthy of the immediate

13 Footnote about footnotes. Professor Aimee Bahng described Liboiron’s footnotes in our GWS172: Race, Gender, and the Environment class discussion board. I also bring in Emilio’s words in our discussion board: how Liboiron employs footnotes to “enact the kind of practice needed to ‘maneuver within this complex and compromised terrain’ (21).”
confidence of the Comuneros. Still, the community appreciated the values of reciprocity, kindness, and collectivism that a person brings. I believe that this is the bare minimum that a researcher must provide. My methodology includes the continued consciousness of my foreigner positionality and approach to listen to the voices of the community with empathy and reciprocity.

As a foreigner, my presence is fleeting, while the community members who are represented in my research have deep roots in the land and territory. My fleetingness sets up a possible relationship of extracting knowledge for my personal benefit of the research or a personal agenda. The ethic of colonial knowledge extraction is something I hope to continuously challenge. In fact, the colonial practice of extracting local and ancestral knowledge underscores current and past colonial territorial encroachment. In this thesis, I am cautious to use colonial diction such as excavating and exhuming stories, as if their stories are hidden, vulnerable, and waiting for the Researcher to come to excavate and rescue knowledge. Due to the nature of colonial extraction frameworks entrenched in research, I aim not to claim that I am relieved from any nuances of colonial knowledge extraction, because the decision is in the hands of the community. I offer the basic condition of reciprocity—showing thanks, responding to the needs of the community, making my project accessible, and consulting the community in my processes.

I ask: how do I, as a foreigner, register silences in the hegemonic territorial narrative? The silences do not refer to the silent figure of women in Las Tunas, because they are present. The silences refer to registering what is territorial and environmental knowledge and who is considered as holding, disseminating, and creating the knowledge. My intention is to underscore the reciprocity in relationships with women, stories, and territory. I perceive the stories as how they are told to me and by whom, and how I got there. I began registering the silences from the outsider point of view, I noticed the gaps in the narrative, and the prevailing theme of resistance
as constructing environmental knowledge. I was hearing the megaphone of masculine voices that narrate the stories of the territory. I do ask, is the outsider the one that only hears the megaphone? Is the megaphone directed to her? Can testimonios be transmitted and heard through the megaphone? The process of dis-entangling the threads of environmental and territorial knowledge and narrative, is messy. As an extranjera, I hope to tease out the complexities, that the testimonios story the land and reveal what silences can tell in Las Tunas.
Chapter 1: Testimonios and the Tradition of Silences in Territory: Literature Review

My curiosities as an undergraduate follows a trajectory of aligning my Latinx identity to my interests in geography. I found the intersection while studying in Ecuador; in a time that I sought to re-establish my roots in Latin America, I engaged with Latin American feminist geographies to better understand environment, territory, and gender. Feminist geographies identify concerns on how power is embedded and reflected in territories in Latin America. For example, scholars map and portray the gendered shaping of territory (Colectivo de Geografía Crítica del Ecuador, 2018). However, geography scholarship lacks ethnic studies methodologies. Ethnic studies methods critique knowledge and narrative construction. Specifically, ethnic follows the practice of using testimonio methodologies to trace links between counter hegemonic stories, most notably, among Chicanas and Latinas. Ethnic studies practices, as observed by, testimonios can inform critical questions in the field of geography. I follow Madelaine C. Cahuas’ question in “Voicing Chicanx/Latinx feminisms and situating testimonio in geographical research” (2022): “what possibilities emerge when we take seriously Chicanx/Latinx feminist thought, methodologies, and praxis in geography?” (Cahuas, 2021, p. 1516). My aim is to interlace theories of Latin American and Latinx feminist geographies with Chicana/Latina testimonio methodologies to envision the overlap between testimonio and territory to map the tradition of silences in territory and narratives. Susy J. Zepeda offers the significance of weaving critiques of narrative construction with feminist geography principles.

It is important to critically interrogate U.S., transnational, and hemispheric paradigms, historiographies, dominant narratives, and politics by showing interconnectivity in what otherwise appear as singular histories, disconnected groups or peoples, the viewing and treatment of land, Mother earth—madre tierra—and the environment as ownable property, as an unlimited resource for the entitled, for capital, for profit (Zepeda, 2022, p. 20).
I put the geography and ethnic studies disciplines in conversation with each other because my work in *La Comuna Ancestral Las Tunas*, or the Ancestral Commune of Las Tunas, foregrounds how the *testimonios* of women uncover the tradition of silences in the collective stories and knowledge of territory.

The material of the literature review is divided into 3 parts: touching on the methodology of *testimonios*; revealing the discussions of territorial narratives, definitions of territory in Latin American feminist geographies and the construction of a dominant territorial narrative in Latin America; and finally, scholarly case studies of how *testimonio* and territory have been interlaced to critique knowledge and narrative construction. *Testimonios* interlaced with territory is a mechanism to evaluate the process of knowledge and narrative construction. This chapter reveals the tradition of silences, critiqued by ethnic studies, found within the construction of a hegemonic territorial narrative in Ecuador.

**Part 1.1- Testimonio**

Oral histories and *testimonio* exist under the umbrella of feminist methodologies in Chicanx/Latinx Studies. How is *testimonio* different from oral history? Oral history has shifted over time\(^\text{14}\), yet the overall “objective of oral history is to record oral memory” (Francis, 2021, p. 268). Delgado, Burciaga, and Flores Carmona in “Chicana/Latina testimonios: Mapping the methodological, pedagogical, and political” (2012), make the distinction that *testimonio* displays a “critical reflection of their personal experiences within particular sociopolitical realities” (Delgado, Burciaga, and Flores Carmona, 2012, p. 364). *Testimonio* is embedded in and responds to the socio-political conditions of the place or time. Despite the distinction, oral histories do not

exist in a vacuum, nor is the impact of the socio-political realities absent in the narrations, yet the recording of oral histories might not offer the depth of reflection of the realities that is found in *testimonios*. With this complexity in mind, I still use scholarly conversations found in oral histories to note the importance of centering women’s voices in knowledge and narrative construction. In the next two subsections, I outline the contributions of oral history and *testimonio* scholars.

**Oral Histories**

In the discipline of Chicanx-Latinx studies, scholars have used oral histories to exhume and offer alternate views of histories. Most notably, Maylei Blackwell in *¡Chicana Power!: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement* (2021), employed a “retrofitted memory” framing to build a countermemory of the 1970s-1980s Chicano Movement; retrofitted memory “uses fragments of older histories that have been disjunctured by colonial practices of organizing historical knowledge or by masculinist rendering of history that disappear women’s political involvement…” (Blackwell, 2021, p. 2). Blackwell’s text is foundational for my research because it details how Chicana oral histories are re-inserted into the hegemonic historical discourse and re-imagines a specific historical event. Chicana oral histories provide a counter-narrative that shapes the re-telling of the Chicano Movement. The piece establishes the rich scholarly literature on women’s oral history methodologies in Chicanx-Latinx studies because the piece identifies the importance of the methodology revealing the “mechanics of erasures” in narratives. Blackwell defines, “This means looking at the conditions in which a story/history is told, interrogating the erasures, and listening to the gaps and interstices to reveal the workings of power” (Blackwell, 2021, p. 2). When thinking about the practice
of orality, Chicana-Latina methodologies trace how power and domination can be subverted when sharing women’s voices—Blackwell calls this subversion “a new structure of remembrance” (Blackwell, 2021, p. 2). A new structure of remembrance means that the hegemonic narrative that dominates the telling of a historical event is destabilized and thus makes room for alternate renderings and ways of remembering.

Decolonial Studies engages with oral history to center marginalized voices and communities. Voice, for this discipline, creates collective memories and retellings as a practice of resistance. In “Decolonising Oral History: A Conversation” (2021), Hillary Francis, Inge Boudewijn, Antonia Carcelén-Estrada, Juana Francis Bone, Katy Jenkins, and Sofia Zaragocin have an intercultural discussion about decolonizing oral history, approaching the topic through the lens of Afro-Ecuadorian orality and practices of resistance in Esmeraldas, Ecuador. Their conversation introduces an intricacy of orality and territoriality. In the Esmeraldas context, Carcelén-Estrada presents: “Orality protects [emphasis added] the physical and symbolic integrity of the land against the threat of the mineral extraction and colonial dispossession that ‘devour’ Esmeraldas and its memory” (Carcelén-Estrada, 2021, p. 277). Decolonial studies reveal how territory becomes intertwined with Afro-Ecuadorian orality. These authors exemplify oral history as a tool to trace the unraveling of colonial and patriarchal challenges over territories, voices, and bodies. Sharing oral histories articulates the vision that the Afro-Ecuadorians of Esmerelda hold of their territory. Thus, decolonial oral histories contribute to the defense of territory in Esmeraldas because the practice of disseminating Afro-Ecuadorian stories re-inserts subversive territorial knowledge that challenges how colonial extractivist episodes flatten narratives of the land.
Testimonio

Testimonio as a genre and a methodology focuses on uncovering silences (Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, and Carmona, 2012). Testimonio sprouted from the Latina Feminist Group, a collective aiming to share their testimonies in a community. The Latina Feminist Group established testimonios as an academic tradition. The group offered the metaphor of testimonios uncovering the papelitos guardados, “the stories often held from public view—and to express the full complexity of our identities, from the alchemies of erasure and silencing our passions, joys, and celebrations” (Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 20). Sharing the papelitos guardados breaks the silences that Chicana and Latina women exist in and re-values testimonio as a form of constructing knowledge within the confines of academia (Cahuas, 2022).

Chicanx/Latinx scholarly conversation lacks a discussion of how testimonio can be utilized in various interdisciplinary realms and viewed as creating knowledge outside of academic knowledge production. Testimonio can be important across disciplines due to the tradition of the “genre that exposes brutality, disrupts silencing…” (Delgado, Burciaga, and Flores Carmona, 2012, p. 363). Madelaine C. Cahuas (2022) sets the foundation for weaving testimonio and geography by discussing the importance of situating testimonio in Latinx geography research. Cahuas’ discussion of testimonios is its use to improve engagement with decoloniality and anti-oppressive strategies in geography research (Cahuas, 2022, p. 1520). Cahuas focuses solely on testimonios in the realm of research, while I hope to expand to examining women’s testimonios in territorial resistance and the challenge testimonios pose to patriarchal knowledge construction.
In the next section, I zoom in on territorial resistance as a branch of feminist geography discipline that should consider centering testimonio. According to scholars in Chicanx-Latinx studies, testimonio bears witness and places value on non hegemonic knowledge of women of color; thus, testimonio can bare the silences and voices of subversive narratives resisting colonial narratives of extraction.

**Part 1.2- Territory and the Territorial Narrative**

Territory is linked to traditions of resistance in Indigenous communities in Abya Yala. I use this terminology from Indigenous scholars that refer to the place known as Latin America. I discuss the narratives of territory according to feminist geographies and extractivist cosmologies. I provide critical context about the construction of a hegemonic cosmology and narrative of extractivism in Ecuador. The dominant narrative of extractivism in Ecuador reduces alternate cosmologies of territory to silences. Although other scholarship identifies them as different, I use dominant and hegemonic as synonyms to refer to the establishment totalizing narratives, both in the larger Ecuador context and in later chapters, in Las Tunas.15

*Abya Yala Feminist Geographies*

*El Colectivo de Geografía Crítica del Ecuador*—the Critical Geography Collective of Ecuador—offers the definition of territory that I adopt. Their work evidences the interplay of territory and power that then shapes how territory is narrated. In the lens of critical geography, territory is defined as the dynamic expression of power in a place (Colectivo de Geografía Crítica del Ecuador, 2017, pp. 175). Territoriality is how each actor in the territory is able to appropriate the territory to transform and control it, seeing it as the space of producing and reproducing life (Colectivo de Geografía

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15 The discussion of the difference between them is out of the scope of this thesis. I hope that this will be a future direction for my work.
Critica del Ecuador, 2017, pp. 175). This definition frames the rise and position of power in specific territories. In Abya Yala, feminist geographies pivot to the analysis of coloniality and patriarchy as displays of power and how they manifest in territories.

The current crisis of development, foreign capital, and cycles of dependency in Latin America provides a stage for feminist geographers to examine how extractivism displays patriarchy and colonialism narratives in territories. In the next subsection, I add scholarly literature on extractivism to provide a depiction of what type of narrative is enacted in the territory. The extractivist context paired with Abya Yala feminist geography raises the questions of: how are scholars responding to each other? How is power seeped into the extractivist narrative and its displays in territory? What do feminist geographers say about the extractivist narrative? Some of these questions are out of the scope of this literature review, yet they offer future lines of inquiry and lead into the next section of how territory is narrated from non-Indigenous and extractive cosmologies.

**Extractivist Narrative**

The constructed economic development narrative rules Latin America. Global North countries have forced upon a capitalist and neoliberal economic narrative that every nation must follow, focusing on prosperity, growth, and profit. Territories have been ransacked for the growth of Global North nations. This history shapes how territories in Latin America are dominantly imagined and constructed as resource-rich and open lands for extraction. As a result, the extractivist narrative forms part of the historical thread of the territory—both foreign extraction to fund the capital of foreign nations and extraction to produce capital for Latin American states. In this section, I
examine the creation of the hegemonic extractivist epistemology and the dominant narrative of exploitation in Latin America.

My objective is to argue that extractivism is not just a project of environmental exploitation at a grand scale, but in addition, extractivism is an epistemological project that creates a hegemonic narrative in Latin America. Finally, I connect the (re)production of the extractivist narrative to Ecuador.

In Latin America, the wave of the “commodities consensus” spills over into the way of thinking about and generating knowledge of territory. According to Maristella Svampa in “Commodities Consensus: Neoextractivism and Enclosure of the Commons in Latin America” (2015) the commodities consensus “focuses on the massive implementation of extractive projects oriented toward exportation” (Svampa, 2015, p. 66). The wave of the commodities consensus submerges stories and epistemologies that are in opposition to the dominant extractivist model. The consensus creates a colonial hegemonic epistemology that accepts extractivism as the only way of relating to and narrativizing territory. The commodity consensus built on the idea that there is—tacit or explicit—agreement about the irrevocable or irresistible character of the current extractivist dynamic, resulting from the global demand for raw materials. The aim is to limit collective resistance and close off the possibility for considering other notions of development and to install a comprehensive-historical threshold in regard to alternatives (Svampa, 2015, p. 67).

According to Svampa, the commodities consensus is implemented as the singular way of thinking about and executing development. In Latin America, there exists the necessity and urgency to participate in extractivism to develop and respond to the capitalistic
demand for natural resources. As a result, the dominant epistemology is built once the commodities consensus is accepted.

The hegemonic colonial extractivist epistemology rejects alternate narratives of relating to and narrativizing territory. Indigenous leader and scholar of the Krenak community in Minas Gerais, Brazil, Ailton Krenak in *Ideas para postergar el fin del mundo* (2021) notes that the rejection of multiple epistemologies of territorial relations creates an environmental and territory relation crisis. Krenak shows that “[c]uando despersonalizamos el río, la montaña, cuando los despojamos de sus sentidos, considerando que eso es atributo exclusivo de los humanos, liberamos esos lugares para que se tornen residuos de la actividad industrial y extractivista” (Krenak, 2021, p. 29). Ailton Krenak demonstrates that when extractivist epistemologies depersonalize the river, the mountain, the beings are stripped of their senses. When extractivist narrative considers that senses are exclusive attributes of humans, the extractivist projects free those territories so that they become spaces of industrial and extractive activity. The colonial mentality is reflected in the implementation of a dominant epistemology of extractivism that rejects and extinguishes indigenous voices and their relations to their territory. The relational crisis results in a depersonalization of the territory that facilitates the implementation of an extractivist epistemological project.

The hegemonic and colonial extractivist epistemological project transforms the narrative and imagination of territories. Macarena Gómez Barris in *The extractive zone: Social ecologies and decolonial perspectives* (2017) utilizes the terminology “extractive view” to describe how territories come to be marked as “extractive zones” due neoliberal development pressures revealing “the regions of extractive capitalism” (Gómez-Barris,
The extracist view helps explain the construction of the extractivist epistemology. The extractive view is “similar to the colonial gaze, facilitating the reorganization of territories…into extractible data and natural resources for material and immaterial accumulation” (Gómez-Barris, 2017, p.3). The extractive view constructs a dominant way of thinking, a hegemonic epistemology where territories are subject to an extractivist narrative—the higher the capital value, the more likely territories are to be exploited for capital and the higher likelihood that communities are subject to environmental violence.

The exploited territories, subject to the commodities consensus and the extractive view, are transformed into regions, called by Maristella Svampa in “Feminismos ecoterroriales en América Latina. Entre la violencia patriarcal y extractivista y la interconexión con la naturaleza” (2021) as zonas de safrificio—sacrifice zones. Svampa explains that living in these zones means living in a situation of inequality and environmental racism, where social, ethnic, and gender complexities intersect (Svampa, 2021, p. 10). Additionally, configuring the sacrifice zones is a process where other knowledge, forms of production and life lose value (Svampa, 2021, p. 10). The deployment of an extractive narrative and the creation of sacrifice zones shape how territory is imaged and valued. The scholarly conversation reveals that under a capitalist, patriarchal, and colonial view the relationships to land and territories shift, along with how territories are being transformed, disembodied, and exploited.

In my research, I aim to add complexity by asking what type of narrative is being diffused in the territory in Las Tunas? How can women’s testimonios reveal the
construction of a hegemonic epistemology and narrative of territory? How can women’s testimonios offer a different vision of territory?

**Ecuador Context**

Ecuador has been transformed as an extractive sacrifice zone because of the mass implementation of extrativist projects. The extractivist model is characterized by “large-scale enterprises, a focus on exportation, and a tendency for monoproduction or monoculture” (Svampa, 2015, p. 66). The hegemonic extractivist narrative preys on territories with wood, minerals, and oil in Ecuador. Territories are being ransacked by foreign actors and the Ecuadorian state for its rich resources.

Specifically, oil is a lucrative market that aims to springboard Ecuador out of debt. However, oil has torn through the country’s economy because of its dependency on foreign investment and pattern of environmental abuses. The former energy minister of Ecuador, Fernando Santos told The New York Times (2023) that Ecuador is in “monstrous debt…But while [Santos] recognizes that oil played a role in creating the problem, he also sees oil as the solution. With more drilling and mining development, he said, ‘the country will be able to get out of debt’” (Einhorn and Andreoni, 2023). The former energy minister affirms the hegemonic extractivist narrative of development in Ecuador that justifies the implementation of extractivist projects in vulnerable territories in Ecuador. Open-pit mining in Ecuador exemplifies the implementation of the extractivist cosmology. The most contentious project is in

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Zamora...the site of the ‘El Mirador’ open-pit copper mining project. This $1.4 billion project, developed by the Chinese firm Ecuacorriente, signaled Ecuador’s entry into large-scale mining and the launching of a new industry...The lands on which these projects would be taking place are predominantly Indigenous lands, and given the expected effects in terms of pollution, displacement of communities, and health concerns, Indigenous and environmental groups have fought to stop the project. (Bernal, 2021, p.10).

Not only does open-pit mining explode mountains, but sacred territories and its people are affected in the name of the extractive narrative. Ecuador has this foreign investment that can support a rising industry for capital accumulation, yet the bodies—their health and wellbeing—of indigenous people are put on a line. The capital accumulation through territorial invasions fails to consider the casualties because the people on the margins are seen as disposable and factors for capital accumulation. Current extractivist narratives have not considered the manifestation of other iterations of colonial and patriarchal narratives, such as, the hegemonic masculine narratives of territory and territorial resistance. My aim is to analyze how these narratives reinforce the totalizing extractivist frameworks found in Ecuador that consume alternate knowledges.

The Ecuadorian ongoing extractivist narrative constructs the context of the country that belittles and banishes alternate cosmologies of territory. The stories that were told to me reflect a colonial and patriarchal thread of territorial resistance narratives. The question that frames the next section is, how can testimonios reveal alternative epistemologies that defy the tradition of subjecting alternate cosmologies to silences?

Part 1.3- Interlacing

The interlacing of testimonios and territory reveals the ways territory is imagined, narrated, and transformed across time. This section delves into case studies and theories that weave the orality and relationships to territory, imagining how women’s voices enact an
anti-extractive lens. The scholarly discussion that emerges of how *testimonio* and territory are connected is that sharing submerged knowledge of women can offer a non hegemonic cosmology that inverts the extractive cosmology and narrative imposed on territory. Women of color’s *testimonios* center on the plight of territorial resistance. Focusing on territorial resistance means focusing on the silencing of women’s narratives. I briefly go into theories and case studies—anticolonial, from the Black Pacific, and Indigenous Feminisms—to recover reciprocal visions of territory narrated by women’s voices. They display reciprocal connections to their territory revealing the importance of valuing multiple epistemologies to “intentionally work to unravel dominant narratives” (Zepeda, 2022, p. 8). I close with a concluding section on interlacing alternate epistemologies to defying the tradition of silence of alternate epistemologies.

**Anticolonial feminist storytelling**

In “Storytelling earth and body” (2023), Vasudevan *et al* identifies storytelling by women as the tradition that theorizes the relations between beings, bodies, and land. One way is transforming “spatiotemporal scales through which planetary crises are understood by centering the relationship between body and land” (Vasuden *et al*, 2023, p. 1728). The territorial relationship is built from their narrations; the stories of women of color place body and territory at the forefront, this “reveals alternate renderings of body–land relations, refusing Western colonial dichotomies” (Vasuden *et al*, 2023, p. 1738). As a result, the narratives create an epistemology that challenges colonial renderings and extractive narrative of territories. In the following disciplines and/or cases, the narratives follow the tradition of inverting, challenging, countering hegemonic colonial narratives.

**Black Pacific (Chocó) and Women**
The voices of the Black Pacific, known as the Chocó region located in Ecuador and Colombia offer ancestral narratives and submerged knowledge that form a strong collective memory of territory. Javier Eduardo Pabón in “Afro-Ecuadorian Ora-Literature: Insurgent Narratives of re-existence and place” (2016) argues that ancestral knowledges in Afro-Ecuadorian oral literatures portray a cosmology that counters Western hegemonic thinking of territory and memory (Pabón, 2016). Afro-Ecuadorian oral literature connects the importance of palabra and territory because when ancestral oral knowledge is shared, cosmologies of territorial defense are diffused (Pabón, 2016, p. 99). Territorial resistance of the Chocó region is enacted when stories are shared de boca en boca.

This piece provides the framing of testimonio and territory I apply in my research, “El territorio posee una dimensión testimonial de la presencia de las comunidades”: territory holds a testimonio dimension of the presence of communities that reside in territory (Pabón, 2016, p.108). Pabón highlights how Afro-Ecuadorian territorial defense means keeping Afro-Ecuadorian testimonio presence in their territory, or else narratives, voices, and histories that ties to the land will be lost.

However, the quote and paper does not recognize the narratives of Afro-Ecuadorian women. Javier Pabón’s work primarily centers on Afro-Ecuadorian men’s narrative. This gap points to the legacies of slavery, anti-Black racism, and convergence with misogynoir present in Afro-Ecuadorian communities and creates an additional layer of silencing for Afro-Ecuadorian women in Esmeraldas. The gap in this piece became a jumping off point for me to engage with further literature that centers women of color’s testimonio contributions to territory. In “Oral Histories in the Black
Durán González, 36

Pacific: Women, Memory, and the Defense of the Territory" (2022), Antonia Carcelén-Estrada analyzes the art piece Los dones de Esmeraldas to ask: Where are the representation of the presence of the women in the territory of the Black Pacific? Where are their voices? Carcelén-Estrada examines the gendering of territory in Black Pacific, hearing the impacts of women on the territory through their voices. “[T]erritories are defended by Black women who hold their ground and use oral history [emphasis added] and critical feminist geography to produce a history that heals and a narrative [emphasis added] of return to the dispossessed land” (Carcelén-Estrada, 2022, p. 82). The narratives of Black women, of their initiatives to defend their territory, oppose “the very conception of Esmeraldas as an early modern Spanish colonial frontier in the Pacific coast”; yet, the narratives reveal the “racial and gendered tensions…[and] relate to the silencing of Black women in Latin-American postcolonial history” (Carcelén-Estrada, 2022, p. 83). Here, the voices of Afro-Ecuadorian depict the very silencing of their knowledge of territory.

For the scholarly conversation, Carcelén-Estrada links the tensions between territory, gender, and silences: what does it mean for women of color to live in silences? Who registers silences? How are silences produced? And reproduced? How are they defied? In the Chocó region, Black women expose and counter the silences; for example, “Mujeres de Asfalto, a collective of Black feminists in Esmeraldas, combines decolonial oral history and critical feminist geography to defend communities, territories, and memory” (Carcelén-Estrada, 2022, p. 96). The narratives of Mujeres de Asfalto produce a territory of joy that resists silencing and the “violence of capitalism and a genocidal state” (Carcelén-Estrada, 2022, p. 96). I discuss the case study of Black
women in the Chocó region because the testimonios of Afro-Ecuadorian women elucidate the normative stories of history, bringing their own narratives of silences and resistance of their territory.

**Indigenous Feminisms in Abya Yala**

For Indigenous women of Abya Yala, the positionality of their bodies inform their relationship to their territory. Lorena Cabnal (2010) utilizes her testimonio to foreground how her body is in relation to her territory—coining this practice as feminismo comunitario (Cabnal, 2010, p. 21). For Cabnal, feminismo comunitario proposes the methodology of intertwining the cuerpo-territorio. The entanglement is explained as the “recuperación y defensa histórica de mi territorio cuerpo tierra,” (the recuperation and the historical defense of my body-land territory) (Cabnal, 2010, p. 21). Cabnal tells that she conceives her body as a woman as connected to a physical space in the land that affirms her existence, and promotes her plentiful life (Cabnal, 2010, p. 21). 

Feminismo comunitario triangulates gender, body, and territory and is a "propuesta feminista que integral [emphasis added] la lucha histórica y cotidiana de nuestros pueblos para la recuperación y defensa del territorio tierra”—a feminist proposal that integrates [emphasis added] the historical and cotonidian Indigenous fight for the recuperation and defense of the land-territory (Cabnal, 2010, p. 21). The triangulation forms the feminismo comunitario’s cosmology of territory: where territory must be prioritized and defended to guarantee having an “espacio concreto territorial, donde se manifiesta la vida de los cuerpos [emphasis added]” (Cabnal, 2010, p. 21). The proposal sees territory as being concrete, where the life of bodies are manifested.
Cabnal calls this body-territory thinking a “cosmovisión liberadora” (Cabnal, 2010, p. 22). The cosmovisión liberadora is a gaze of the self and the land, a liberatory cosmology that envisions body entangled with the territory; this cosmology “[r]ecupera la femealogía de nuestras ancestras, las nombra, las reconoce y legitima su conocimiento, resistencias y sabiduría” (Cabnal, 2010, p. 22). The knowledge of their women ancestors are recuperated, named, recognized, and legitimized for their resistance and wisdom. Testimonio fits in this cosmology because the voices of Indigenous women evoke the submerged knowledge and silences of their voices and of their female ancestors (Cabnal, 2010, p. 22). I build on the cuerpo-territorio framework in the last chapter to add to feminist geography discussions of the women’s bodies and stories in resistance.

The ancestral cosmology is employed in Maristella Svampa’s ecoterritorios framing. For Svampa, ecoterritorios means fusing women’s role and voices in territorial and environmental defense (Svampa, 2021). Ecoterritorios display an entanglement of women’s testimonio and territory that recognizes the contributions and protagonism of women of color in territorial resistance. The testimonios of women defending their territory evidences the significance and difficulty of being on the frontlines; Linda Oneida Suárez Sánchez founder of Corporación para la Defensa Integral del Ambiente y las Fuentes Hídricas en el Bajo Simacota, Coldimafh, Colombia, (the Corporation for the Integral Defense of the Environment and Hydraulic Sources in the Bajo Simacota, Coldimafh, Colombia) offers her testimonio, “No es para nada fácil iniciar como mujer el liderazgo de una causa por la defensa del territorio, el agua, la vida y los derechos de las mujeres” (Svampa, 2021, p. 7). For Oneida Suárez Sánchez, it is not at all easy to be a woman initiating the cause of defending territory, water, life, and women’s rights,
especially organizing for the autonomy of the territory. However, she remarks, if nothing is done, then there is no triumph (Svampa, 2021, p. 7).

Under this cosmology, the lineage of testimonios of women narrate the long stories of resistance. The cosmology unearths the “[n]arrativas de voces bajas, casi inaudibles frente a un poder que busca invisibilizar los reclamos”—the narratives in low voices, almost inaudible against a power that aims to render invisible the claims of women of territorial exploitations and violences (Svampa, 2021, p. 13). The testimonios of submerged perspectives of women are amplifying a new language and gaze relating to territory outside of the extractive view. Their epistemology exists opposite of the dominant narrative that seeks to own territory because the reciprocal territorial relationship is in defense of territory and water (Svampa, 2021, p. 16-17). For Svampa, the gaze and language of ecoterritorios articulates a narrative that questions patriarchy and capitalism, all while forming an epistemology of care of territory (Svampa, 2021, p. 25). Ecoterritorios interlacing testimonio and territory offers a new way of viewing and learning with the territory.

**Alternate epistemologies and the tradition of silences**

The previous sections show the tradition of silence that alternate epistemologies find themselves subject to. Narratives that challenge dominant colonial extractivist narrative exist in silences since they are overpowered by the hegemonic consensus of extractivism. This last section further builds the further explanation of the tradition of silences, examining the impact of coloniality, and discusses additional decolonial multi-vocal epistemologies of territory that establish key terms for the rest of the thesis.
The tradition of silence is an expression of coloniality. The hegemonic narratives of territory submerge alternate epistemologies to silence to ensure the dominance of their colonial territorial project that reduces territories to resources and robs territories of rich reciprocal relations. I use Zepeda’s implementation of Aníbal Quijano’s definition of coloniality; for Zepeda, coloniality is the “conceptualization of a ‘colonial structure of power’ [that] provides an analytic framework from which to map the complexities of histories, memories, and silences” (Zepeda, 2022, p. 15). Coloniality is a structure that shapes narratives to benefit colonial actors. For example, extractivist projects and usurping of territory. The extractivist narrative and epistemology as an expression of coloniality is the framing for my critique of masculine narrative in chapters 2 and 3. The extractivist epistemology does seep into La Comuna, yet the context of extractivist projects is not the focus of this work. I discussed the creation of the extractivist narrative to model the process of coloniality in knowledge and narrative construction in Ecuador. The manifestation of coloniality is found in the construction of the masculine hegemonic territorial epistemology and narrative in Las Tunas.

As established in previous sections, the dominant extractivist narrative in Latin American silences alternate rich cosmologies. I want to focus this section on the rich multi-being epistemologies that are present in the territory and their decolonial possibilities. I hope to establish the decolonial theoretical foundations that I build on in my later chapters.

Ailton Krenak displays alternate cosmologies to the hegemonic narrative of extractivism in Latin America. Ailton Krenak reflects decolonial thoughts that challenge the dominant extractivist narrative in Latin America. Krenak's narrative challenges
epistemic hegemony because the Indigenous epistemology seeks to heal the relational crisis with the environment and territory. Krenak asks, “[p]or qué [esas narrativas] van siendo olvidadas y borradas en favor de una narrativa globalizante, superficial, que quiere contarnos la misma historia?” (Krenak, 2021, p. 18-19). Krenak is concerned with why are Indigenous narratives being forgotten and erased in favor of a globalizing and superficial narrative that seeks to tell the same story.

The narratives are being forgotten because the hegemonic extractivist narrative seeks to harm territorial relations. The “superficial, globalizing narrative that wants to tell us the same story” facilitates the exploitation of minerals and disconnects the emotional relationships of communities with their territory. On the other hand, an alternative epistemology, narrative, and imagination to the extractivist narrative strengthens relationships with territory. Ailton Krenak shares an ancestral story of his community’s connection to a mountain near the Watu River:

La aldea Krenak queda en la margen izquierda del río, en la margen derecha hay una sierra. Aprendí que esa sierra tiene nombre, Takukrak, y personalidad. De mañana temprano, allá en el terrero de la aldea, las personas miran para ella y saben si el día va a ser bueno o si es mejor quedarse quieto. Cuando está con una cara tipo “hoy no estoy para conversaciones,” las personas ya están atentas. Cuando amanece espléndida, bonita, con nubes claras sobrevolando en su cabeza, toda arreglada, todos dicen: “Puede hacer fiesta, bailar, pescar, puede hacer lo que quiera” (Krenak, 2021, p. 18).

The Krenak village is on the left bank of the river, on the right bank there is a mountain range. I learned that that mountain range has a name, Takukrak, and a personality. Early in the morning, there on the village grounds, people look at her and know if the day is going to be good or if it is better to stay still. When she has a face like “I’m not up for conversations today,” people are attentive. When she wakes up splendid, beautiful, with clear clouds flying over her head, all dressed up, everyone says: “We can party, dance, fish, we can do whatever we want” (Krenak, 2021, p. 18).
Having affective relations with the territory and the environment means engaging in “un compromiso con la vida,”—a commitment to life—with community, not with capital, exploitation, or extractivism (Krenak, 2021, p. 29). Ailton Krenak's decolonial narrative is an alternative to extractivist epistemologies since the decolonial thinking proposes to center affective territorial relations and commits to not reproducing colonial thinking and violence in the imagination of territory. These community and collective connections with territory and its beings challenge the extractivist mentality because collective relationships prioritizes reciprocity with the territory.

These decolonial collective relations oppose the extractivist project that depersonalizes members of the community, like the “Río Doce, que nosotros los Krenak, llamamos de Watu, nuestro abuelo, es una persona, no un recurso, como dicen los economistas” (Krenak, 2021, p. 26). Ailton Krenak traces that the Río Doce is known to the Krenak community is Watu, their grandfather, a person and not a resource—as referred and depersonalized by economists. Having reciprocal relationships means identifying the Watu as a being, he is not “algo de que alguien pueda apropiarse; es una parte de nuestra construcción como colectivo” (Krenak 26). Río Watu is part of the collective construction of the territory, and not something that someone can own. Collective, reciprocal, and decolonial relationships build a rich multi-vocal and multi-being narrative and imagination of the territory. Krenak constructs a territorial imaginary from collective and multi-vocal narratives of territory, constructing imagination of territory through a decolonial indigenous vision. I refer to the construction of a territorial imaginary in my thesis through Krenak’s visions.
In this horizon that Ailton Krenak illustrates, decolonial indigenous epistemologies recognize that “[e]xisten cientos de narrativas de pueblos que están vivos, cuentan historias, cantan, viajan, conversan y nos enseñan más de que aprendemos en esta humanidad” (Krenak, 2021, p. 23). Ailton Krenak's words manifest the existence of hundreds of narratives of communities that are alive, that tell stories, sing, travel, converse, and teach more than what we learn from the single narrative of one humanity. Multiple pluralities of life, worldviews, and stories flourish. For Ailton Krenak, the decolonial lens is “mantener nuestras subjetividades, nuestras visiones, nuestras poéticas sobre la existencia” (Krenak, 2021, p. 24). Decoloniality is maintaining Indigenous subjectivities, visions, and poetics about existence. The decolonial narrative rejects extractivist imagination that depersonalizes collective relationships with the territory and the multivocal narrative challenges the colonial hegemonic extractivist epistemology.

The multi-vocal and multi-being epistemologies that have been discussed all along this chapter are considered submerged perspectives by Macarena Gomez Barris. In addition to the extractive view, Gomez Barris contributes to the scholarly discussion by “foregrounding submerged perspectives…the realms of differently organized reality that are linked to, yet move outside of, colonial boundaries. Unlike the extractive view, I lift submerged perspectives that perceive local terrains as sources of knowledge, vitality, and liveability” (Gomez Barrris, 2017, p.2). I refer to testimonios as submerged perspectives because as Chapter 2 shows, they exist and are “submerged within local geographies that have been traversed by colonialism and extractive capitalism to show the ongoing force of the colonial encounter” (Gomez Barrris, 2017, p.2). Testimonios exist in silences, submerged within the hegemonic masculine territorial narrative in La Comuna. Alternate
epistemologies and narratives are “[s]ubmerged perspectives [that] pierce through the entanglements of power…In other words, the possibility of decolonization moves within the landscape of multiplicity that is submerged perspectives" (Gomez Barris, 2017, p. 11-12).

I follow Macarena Gomez Barris’ and Ailton Krenak’s visions of decoloniality in my analysis of testimonios and territory in chapter 3; “Decoloniality moves away from singularity and the reduction imposed by the European gaze toward the proliferation of epistemological possibility” (Gomez Barris, 2017, p. 3). My research shows that testimonios display indigenous women’s voices and stories as alternate decolonial cosmologies: how do their stories expose the tradition of silences? And the dominant narrative in La Comuna? What do their stories tell about territory? I center the epistemologies of testimonios to reflect a decolonial action to value multi-vocal epistemologies, defy dominant narrative, and shape a decolonial territorial imaginary.

**Conclusion**

My aim is to emphasize the importance of weaving testimonio and territory to unearth the entanglement between Indigenous women’s voices and their territory. The gaps that exist in testimonio and territory complement each other when weaved. Afro-Ecuadorian narratives in Mujeres de Asfalto (2022), Lorena Cabnal’s feminismo comunitario (2010) and Maristella Svampa’s ecoterritorios (2021) shows that women’s narratives center the lineage of ancestors and current alternate knowledge of territory. Notably, the cosmovisión and epistemologies of Lorena Cabnal and Maristella Svampa interlace the crucialness of testimonio to provide an alternate and submerged narrative of territory that then defies the extractivist narrative. In the cosmology and epistemology that arises, the silences of women’s voices are exhumed and
recognized. The literature review offers how women’s testimonios can leave an “imprint” on the territory and display decolonial epistemologies, according to Ailton Krenak (2021) and Macarena Gomez barris (2017). Specifically, the discussions of how women's testimonios have an impact on the narrative, epistemology, and imagination of territory.

The scholarly literature depicts the possibility of building on the interlace between testimonio and territory. The literature review has sparked additional questions about this interlace, such as, curiosities of the “potential” of testimonios as a methodology in the environmental discipline. Pointed questions include, in environmental and territorial conflicts, why is it important to be considered as/ to consider testimonios? In territorial conflicts, why is it important to call them silences? How are silences perceived in testimonios?

Building on the works mentioned above, in the following sections, I further the scholarly discussion by focusing on a case study in La Comuna Ancestral Las Tunas, or the Ancestral Commune of Las Tunas. My objective is to discuss the process of registering silences in knowledge production, the construction and defiance of a dominant masculine narrative.
Chapter 2: A Journey to Registering Silences in Knowledge Production and Narrative Construction

Doña Leito Tomala, an Abuela\textsuperscript{17} of the Las Tunas, sat sandwiched between Don Horacio and Don Saúl\textsuperscript{18} in the Chocolate con Historias night\textsuperscript{19} in Wipeout\textsuperscript{20}. Don Horacio had just given a short testimony of accompanying his dad to work in the mountain, and I gestured for Doña Leito to share her narrative about the role of women in the formation of the Comuna and to go into detail about that past: Señora, usted ha escuchado sobre cómo era el papel de la mujer durante la formación de la comuna como…sabe como esa historia…My voice trailed off, unsure of where the thread would lead. I was met with Doña Leito’s hesitancy, yet a direct answer: ¿De la historia de la comuna? Muy poco. Her response was that she knew very little when talking about the history of the Comuna. The community members chipped in with their curiosities, her daughter, Alexandra Mero whom I began to know very well because I accompanied her in Wipeout’s kitchen while she made me breakfast, asks Doña Leito, ¿Cómo era antes? ¿Cómo se trataba a las mujeres? O sea. ¿Cómo trataban a la mujer antes? Doña Leito follows that Alexandra wants to know about how women were treated in the past, and seeks clarification, ¿O sea, en el hogar? (Tomala, 2023). Doña Leito’s situated knowledge in the home, in addition to our earlier exchange, gestures to how her stories of the home and her entorno\textsuperscript{21} are not registered as knowledge of the territory.

\textsuperscript{17} Spanish for woman elder
\textsuperscript{18} Don Saúl and Don Horacio are Abuelos (elders) too.
\textsuperscript{19} As part of my reciprocal connections in Las Tunas as a researcher, I collaborated with Byron Delgado, my “host”—who helped me during my project—to host a night where the community would hear the elders share their stories while having hot chocolate. The intention for this initiative was to lead an intergenerational exchange of stories. I asked Byron if we could have 2 abuelas and 2 abuelos, but unfortunately Doña Leito was the only one who could make it. I was there to ask questions, record, and later transcribe the stories for the Anthology we are co-creating.
\textsuperscript{20} Wipeout is the lodging that I stayed in, owned and worked by Byron and the Delgado Flores family: Doña Mercedes Flores, Doña Elsa Flores, Nexar Delgado Flores, Eliana Delgado Flores, Nathaly Delgado Flores, Alexandra Mero Tomala, and Michael Delgado Mero.
\textsuperscript{21} Entorno is the word for surroundings, I use it to refer to all that constituted the “surroundings” of Las Tunas: environment, territory, community.
Still, Doña Leito shared critical testimonios of how she views her entorno, her surroundings, and her community. Her thoughts reveal a blooming knowledge of how the territory of Las Tunas has changed over time, in the face of environmental challenges. For example, the testimonios trace the shift of how extractivist consumer demands have depersonalized the environment into resources. In Doña Leito’s testimonio, the impact of the lumber industry is visualized in the territory. She sees how, Porqué árboles, ya quedan pocos. Hay terrenos que eran forestados y se ve que hay árboles, en la montaña, ya no. El árbol que nace por ahí, pero yo lo ven gruesito, y lo van cortando. Doña Leito narrates the disappearances of trees in the mountain—as soon as the industry saw a tree grow, they began to cut it (Tomala, 2023).

I return back to my first exchange with Doña Leito because what I heard was that Doña Leito bears a story, a testimonio of the dynamics and past of the territory. Only that the narrative has not been considered as part of the dominant knowledge of the “History” of La Comuna. I detangle the mechanics of knowledge production\textsuperscript{22} of environmental narratives of La Comuna; I aim to map the journey of registering the silences of knowledge production of territorial narratives of Las Tunas. The journey reveals a process of what comes to be registered as knowledge, exposing the mechanisms that construct a masculine dominant territorial narrative of Las Tunas. Next, I define the masculine line of inquiry present in Las Tunas, revealing the (re)production of what constitutes knowledge and the subsequent erasure of women’s testimonio. Finally, I offer the metaphor of the coloniality megaphone to unravel the occasion of coloniality, the threat to the ancestral identity that gives rise to what voices and stories are uplifted,

\textsuperscript{22} The term “mechanics of knowledge production” is inspired by Blackwell’s term “mechanics of erasures.” Defined as “looking at the conditions in which a story/history is told, interrogating the erasures, and listening to the gaps and interstices to reveal the workings of power” (Blackwell, 2011, p. 2)
explaining why testimonios are spoken over and exist in silence in La Comuna Ancestral Las Tunas.

**Part 2.1- Construction of Masculine Dominant Narrative**

The entanglement of episodes of resistance and a gendered line of inquiry construct a dominant knowledge in Las Tunas. The masculine line of inquiry is the path in which stories flow from man to man, this closed circuit generates and supports a masculine hegemonic environmental narrative. Since the knowledge of the territory gets passed down by masculine voices, the construction of the environmental knowledge of the territory comes from their perspectives. The episodes of territorial resistance become the hegemonic narratives in Las Tunas because stories and voices that exist beyond these boundaries—not masculine nor episodic and visual—are not uplifted as territorial knowledge. The masculine dominant narratives of Las Tunas overpower the subversive voices of women who narrate their stories with the territory. Their testimonios are drowned out.

*Te voy a comentar algo de la historia de nuestro territorio, de la comuna...* That is how Don Saúl Delgado, confidently opened the territorial history of the Comuna for my ears. Once I began asking Byron in November 2022 about the formation of Las Tunas, he connected me with his dad, Don Saúl Delgado. Don Saúl is an abuelo of the community, he is recognized as an elder who holds extensive knowledge of the story of the formation of the Comuna. Don Saúl offers a narrative that he calls the entire history of the territory. He shared the events that the elders of the community had shared with him throughout his life. Now the story has reached me. He exposed the explosive events that marked the beginning of the Comuna.

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23 The discussion of episodic and visualness is weaved with discussions of slow violence, I begin explaining this in the latter half of part 2. Later, in part 3, slow violence and coloniality is connected in the metaphor of the coloniality megaphone.
Don Saúl is assertive and assured in sharing the tale of territory that he registers to be the knowledge of the territory, compared to Doña Leito’s hesitancy and doubt that her testimonio is part of the tale of resistance, or of the dominant knowledge. The first episode starts with the arrival and presence of the first land-grabbers and terratenientes. Don Saúl tells:

_Era una comunidad…eran montañas—bosque. En esos tiempos eran bosques. Montañas inmensas._ Aquí llegaron las personas de Montecristi, de Colonche… y Papoche. Ellos llegaron aquí porque aquí ‘no había nadie.’ Ellos se hicieron su asentamiento…En esos tiempos [era] cuando había dos haciendas… y comenzaron arrebatarle el territorio—sus montañas. Las haciendas se querían hacer dueños de todos los territorios, que son más de tres mil no se cuanto hectáreas de la Comuna Las Tunas (Delgado, 2022).

It was a community…it was mountains—forest. In those times, the community was forest. Immense mountains…The people from Montecristi, Colonche... and Papoche arrived here. They came here because ‘there was no one here.’ They made their settlement... In those times when there were two Haciendas (estates)... and they began to take away the territory—their mountains. The haciendas wanted to become owners of all the territories, which are more than three thousand hectares of Las Tunas (Delgado, 2022).

Don Saúl establishes the background of the Comuna to be land-grabbing Haciendas that attempted to usurp all the land and claim ownership over the territory. The oral history established how the beginning of the Comuna started with the exploitation of the territory and thus shaped the tradition of environmental storytelling and resistance in the Comuna. Since the start of the community is symbolized by an episode of resistance, knowledge of the territory begins to be built around episodes of resistance.

When the direction of tracing environmental storytelling in Las Tunas was becoming clearer, Byron pointed me to Don Alfredo Pilligua, the author of the Anthem of the Comuna. The abuelo showed up in _La Casa Comunal_—the centralized community space where the governmental body (dirigentes) meet. The dirigentes were captivated by the presence of Don Alfredo Pilligua. I approached him with the same honor, clearly absorbed that he was going to share his recollection and inspiration for the territorial anthem.
Don Alfredo Pilligua’s interview supported that the exploitation of land is the seed of Las Tunas’ dominant territorial narrative. When he would inquire to the elders, *le contaban cómo surgieron [las Haciendas]…la Hacienda La Luz, y por aca este lado, había la Hacienda denominada Vallejo. Entonces prácticamente, la gente no tenía donde trabajar formalmente porque ellos eran los que se estaban adueñando de los territorios* (Pilligua, 2022). The elders specified to Don Alfredo how the Haciendas Luz and Vallejo were the owners of the territory; therefore, the community could not formally work anywhere because the complete ownership of the land by the Haciendas meant there was no place for community members to be part of the territory. The Haciendas display the roots of the larger colonial project seeking complete ownership of the territory. The community members' response was to unite to resist the appropriation of collective land. The community’s initial response establishes a pattern of episodic and community fight for territorial resistance—*la lucha comunitaria para rescatar las tierras*. According to Don Saúl, the figure that inaugurated the story of territorial resistance was

*a señor de Salango llamado Carlos Manuel Jara, muy inteligente, muy astuto...Y el [el profesor Carlos Manuel Jara] inteligentemente dice, no puede ser que desalojen a mis compañeros de sus tierras...en realidad hay personas que dejan que se lleven todo, [dicen] yo quiero lo mio, porque yo también quiero tener mi fortuna. Pero él no. El [dijo] “yo lo voy a defender”* (Delgado, 2022).

A man from Salango called Carlos Manuel Jara, very intelligent, astute...And he intelligently says, they can't be ones that evict my compañeros from their lands...In reality, there are people that take everything, [they say]: I want what is mine because I also want to have my own fortune. But he did not. He [said] “I'm going to defend” (Delgado, 2022).

Carlos Manuel Jara is the emblematic leader that many community members credit as establishing the foundation for future territorial defense movements and resistance. A key pillar to the resistance against colonial threat was that Carlos Manuel Jara was able to unite the
community to fight against a force that threatened the collective territory. Don Saúl tells that

Carlos Manuel Jara

comenzó luchando por el territorio, pero no estaban organizados, no eran comuna. Ellos luchaban desordenados. El vino y buscó asesoramiento a los amigos que tenían y le dicen “Carlos—usted está luchando así, pero es bien difícil ¡Unansen! Transformense en una comuna que se le hace más fácil para ustedes luchar por tierra, porque ahí tienen más fuerza. Porque unidos tienen más fuerza. Desunidos, desorganizados, no hay nada.” Eso fue antes de 1937. Antes. El se encargo de socializar tres pueblitos, Las Tunas, Puerto Rico, y más al norte que es Ayampe y reunió 50 personas entre los tres pueblos, para comenzar hacer los trámites de conformarse en comuna (Delgado 2022).

began fighting for the territory, but [the community] was not organized, they were not a commune. They fought in a disorganized manner. He [Carlos Manuel Jara] came and sought advice from his friends and they told him “Carlos—you are fighting like this, but it is very difficult. Come together! Transform yourself into a commune that makes it easier for you to fight for land, because there you have more strength. Because united, you will have more strength. Disunited, disorganized, there is nothing.” That was before 1937. Before. [Carlos] was in charge of socializing three small towns, Las Tunas, Puerto Rico, and further north, which is Ayampe, and gathered 50 people between the three towns, to begin the procedures of forming a commune (Delgado 2022).

Carlos Manuel Jara’s unification of the Comuna paved the path for strengthening the territorial resistance. Entonces, una vez que [Jara] vino acá comenzó la defensa de las tierras (Delgado, 2022). According to Don Saúl, once Jara began leading, the territorial defense began.

In addition to notable leadership, visual violence marks the episodes of territorial resistance. Byron Delgado told me about this dark backdrop of the territorial fight: hubo hasta personas que fallecieron para poder ganar estas tierras. Byron exposed that people even passed away in the struggle for territorial defense (Delgado, 2022). The violence in the episodes of resistance are commemorated and remembered in the anthem of the Comuna.²⁴ Don Alfredo Pilligua highlights that the blood and violence is present in a specific

partecita [del himno] donde dice que “al tirano lo hicieron sucumbir:” Porque era el presidente, el fundador de la Comuna en ese tiempo, él tenía bastante persecuciones...Subiendo el primer lomito, de ahí, del primer lado, hay le dieron por

²⁴ More on the anthem in the next section, I analyze it for the gaps it creates and as a material display of (re)producing the masculine dominant narrative.
muerto, lo garrotearon...Lo dejaron botado...Me la contaron mis abuelos, mis padres...Se cumplió lo que prognosticaron, porque los demás se indignaron y le hicieron casería al que perseguía los dirigentes (Pilligua, 2022).

Little part [of the anthem] where it says that the tyrant was made to succumb (“al tirano lo hicieron sucumbir”). Because it was the president, the founder of the Commune at that time, he was being increasingly persecuted... (He points), Climbing the first hill, from there, on the first side, they left him for dead, they garroted him... They left him... My grandparents told me, and my parents... What they predicted came true, because the others were outraged and hunted down the person that was persecuting the leaders (Pilligua, 2022).

The blood that was spilled during territorial resistance is clearly expressed in the anthem. The violence propelled the intensity of the territorial defense, the leaders unleashed a fight to protect the organizers that were being threatened. Byron affirmed that the intensity ended in a “success,” una vez que ganaron estos procesos, la otra gente que estaba allá se fueron. Entonces la gente pudo finalmente celebrar el triunfo. Once the community won the process of lucha, they could begin to celebrate their territorial triumphs (Delgado, 2022).

For Comuneros, the initial episode of resistance embodies the strength of their territory and community. Don Saúl reminded me, la Comuna tiene una fuerza como usted no se imagina. Don Saúl Delgado says that the Comuna has an incredible strength that I couldn’t fathom (Delgado, 2022). Don Heber Ponce, the ex-president of the Las Tunas directive, affirms that with strength and unity, se debe defender nuestros territorios. Don Heber Ponce declares the urgency and duty to defend the community’s territories and resist (Ponce, 2022). The question then arises of how the episodes of resistance become the dominant narrative that silences testimonios, the subversive stories of territory.

Part 2.2- Masculine Line of Inquiry and Cycle of (Re)production of Knowledge

In Las Tunas, I began to notice that the living archive is held by men—they have access to the dominant narrative, produce it, and spread it. The living archive is being housed in men,
their voices are hailed as the narrative landscape that shapes the environmental knowledge. In this section, I examine how the dominant masculine territorial narrative is (re)produced in the oral “snowball” tradition in Las Tunas and the material fragments of Las Tunas. Finally, asking: who holds the knowledge that creates the hegemonic narrative of resistance? Who gets to hear and spread the knowledge?

A strong oral tradition is present in Las Tunas; environmental stories are shared de boca en boca, from mouth to mouth, traveling like a snowball, too. As people share the oral territorial stories of Las Tunas, the story builds to an avalanche—a dominant narrative of ancestral and territorial resistance. However, the line of oral memory is harbored and shared by men. I was exposed to this tradition of snowball sampling in November of 2022 because my host, Byron Delgado, took note of my interest in hearing the history of Las Tunas and connected me to Comuneros who first, were open to sharing the territorial history of their community and second, were elders who are recognized as oracles of the territory.

The first snowball was Byron facilitating a conversation with his dad, Don Saúl Delgado. Don Saúl is an abuelo of the community, he is acknowledged as an elder who holds extensive knowledge of the story of the formation of the Comuna. I later was led to additional abuelos—Don Alfredo Pilligua, Don Heber Ponce, and Don Horacio Delgado.

In July 2023, I began wondering what led to Don Saúl and other abuelos being widely recognized as the voices of the territorial archive. In the Chocolate con Historias workshop, vignettes and dynamics depict the status and wide recognition of the abuelos as living archives. For example, Doña Leito Tomala offered side comments that illuminate how the abuelos are accepted as the arbitrators of territorial knowledge. In the following vignette, I was introducing Don Alfredo Pilligua, the author of the Comuna’s anthem; I gestured to his presence,
remembering that the author of the anthem was present in the space, *Y creo que el señor Alfredo Pilligua fue*—. In the background, Doña Leito comments: *El tiene si sabe más sobre las historias de la Comuna.* Doña Leito remarks that Don Alfredo is the one who knows more about the stories of the Comuna (Tomala, 2023). Much later, as Byron Delgado took the lead of the workshop, he encouraged the continuation of the exchange of stories: *Continuamos ya mismo* ...

*.Y usted, pa?* Byron is introducing his dad, Don Saúl Delgado, bringing him into the conversation. Doña Leito, again making a side comment, jokes: *Aquí viene la historia. La historia de la Comuna. (Se rie).* Doña Leito laughs when she remarks that here comes the story, the story of the *Comuna*. Don Saúl thanks for the introduction and adds: *Creo que hoy todo el mundo me conoce. Al saber que alguien no me reconozca. Mi nombre es Saúl.* He believes that everyone knows him, in case they do not, he formally introduces himself and begins his narration urging that *siempre tenemos que reconocer y no negar nuestra propia tierra. Así, como cuando nuestra madre nos trae al mundo, así mismo la tierra tampoco se debe olvidar.* He encourages that community members must recognize and not deny their land. Don Saúl compares that just as the community recognizes the mothers bring them into the world, the community must not forget the land that they come from (Delgado, 2023). And he will be telling the community about the territory that they come from. Doña Leito affirms that Don Saúl is the figure who will be informing the community members of the knowledge of the history of the territory.

In both vignettes, I believe Doña Leito is recalling the questions I, along with the audience, was asking her at the beginning of the *Chocolate con Historias* workshop, where she did not give direct answers about knowing the history of the *Comuna*. Doña Leito is gesturing to Don Alfredo and Don Saúl, almost telling me and the audience that he is the one to ask. The power of telling the narrative of the territory is granted to Don Alfredo Pilligua and Don Saúl
Delgado. I register Doña Leito saying: listen, escuchen, to the oracle of the history of the territory, he (the oracle) knows—yo muy poco. Doña Leito has self-identified herself as knowing very little. Doña Leito’s self-identification of “knowing little” or “not knowing enough of the story” is due to the context of how and why men are hailed and recognized as the oracle of the territory of Las Tunas, and as the archive of stories.

I return to the voices of the abuelos. In the narratives of the abuelos, a common theme emerged. The abuelos share a collective curiosity and concern to sustain the stories of their ancestors, their abuelos. Their ancestors were the protagonists of the episodes of territorial resistance, Don Saúl, Don Alfredo Pilligua, Don Geronimo Delgado all shared an urgency to listen to their abuelos and their tales of the formation of the Comuna and the territorial resistance. For Don Saúl,

_De niño, siempre me gustó escuchar, escuchar y hasta la vez me gusta escuchar. Sí, sí. Porque cuando uno escucha, aprende. ¿Mhm, Eh? Y cuando uno quiere también tener, eh, como dice al futuro. O sea, como dice también aplicar o enseñar o recordarle al que no ha conocido o al que no ha visto, porque en este caso yo ciertas cosas he visto, pero la mayor cosa no la he visto. Sí, pero por porque me ha gustado siempre desde muy muy tierna edad. O sea, escucharle a a nuestros abuelos. O sea, al amigo. Mhm. O sea. Y eso a mí me valió bastantísimo…La autoeducación me valió muchísimo…. Y por eso yo sé un poco de la historia. Mhm. Ya, y hasta la vez, porque también me gusta escuchar._

(Delgado, 2023)

As a child, I always liked to listen, listen and I even like to listen now. Yes, yes. Because when you listen, you learn. Mmm, eh? And when one also wants to have, eh, as you say for the future. In other words, how you say, that one must apply or teach, or remind, the people that they do not know or have not seen, because in this case I have seen certain things, but I have not seen most things. Yes, but because I have always liked listening from a very very tender age. I mean, listen to our grandparents. In other words, to my friends. Mmm. And that was worth a lot to me…Self-education was worth a lot to me…. And that's why I know a little about the history. Mmm. Yes, and even now, I also like to listen (Delgado, 2023).

Don Saúl expresses his curiosity about listening to the elders and his passion to guarantee a future where he could share the same stories of his abuelos. Now, as I was listening to the stories
being passed down from one masculine voice to the next, I was given a glimpse of the narrative networks of the male elders.

The pattern of the masculine line of inquiry is established since the ancestors that Don Saúl, Don Alfredo Pilligua, and Don Geronimo talked to were men, and seen as the protagonists of the episodes of resistance. Don Saúl and Don Geronimo’s grandfather

\[\text{era peluquero ….Él fue vicepresidente en la Comuna en esos tiempos. Pero él fue uno de los primeros que organizaron la comuna con el señor Carlos Manuel Jara, porque ellos vivían ahí, [el] vecino al frente y siempre tienen esa comunicación ya. Y ellos comenzaron. ¿A qué? A trabajar en ese territorio. Porque esto era tierra de nadie porque eran contados y las montañas eran libres (Delgado, 2023).}\]

was a hairdresser….He was vice president of the Comuna at that time. But he was one of the first to organize the commune with Mr. Carlos Manuel Jara, because they lived here, [he was] neighbor across the street and they always had that communication. And they began. To what? To work in that territory. Because this was no one’s land because they were numbered and the mountains were free (Delgado, 2023).

Don Saúl Delgado and Don Geronimo Delgado’s grandfather was a peer to Carlos Manuel Jara and a leader in the formation of the Comuna. The masculine line of inquiry begins to become visible. First, the masculine protagonist constructs the story from his point of view: el abuelo Delgado shares the episodes of protecting the territory as the vice president of the Comuna and in partnership with Carlos Manuel Jara. Due to proximity and relation, Don Saúl and Don Geronimo listen to their grandfather’s story of resistance. With that knowledge, Don Saúl and Don Geronimo can share the narrative with additional generations. The dominant masculine narrative is being engineered and transferred through the voices of men. The stories and line of inquiry replicate the dominant narrative of masculine resistance as the stories of territorial resistance are being passed down to young men who have the advantage of listening to the narratives of the abuelos. The power of sharing and transferring the oral tradition remains and concentrates in the voices and bodies of the men of Las Tunas.
In comparison, women in Las Tunas tend to be left out of the exchange of knowledge. Doña Leito expressed that she did not have the same privilege of being part of the conversations with the elders. In the *Chocolate con Historias* night, Byron asked to Doña Leito

¿Y usted [Doña Leito], algo que se acuerde cuando se creó la comuna? ¿O sea que de acuerdo a las historias que he escuchado, ha habido como varias fases, no? De que los terratenientes, Carlos Manuel Jara y otras personas también. Entonces usted no se acuerde de esa? (Delgado, 2023).

And you [Doña Leito], do you remember anything when the *Comuna* was created? So according to the stories you’ve heard, there have been several phases, right? The phase of the landowners, Carlos Manuel Jara and other people too. So you don't remember that [phase]? (Delgado, 2023).

Doña Leito candidly responds, *No me acuerdo yo*. Doña Leito does not remember any of the phases. Byron insinuates the why—because *no la dejaban participar*. Byron is confirming that the abuelos, or the leaders of the formation did not let Doña Leito participate; Doña Leito confirms the suspicion: *Ahí no. Estaba todavía [muy] muchacha*. During the formation, she was too young and a woman and was not let into the oral tradition of sharing territorial knowledge (Tomala, 2023). However, that was not a problem for Don Saúl, Don Alfredo, and Don Geronimo. Doña Leito’s participation in constructing and witnessing knowledge of the territory is limited. She is left out of the line of inquiry and falls into the silence of knowledge production.

Doña Leito's vignette of exclusion displays how the oral tradition that constructs the territorial knowledge (re)produces the masculine archive and the masculine dominant narrative. Maylei Blackwell in *¡Chicana Power! Contested Histories of feminism in the Chicano Movement* (2011) discussed how Chicana feminist stories were shadowed by Chicano’s grip on the dominant historical narrative. Blackwell establishes that the grip on knowledge of the Chicano movement reveals an epistemological register that licenses and controls the dominant narrative (Blackwell, 2011, p. 4). Similarly, men establish the epistemological register in Las Tunas.
because as young men, they hear from abuelos about their dominant role in the episodes of resistance, then young men become the abuelos—the elder oracles—who share the dominant narratives of masculine episodes of territorial resistance and (re)produce the dominant masculine narrative of episodes of territorial resistance. The abuelos when they were young only heard from the masculine voices that were leaders in the resistance movements. Blackwell critiques this epistemological register, “[i]t is not enough to say, ‘the women were there, too.’ To subvert the ideologies of these official histories, we must overturn the epistemological register that licenses them” (Blackwell, 2011, p. 4). The oral tradition reveals the epistemological register and control that male elders have to construct the territorial narrative.

From the oral, the masculine dominant narrative and epistemological control are then transferred to the material archive. Don Alfredo Pilligua, the author of the anthem, got his inspiration to write the anthem from the oral stories of territory in Las Tunas:

La recreación del himno fue a base de conocimiento de un poquito de la de la historia, de lo que contaban los abuelos, porque realmente yo pues esas cosas, yo no las viví. Lo único que yo tenía que yo me involucraba a veces con personas mayores. Le cuento que yo, eh, me gustaba también enbregar, incluso ahí me reunía con ellos. Ellos me invitaban a sus casas o entonces yo a veces les preguntaba así algunas cosas y ellos me, ellos me contaban y también revisando un poco la la historia de la de la comuna. Entonces eso inspiró a escribir el himno poco a poco (Pilligua, 2022).

The creation of the anthem was based on knowledge of a little bit of history, of what the abuelos told, because I really didn't live those things. The only thing I had was that I sometimes got involved with older people. I tell you that I, uh, I also liked to get involved, even I met with them. They would invite me to their homes or sometimes I would ask them some things and they would tell me and also review a little bit of the history of the commune. So that inspired me to write the anthem little by little (Pilligua, 2022).

Don Alfredo Pilligua also engaged with the abuelos of the community. What he heard from the male voices formed the basis of the anthem. The anthem depicts how the oral (re)production of masculine territorial knowledge bleeds into the material archive. Plus, vice-versa, the material
archive supports the oral (re)producing the dominant narrative of episodic and visible forms of resistance. I analyze the presence and production of the dominant masculine narrative of episodic resistance in the anthem, pairing it with Robert Nixon’s phenomenon of slow violence, to then examine the gaps and the silences and gaps that arise from the material archive.

Don Alfredo Pilligua’s anthem is a material fragment of the archive and portrays the violence of the formation of the Comuna, the masculine protagonism, and works to support the masculine dominant narrative of territorial resistance. Each stanza contributes to the construction of a hegemonic knowledge of the territory to be about visual episodes of resistance.

The first stanza sings:

1
Salve oh salve gloriosa comuna
Grandes hechos hoy narran tu historia
Son heroicas, tus grandes victorias,
Con esfuerzo, constancia y valor
1
Hail oh hail glorious comuna
Great events today tell your story
They are heroic, your great victories,
With effort, perseverance and courage

Robert Nixon’s “slow violence” can help show how starting with the first stanza, the anthem constructs a normative depiction of territorial resistance, as solely visual and violent episodes. The normative image creates boundaries to what will constitute territorial resistance and knowledge. In Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor (2013), Nixon employs the term slow violence to question normative ways that environmental violence is portrayed. Slow

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25 See Appendix C for the full anthem. I did not analyze all the stanzas, but I hope that this chapter builds tools to read the whole anthem and notice how the words replicate the dominant masculine territorial narrative.
violence is “to engage a different kind of violence, a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous [emphasis added], but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales” (Nixon, 2013, p. 2. The line of “grandes hechos narran tu historia” gestures to the resistance being an explosive, spectacular, and instantaneous episode of the formation of the Comuna.

The language of “heroic” “victories” and “effort, perseverance, and courage” cement a hegemonic depiction that territorial narratives must reflect strength, victory, and resistance—a very narrow portrayal of resistance and stories of territory. Similar to Nixon’s argument that the media creates a hegemonic image of environmental violence, the anthem establishes specific guidelines of what stories and images qualify as tales of territory. The framework that arises is that territorial narratives must be spectacular episodes of resistance. The guidelines are strict and define knowledge production in the territory of Las Tunas. However, I wonder, what about the testimonios that do not fit into the hegemonic “great events [that] today tell your story?” I identify the absence of alternate stories as a significant gap in the construction of territorial knowledge. The archive excludes both stories of territorial “slow violence” or stories that do not exemplify the spectacular nor instantaneous stories of resistance and the testimonios from women.26

In addition to gaps present in territorial knowledge, the material archive of Las Tunas does not recognize women’s presence in the formation of the Comuna. Women’s voices exist in silences. The protagonist's voices in the anthem are men, reflecting the same pattern as the oral

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26 I notice that I separate territorial slow violence stories from stories of women. I believe that there is an overlap, a point I may make in chapter 3, as part of testimonio-territorio. In my time in Las Tunas, I notice that the testimonios of women in Las Tunas tend to have alternate stories of territory that reflect characteristics of slow violence. While they are separated here, I take note of how they may overlap.
tradition. The second and fourth stanza displays the male lineage of protagonists, weaved with the strong resistance language:

II
Defenderte ha sido el anhelo
De tus hijos nobles y valientes
Enfrentando a los terratenientes
Que humillarte quisieron a ti.

....

IV
Abrazando viene a Puerto Rico,
Las Cabañas, Las Tunas, y Ayampe
Con gran furia y destreza incesante
al gran tirano hicieron sucumbir

II
Defending you has been the desire
Of your noble and brave sons
Taking on the landowners
That wanted to humiliate you.

...

IV
Embracing Puerto Rico,
Las Cabañas, Las Tunas, and Ayampe
With great fury and ceaseless skill
they made the great tyrant succumb

The anthem points to the “noble and brave sons,” the “hijos nobles y valientes.” In Spanish, the anthem makes a reference to the hijos being in charge of protecting the territory. Hijos is the gender neutral term for children, but it can also mean sons—male children. I chose to use the gendered translation of hijos, referring only to sons because the oral tradition uplifts men as the protagonists. The reference to men as protagonists and the subsequent characterization as brave
and noble in the material secures the masculine lineage in the episodes of resistance. The sons “[w]ith great fury and ceaseless skill…made the great tyrant succumb.” The rhetoric of battles (“gran tirano”) and strength (“gran furia y destreza incestante”) is entangled with the masculinization of the leaders of the resistance because both weave to support the masculine dominant narrative of territory and knowledge production that stories of territory must be episodic forms of resistance. The male leaders become the voices that shape the stories of territory and due to their assumed position as leaders, they are replicating the narratives of acute and visual territorial resistance.

The last two stanzas of the anthem represent the impact the masculine hegemonic territorial narrative has on the conceptions of territory. The anthem concludes:

v

Tu inmensa y fértil montaña,
Con sus aves en diáfanos trinos,
El marfil, vegetal que obtuvimos
Celebramos gran triunfo al fin

vi

Eres fuente de grandes riquezas
Y el océano, bañando tus playas
Enfrentando tan duras batallas
Al fin libre te han visto crecer

v

Your immense and fertile mountain,
With its birds in diaphanous trills,
The ivory, a vegetable that we obtained
We celebrate great triumph at last

vi

You are a source of great richness
And the ocean, bathing your beaches
Facing such tough battles
Finally free, they have seen you grow

The war rhetoric continues to be present; the anthem celebrates the “great triumph at last.” The resistance narrative ends up weaving environmental descriptions: “And the ocean, bathing your beaches. Facing such tough battles.” The territory embodies a battlefield. As exemplified by the description of the ocean, the territory of Las Tunas is painted by the battles. The resistance narratives end up shaping the land—shaping the imaginary of the ocean to be constantly facing threats, battles, and episodes of territorial challenges. The hegemonic stories of the material archive create bounds to view the territory of Las Tunas only as bodies where episodes of conflict are mapped and experienced. For example, the celebration of the triumph is mapped onto the mountain, onto the acquisition of ivory. From the material archive, the story of the territory is told solely through the lens of conflict. Alternate lenses and stories are absent because the spectacular episodes of territorial battles are the consuming narrative mapping and storying the territory.

The oral and the material archive of territorial knowledge suppress alternate views of territory, such as testimonios and their offerings of rich alternate stories and knowledge of the territory of Las Tunas that is absent from the dominant narrative. The hegemony of the masculine territorial narrative pushes testimonios to exist in silence.

**Part 2.3- Coloniality Megaphone**

In the journey to register the silences in knowledge production, I want to make the important distinction that testimonios of women are living in silences, existing in the foreground of the territory narratives, and their voices are not being actively extinguished. Silenced but not silent. Testimonios are absent in the dominant discourses of territorial knowledge because, for
Las Tunas, the masculine episodes of resistance take precedence in the context of ongoing colonial challenges. In this section, I employ the metaphor of the coloniality megaphone to explain the context of why masculine dominant narratives are uplifted, and why testimonios fall to the background.

Hegemonic narratives in Las Tunas aim to uplift ancestral stories and identity; the narratives of the abuelos depict the legacy of mobilizations to defy colonial threats through the lens of men. Although the single perspective discounts alternate knowledge from the voices of women, the lens can trace how the roots of the colonial thought—of conquering and taking over the land—were planted and how coloniality extends in the present.

The abuelos share stories of the past that serve as cautions for the present. Don Saúl remembers that his grandfather

\begin{quote}
always said...when there is a road, these lands will be envied. If you don't take care of them, you will go to the mountains, and whoever has money will be the owner of the entire beach. Said and done. Here, there are still few, but the owners of the beach are the ones who have arrived and what do they do? They try to buy land so they can go further. Indeed, the lands were envied. In the end, they will come to buy and buy and in the end, there will be no territory for Las Tunas (Delgado 2022).
\end{quote}

Don Saúl says that the threat is of the community losing their territory, a colonial concern that has shaped the Comuna since its formation. The intimidation of colonialism is that the land of Las Tunas is envied and that their territory will be taken from under them.

The thread of the colonial threat is weaved into the present. Currently, Las Tunas faces an ongoing territorial conflict with the neighboring precinct of Ayampe, which seeks to break with
Las Tunas to fully profit as a tourist destination (El Diario, 2022). They intend to separate Ayampe from the Las Tunas Ancestral Commune to develop a surf town, targeting foreign tourists and development. Community members have expressed concern that development would facilitate the erasure of their ancestral heritage. Byron Delgado recounts that the territorial conflict began when

*a man appeared...who is not a native to here [the Comuna]. He acquired territories, he has his own business here, but after many years he says “Ayampe will become independent, like a new Comune.” So it doesn't apply there, for many reasons. First, community land cannot be divided, divided at a legal level...But as I told you, the global deed, you cannot divide it...*(Delgado 2022).*

According to Byron, the influence of capital and foreign actors has driven the territorial conflict. The current territory challenges are an extension of colonial threads present in the *Comuna*—usurping territory and defying the principle of collective land. The leaders of the conflict in Ayampe appear to be using the colonial frameworks circulating in the dominant narratives as a reference to make decisions. Tourism in Ayampe is a manifestation of colonialism because the Ayampe leaders seek to erase ancestral traditions to make way for foreign influence. Don Saúl recalls his grandfather’s words: *se está viendo...todo lo que ellos decían, cómo ya estaba sabiendo anticipadamente lo que iba a pasar.* Don Saúl suggests that the elders knew in advance what was going to happen; his grandfather’s concerns are confirmed because the *Comuna* is seeing everything that the elders foretold (Delgado 2022). The predictions from the elders bear witness to how coloniality has developed in the *Comuna*. According to Aníbal

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27Since I am translating, I want to be able to clarify that community lands refers to collective land as defined by the Ecuadorian 2008 Constitution, in articles 56 and 57. Collective land of *Comunas* cannot be divided.
Quijano in “Coloniality and Modernity/ Rationality” coloniality is a structure of power, “[i]t doesn’t exhaust…the conditions nor the modes of exploitation and domination between peoples” (Quijano, 2007, p. 170). Coloniality is not limited to the past but has modernized to act as an imminent power structure that dominates and disrupts the collective territory and ways stories are told.

Comuneros share the concern that the foreign influence, saturation, and presence in Ayampe, plus their subsequent claims to the territory, will rapidly erase the ancestral identity of the Comuna. For Judith Mero, the head of the volunteer program I participated in during November 2022, Ayampe is losing its culture; she was a resident of Ayampe, and it was evident that the ancestral heritage of Ayampe is being erased to make room for the foreign traditions (Mero, 2022). Hotel developers are inserting their ways of living into Ayampe; subsequently, this brings urgency to maintain ancestral lineage in Ayampe. Graciela Tomala is a descendant of elders who founded Ayampe, and is concerned about Ayampe developers eradicating the ancestral traditions of the precinct. She laments, no pueden venir a cambiar nuestras costumbres. The foreigners cannot arrive and change the customs (Tomala, 2022).

The intent to change traditions is part of the colonial project because foreign developers demonstrate the colonial impulse to diminish the ancestral culture of Ayampe. The continued threat of ancestral erasure in Ayampe mirrors the frameworks of colonial violence. Patricio Noboa Viñán in “Discursos, representaciones y prácticas de la colonialidad: La interculturalidad como práctica decolonial” (2011) defines colonial frameworks as “a matrix of power that allowed the installation of the colonial project and its consolidation as a mold of homogenization, which justified the reduction, the subsequent integration of the native

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28 This sounds contradictory, what foreign traditions? I refer to how the ways of living promoted by the developers and tourists that come are being projected into Ayampe, and ancestrality is diminished.
population into the Western civilizational project” (Noboa Viñan, 2011, p. 123, my own translation). The foreign developers in Ayampe reflect the continuation of the colonial framework since their presence has been responsible for moving to homogenize the ancestral culture. Ancestral traditions have already begun to shift. Graciela tells me that before Ayampe was “un mundo humilde,” a humble world where people fished and cleaned their clothes in the Ayampe River, a practice shared with her mom and that the ancestors followed, but ya no se puede hacer eso (Tomala 2022). Those traditions can no longer be found.

Since the process of erasure has begun, Comuneros sees storytelling as the avenue to uplift their ancestral identity. The hegemonic stories of territory can defy the ongoing erasure—their voices can share knowledge that will keep ancestrality alive. Coloniality is pushing the hand of Comuneros to share certain stories, the hegemonic narratives of territorial resistance that exemplify strength and defiance against coloniality. Comuneros share the hegemonic narratives of territorial resistance because they believe that the dissemination of visual, acute visions of resistance is a direct action to to defy the violence of coloniality.

Here is where the metaphor of the coloniality megaphone arises. The urgency to (re)produce the legacy of mobilizations to resist colonial threats and protect the Comuneros’ territory, leads to the coloniality megaphone filtering and uplifting masculine stories of territorial battles. The coloniality megaphone, which conceals alternate stories reveals the “mechanics of erasure,” (Blackwell, 2011, p. 2). Blackwell relies on “Foucault’s notion of genealogy, [to] examine the social movement spaces in which Chicana feminist knowledges were produced as well as the “mechanics of erasure” that have obscured them”(Blackwell, 2011, p. 3). To analyze the mechanics of erasure is to interrogate “the conditions in which a story/history is told,
interrogating the erasures, and listening to the gaps and interstices to reveal the workings of power” (Blackwell, 2011, p. 3).

I trace the context of coloniality in Las Tunas because providing a larger context is crucial to analyzing the types of narratives that are constructed, as promoted by Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995). Blackwell cites Trouillot’s two sides of historicity.

What matters most are the process and conditions of production of such narratives. Only a focus on that process can uncover the ways in which the two sides of historicity intertwine in a particular context. Only through the overlap can we discover the differential exercise of power that makes some narratives possible and silences others (Trouillot, 1995 cited in Blackwell, 2011, p. 3).

The larger context of coloniality in Las Tunas influences the production of hegemonic territorial narratives and knowledge to be episodic and acute territorial conflicts. As Trouillot points out, this is one side of historicity, one side of the stories of the territory of Las Tunas. Coloniality shapes a megaphone to only reveal this singular side, a singular masculine voice that stories the territory through the masculine lens. The coloniality megaphone reveals that the one-sided story of the territory of Las Tunas is being told in the conditions of an ongoing threat of colonialism. The coloniality megaphone uplifts episodes of resistance that replicate narratives of territorial strength and success because the stories have been denominated as normative challenges to coloniality. The overlap of the coloniality megaphone with testimonios exposes how the coloniality megaphone overpowers testimonios, the alternate stories of territory. Colonial forces still shape territorial narratives rather than a collective layer of voices. On the other hand, testimonio offers rich views of land relations and territory.
Chapter 3: Theorizing in Silences

This thesis shares a story within a story: a story of hearing voices—testimonios—in the silences that narrate connections to community and territory. In the final part of the story, I aim to detail how I came to listen to my first testimonio. Up to the third week in Las Tunas, I had been listening to the loud megaphone of masculine voices. I was heading to Ayampe following Byron and René’s suggestions to find Don Raúl Tomala. Byron and René said he is the elder to talk to about Ayampe’s ancestral stories. I walked through Ayampe, along the sidewalk, observing the foreign influence on the community. Restaurants, lodges, hostels, vacation homes, and yoga studios, lined the street.

I made my way toward the edge of Ayampe, to the general store, to find Don Raúl, a descendant of one of the last families that have ancestral roots in Ayampe. The woman who worked the smoothie stand outside pointed me inside the store to inquire directly about Don Raúl. One woman was cleaning inside, I asked for Don Raúl Tomala, and the woman told me that he was in the hospital with health complications, she asked why I was searching for him. I explained my project, examining the territorial conflict, and she insisted I talk to her sister. Coincidentally, her sister, Graciela Tomala was on her way out with her son, Byron P. Tomala. They were in a rush but were kind enough to answer my questions about how Ayampe had changed and about the state of the territorial conflict. Graciela identified herself as a leader fighting the conflict as a resident of Ayampe. Here, I heard her testimonio about the gendered labor around the river, a practice erased with foreign influence. I share this story because while searching for an abuelo, designated to have a breadth of knowledge about the past, Graciela

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29 René is Byron’s other half when it comes to conservation work in Las Tunas. They both work together at the Fundación Jocotoco, or the Jocotoco Foundation. They manage the Ayampe Reserve and are in charge of completing conservation work such as sea turtle and bird monitoring. They do work in Las Balsas, a community in the province of Santa Elena, Ecuador.
illuminated the richness of women’s *testimonio*, and the gap of knowledge around women’s voices in the territory of the *Comuna*.

I went back to hear Graciela this summer. I met her at her family’s *comedor*, an eatery, where Graciela deepened her *testimonio* on the Ayampe River, a crucial part of the territory.

*El río anteriormente, años atrás, estamos hablando de unos 30 años atrás, era un río espectacular, limpio. Nosotras las mujeres íbamos al río a lavar la ropa pero sin tanto químico y nada de esas cosas. Ahora, pues, cómo ve...Desde más o menos empieza el Río en el Recinto de Pedro Pablo Gomez de acá hacia Casas Viejas y todo este sector donde va más o menos las raíces del Río—desde ahí han empezado a talar árboles. Entonces por esa razón ya tenemos el río cómo muy seco* (Tomala, 2023).

The river, previously, years ago, we are talking about about 30 years ago, was a spectacular, clean river. We, the women went to the river to wash clothes but without so many chemicals and none of that stuff. Now, you can see...More or less the River begins in the Pedro Pablo Gomez precinct from there towards Casas Viejas and this entire sector where the roots of the River more or less go—from there they have begun to cut down trees. So for that reason, the River is very dry (Tomala, 2023).

The *testimonio* centers on the community and gendered connection to the Ayampe River. This knowledge exists in a gap because neither the oral nor the material tradition uplifts the ancestral story of the women in the river or the progression of the river. The masculine line of inquiry and coloniality megaphone limits *testimonios* to existing in silence and within gaps.

This chapter inquires: in these silences, what is said about territory? How do *testimonios* fill the gaps of territorial narratives? The following three parts build a mosaic of *testimonios* that theorize about territory in silence. The first part, defying in silences, explains how *testimonios* defy the hegemonic narrative of territory. Rob Nixon’s slow violence is weaved throughout to portray the overlap of subversive territorial “slow violence” stories and *testimonios*. Part two continues the theme of defiance to highlight how in defying a hegemonic narrative, *testimonios* end up storying the territory and building the decolonial territorial imaginary. Lastly, I explain that the territory *testimonios* re-imagine relations to the territory in Las Tunas. In the final
section, I build on an Indigenous feminist geography proposition to offer testimonio-territorio, a feminist geography cosmovisión that contributes to the activism of voices and bodies in resistance.

Part 3.1- Defying in Silences

In the framework of coloniality megaphone, the testimonios are absorbed by the dominant narrative. Thus, the testimonios exist in the foreground, in silence, in comparison to the sensorial space that the hegemonic territorial narratives dominate. However, whilst existing in the silences, testimonios defy the masculine hegemonic narrative of territory. The first part of this chapter exposes the gaps that are present in the dominant narrative, juxtapose testimonios with the episodic resistance narrative, and follow the lens of Nixon’s Slow Violence (2013) to ultimately depict the alternate narratives that testimonios offer.

Doña Leito Tomala speaks from the dominant knowledge gaps to a larger audience in the Chocolate con Historias night at Wipeout. Her story exists beyond the words of the anthem or the dominant story that the territory of Las Tunas is only defined by resistance narratives. Doña Leito’s testimonio reveals

En antes, era de trabajar, uno se levantaba a las cuatro, tres o cuatro de la mañana, a hacer el desayuno para irse a la montaña a trabajar y llegaban a la hora de almuerzo. Ya tenía que hacer el almuerzo. Llegaban a y volvían y se iban a la montaña...el café... Ahora ya casi ni a la montaña ya se va, porque es diferente ahora. Ahora pocos agricultores hay ya porque ya casi a la montaña no van. Hay contaditos los que van a la montaña. Antes lo que sembraba, lo que se sembraba se cosechaba. Sí, que yuca, que café, el que el banano, que el frijol, todo eso, todo lo que se sembraba, se cosechaba. Pero ahora hasta las tierras ya no quieren producir, porque tampoco no se siembra como antes. Como el maíz, todo eso se sembraba. Sí, pero ahora ya no hay por estos lados. Por otro lado, sí, pero aquí, alrededor de nosotros no, no se siembra. Y el café también. Ya se terminó (Tomala, 2023).

In the past, to work, you got up at four, three, or four in the morning, to make breakfast, to go to the mountains to work and [then] you arrived at lunchtime. Lunch had to be ready. They came to and returned and went to the mountains...to cultivate the coffee... Now they hardly even go to the mountains anymore, because it's different
now. Now there are few farmers because they almost don't go to the mountains. There are few who go to the mountains. Before, what was sown, what was sown was reaped. Yes, the cassava, that coffee, that banana, that beans, all that, everything that was planted, was harvested. But now even the lands no longer want to produce, because they are not planted like before. Like corn, all that was planted. Yes, but now there are no more around these parts. But here, around us, no, it is not planted. And the coffee too. It's over” (Tomala, 2023).

The testimonio’s subversive knowledge of the territory emerges from a gap in the hegemonic and masculine epistemology. The gap in this instance can be traced to the anthem, when it sings, “Tu inmensa y fértil montaña/...Eres fuente de grandes riquezas.” The narrative of the immense and fertile mountain, the source of great richness, leaves a gap of knowledges: how is the mountain fertile? Has its richness changed? Doña Leito fills the gaps with her testimonio of a once fertile mountain, a once rich source of coffee for Las Tunas. Her knowledge is not celebrated with the same orgullo that sings episodic and dominant resistance in the anthem. The discrepancy confirms the aim of the material archive to support the dominant depiction of resistance.

I employ Nixon’s slow violence framing to show the importance of shifting territory stories away from the “instantaneous” depictions of territory and to testimonios, which portray alternate territorial narratives. Nixon identifies the challenge of “how to devise arresting stories, images, and symbols adequate to pervasive, but elusive violence of delayed effects” (Nixon, 2013, p. 3). In Las Tunas, the challenge is to offer territorial narratives adequate to voices in silence and to recognize stories of territory that are not episodic. The material and oral archive’s creation of the dominant vivid and episodic territorial narrative juxtaposes with women’s testimonios production of an unspectacular vision of territory. Women’s knowledge of territory does not satisfy the masculine hegemonic framework that territorial narratives must be instantaneous and explosive. Doña Leito explores an alternate temporality of territory stories; her testimonio emphasizes the unspectacular illustration of a changing territory, how “before, what
was sown, what was sown was reaped” (Tomala, 2023). Doña Leito portrays Robert Nixon’s model of “slow violence” with her mundane territorial story.

Maritza Mendoza’s testimonio offers a story of resistance that defies the hegemonic masculine construction of territorial resistance narratives. Maritza Mendoza was the first woman president of the Comuna; she faced several territorial challenges during her tenure. However, her struggles were not amplified in the construction of territorial knowledge of the Comuna. Her testimonio illuminates a territory story of incremental resistance, not bound to a singular episode but has built over time. Maritza’s testimonio traces the patriarchal context of the Comuna: in the governmental body and the community.\(^3^0\) Martiza later shared that pursuing a leadership position as a woman,

\textit{Para mi era un reto muy duro porque yo sabía que la comunidad estaba creciendo, [y] donde existía mucho machismo, donde las mujeres están solo para cocinar, para atender al esposo y todo eso. Entonces era un reto que tenía que pensar lo (Mendoza, 2023).}

was a very tough challenge for me because I knew the community was growing, [and] where there was a lot of machismo, where women were only there to cook, to take care of their husbands and all that. So it was a challenge that I had to think about (Mendoza, 2023).

I have difficulty capturing what machismo means in English, the word cannot be translated to mean masculinity directly. The word refers more to the overpowering performance of masculinity that seeks control. The machismo in the community creates guidelines to control women’s roles that constrain them to home and reproductive labor activities.\(^3^1\) When women leap to pursue roles outside the boundaries, machismo launches pressure and instills fears for women

\(^{30}\) It feels inappropriate to document these reflections in a footnote, this space became a place for reflections and ongoing thoughts. I am brought to the tragedy of the death of Jahaira Isabel Ponce Del Peso in Las Tunas, the dirigente de mujeres y familia. She held the position in the directive of being the representative for women and families. Jahaira was found with no signs of life on Sunday, November 12th. \textit{Que vivas nos queremos, ni una más, ni una menos.}

\(^{31}\) See more in Evelyn Nakano Glenn, “From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor” \textit{Signs}, Vol. 18 No. 1, (1992): 1-43. Thanks to Professor Natalia Duong, my Intro GWS Professor for bringing texts that gave me the language to observe already existing patterns in my life.
to perform and speak exceptionally. Maritza explains that she experienced that fear, when “[la] lanzaron como candidata y de manera unanime me eligieron como presidenta. Yo estaba como asustada pero de todos modos dije bueno vamos a ver. Porque también veía que siempre a los hombres, la palabra del hombre valía...” (Mendoza, 2023). As Maritza was launched as a candidate and later was unanimously elected president, she expressed significant fear: “I was so scared but anyway I said well let's see. Because I also saw that always with men, a man's word was valuable…” (Mendoza, 2023). Maritza witnessed the impact of the patriarchy on women’s voices, the input of women is not respected, valued, or appreciated. The patriarchal pattern of overpowering voices seeps into Maritza’s territory story incrementally. One of the territory challenges she faced was with

*[el] proyecto de la carretera que estaban haciendo y el señor quería, el del proyecto, el Señor... quería negociar conmigo. Tanto así que en algún momento me mandó un sobre y me dijo esto le envía mi jefe, era para la Navidad. Y yo le dije que no, yo no tengo porque. Le decía ¿por qué? Porque recibir de usted, lloraba, lloraba cómo una niña ahí. [Le dije] Que se cree usted, esto tengo precio, escúcheme. Si yo le reclamo por la arena es porque es mi deber cuidar este espacio (Mendoza, 2023).*

highway project that they were doing and the man wanted, the one with the project… wanted to negotiate with me. So much so that at some point he sent me an envelope and told me this my boss sent you, it was for Christmas. And I told him no, I don't have to. I told him why? Well, because I am receiving it from you, I cried, I cried like a little girl there. [I told him] What do you think, I have a price for this, listen to me. If I stand up to you about the sand, it is because it is my duty to take care of this space (Mendoza, 2023).

The project aimed to expand the highway in Las Tunas and sand from the beach was used for construction. The project sought to impact collective environmental connections in Las Tunas, since the sand was being exploited for a development project. Maritza was in firm disagreement with the theft of the sand and continuously expressed her concerns to the man leading the project. However, the man in charge of the project diminished Maritza’s concerns—he tried to pay her off. Maritza’s *testimonio* frames that territorial resistance stories are incremental; in Las

...
Tunas, patriarchy was built over time in the territory and manifested itself in the conflict over a highway project. Maritza’s resistance is her claim *porque es mi deber cuidar este espacio*; Maritza declares her duty to be to take care of the space, of the territory, of the sand.

Nixon’s discussion of slower, structural forms of violence illustrates how *testimonios* intersect with narratives of slow violence. *Testimonios* reframe the discourse of territory and relations; Maritza shows that territorial resistance is ongoing, sprouting from care and duty. Ultimately, the portrayal of territory stories and resistance in *testimonio* defy the hold of coloniality and patriarchy in the construction of territorial narratives because, in the gaps, *testimonios* challenge the colonial and masculine rhetoric of strength and rapidness embedded in territorial narratives and the knowledge construction of territory.

**Part 3.2- Storying the Territory**

*Testimonios* propose to imagine the “possibilities [that] lie for fracturing dominant narratives and creating spaces for new historical subjects to emerge” (Blackwell, 2011, p. 2). In rupturing dominant narratives, the space is created for *testimonios* to emerge and shape the territory in a direction beyond the colonial or masculine narrative. Javier Eduardo Pabón in “Afro-Ecuadorian Ora-Literature: Insurgent Narratives of re-existence and place” (2016) discusses “*El territorio posee una dimensión testimonial de la presencia de las comunidades*”: territory holds a *testimonio* dimension of the presence of communities that reside in the territory (Pabón, 2016, p. 108). This section connects Pabón’s proclamation to Las Tunas to depict how the subversive voices of *testimonios* have a presence in the territory as *testimonios* story the territory and facilitate the emergence of a new lens.

I am brought back to Doña Leito’s *testimonio* as her subversive voice guides all three themes.
Ahí vivía mi tío Abraham. Por ahí. Se comprometió con una señora y se pusieron a hacer pan, vendían pan. Hacían cosas así para vender. Porque antes también la Tagua\textsuperscript{32} era un producto que se vendía bastante. Si, se iba mi abuelita cogía, íbamos a la montaña a recoger esa tagua, la ponían allí en un montón, bastante. Y ahí que se secaba, le metían garrote para para que pele la tagua, ya. Pa que quede nomás la pura pepita y esa tagua llegaban a comprarla y vendían así, por quintales. Era que le garroteaban y nomás apañaban la pepa y ya estaba pelada de la cáscara quedaba ahí. [También] Sacaban la caña. Todos estaban bastante rumberos de caña para vender... Que sería, que ya no, no hay el sustento que había, òsea, de los que se cosechaba en antes, en la montaña ya no hay como para [comer]. Porque se cosechaba, y se vendía lo que se cosechaba, pero ahora ya no hay. Pues ya. És como una historia, porque ya eso ya quedó atrás. Ya no hay esperanza de que vuelva a sembrar y que vuelva a producir, porque ya la tierra tampoco no da para sembrar (Tomala, 2023).

My uncle Abraham lived there. Over there. He got engaged to a woman and they started making bread, they sold bread. They did things like that to sell. Because before, tagua was also a product that sold a lot. Yes, my grandmother would go, we went to the mountains to collect that tagua, they put it there in a pile, quite a lot. And when it dried, they put a stick on it to make it peel the tagua, that's it. So that only the pure nugget and that tagua remained, they came to buy it and sell it like that, by quintals. It was that they garroted it and they just fixed the seed and it was already peeled off the shell and remained there. [Also] They took out cane. They were all quite celebratory for cane to sell...What could it be, [but] not anymore, there is no longer the sustenance that there was, that is, from what was harvested before, in the mountains there is no longer enough to [eat]. Because it was harvested, and what was harvested was sold, but now there is no more. Well now. It's like history, because that's already behind us. There is no longer any hope of sowing again and producing again, because the land is no longer enough to sow (Tomala, 2023).

Doña Leito recalls the presence of her uncle and aunt, their stories directly story the territory because their memories are tied to a particular location and therefore, their memory is called into the territory. The couple's bread business offered its form of resistance to the community; they provided a form of sustenance for Las Tunas. The resistances are found within the elders, like el Tío Abraham, their stories, and the memories that they left for further generations. Doña Leito’s localizing the place where her family made bread extends the framing of the knowledge of the territory to resemble quotidian moments in the territory.

\textsuperscript{32} Tagua is “vegetable ivory” according to a quick Google search. See Images A5 and A6 for images of the tree and nut.
In addition to bringing the presence of departed elders and their place memories, Doña Leito’s *testimonio* recalls Las Tunas’s agricultural past to story the territory. Dominant territorial narratives have a significant absence, the memory of the environment’s past. However, *testimonio* intentionally speaks on the territorial memory and knowledge of agriculture. Doña Leito remembers *Tagua*, “un producto que se vendía bastante.” The *Tagua* was sold plenty and Doña Leito’s joined her grandmother to the mountain to pick *tagua*. The vignettes of *Tagua* and its production are critical in the story of Las Tunas because the *tagua*, or vegetable ivory was an important agricultural source for the livelihoods of *Comuneros*. Many members of the *Comuna* sold the harvested *tagua* or made artisan products from *tagua*. The agricultural *testimonio* of the *Tagua* stories the territory because the memory of agriculture becomes embedded in the territorial imaginary. The territorial imaginary refers to the community’s imagination of the territory, a mental map of relationships with the territory and its features. Subversive voices shape the territorial imaginary of Las Tunas to be layered stories of territory, that depict the multi-vocal and multi-being, that include non-persons, presence in Las Tunas.

In addition to *Tagua*, the territorial imaginary includes the presence of *caña*, cane, in Las Tunas. Doña Leito tells: “[También] Sacaban la *caña*. Todos estaban bastante rumberos de *caña* para vende.” In Las Tunas, they took out cane; in fact, the community celebrated for the cane to sell. Both the *Tagua* and *caña* pose a multi-vocal and multi-being perspective to storying the territory and shaping the territorial imaginary. I am inspired by Robin Wall Kimmerrer's “The Language of Animacy” chapter in *Braiding Sweetgrass*. I animate the perspectives of the *tagua* and the *caña* because they bring their knowledges and memory to the territory. Unlike the single masculine voice that the hegemonic masculine territorial narrative shares, the *tagua* and the *caña*

offer a multi-vocal story and knowledge. *Testimonios* uplift the multiple beings and their voices of Las Tunas’ agricultural past, where the community celebrated their contributions to the wellbeing of the community. The multi-voice epistemology shapes the territorial imaginary to harbor these multiple voices and beings that exist in the territory. Thus, *testimonios* postulate a multi-vocal and multi-being defiance of the single masculine narrative of the territory.

*Testimonios* underscore how the multi-vocal and multi-being perspectives are relevant to the present. Doña Leito shows that the stories of the mountain and its agriculture remain in the present: “*que ya no, no hay el sustento que había, osea, de los que se cosechaba en antes, en la montaña ya no hay como para [comer]. Porque se cosechaba, y se vendía lo que se cosechaba, pero ahora ya no hay.*” Doña Leito tells that now, the sustenance that there once was no longer is present. Compared to “what was harvested before, in the mountains there is no longer enough to [eat].” The multi-being stories display a knowledge grounded in the mountain, in the multi-being voices that were once harvested. The multi-being stories ground the knowledge in the mountain to narrate that the mountain can no longer sustain Las Tunas, and the strong presence of the *Tagua* and caña is no longer in Las Tunas.

Ultimately, *testimonios* put forward a layered lens that shapes the territory. The lens advances a rich territorial memory and knowledge of multi-vocal and multi-beings that builds the complex territorial imaginary, in favor of a layered narrative and knowledge of Las Tunas. Doña Leito demonstrates the layered narrative of Las Tunas: “*Es como una historia, porque ya eso ya quedó atrás. Ya no hay esperanza de que volver a sembrar y que vuelva a producir, porque ya la tierra tampoco no da para sembrar.*” Doña Leito calls the vignette she shared “like history, because that's already behind us.” Her vignette reflects a layered story that centers the voice and

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34 Ailton Krenak’s text *Ideas para postergar el fin del mundo* (2021) shapes this idea. His decolonial lens prioritizes a multi-vocal cosmology. Krenak brings up similar critiques about accepting a single narrative, in the context of Brazil, critiquing the extractivist narrative that breaks Land relationships.
knowledge of the land, *la tierra*, of the territory; the voice manifests to the community that

“There is no longer any hope of sowing again and producing again, because the land is no longer enough to sow” (Tomala, 2023). The territorial imaginary, presented by *testimonios*, captures the complexity of the multiple voices and epistemologies of the land to shape the constructions of territorial knowledge and narrative.

**Part 3.3- Offering Testimonio-Territorio**

The layered lens of multi-vocal epistemologies and stories that shape the decolonial territorial imaginary of Las Tunas, also re-imagine connections to territory and its knowledge construction. In this section, I propose *testimonio-territorio* as a feminist geography cosmology that embraces the facets of *testimonio* and territory.

*Testimonio-territorio* is a cosmology that weaves together *testimonio* and territory. Alternate knowledges in *testimonio* embraces decolonial ways of seeing and imagining territory—as multi-vocal and layered, that too influences the territorial imaginary of Las Tunas. Multibeing perspectives that include non-human entities are embedded in *testimonio-territorio* as they are being brought in to imagine and shape the territory through their lenses. The polyphonic and layered presence offered in *testimonios* overturns the masculine epistemological register because the chorus of multi-being voices reclaims the territorial narrative that has been controlled by a singular masculine and colonial telling. Coloniality has fueled the single narrative of territory, yet *testimonio-territorio* resists the narrowness of the coloniality megaphone. The question of this section is the how\(^35\)—how to counter the coloniality megaphone that transmits a single territorial narrative and cannot capture the decolonial multi-vocal knowledge of

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\(^{35}\) The bones and heart of this thesis began to be shaped by Dr. Max Liboiron’s *Pollution is Colonialism* in Prof. Aimee Bahng’s Race, Gender, and the Environment class. Dr. Max Liboiron discusses Land relations, footnotes, and anti-colonial science. In their chapter 3, I gravitated towards their discussion of the “How.”
*testimonios* that can fully shape a layered territorial imaginary. Dr. Max Liboiron in *Pollution is Colonialism* quotes la paperson and their discussion of engaging with the “how”:

> How? Is a question you ask if you are concerned with the mechanisms, not just the motives of colonization. Instead of settler colonialism as an ideology, or as a history, you might consider settler colonialism as a set of technologies—a frame that could help you forecast colonial next operations and to plot decolonial directions (la paperson, 2017, p. 5 cited in Liboiron, 2021, p. 121).

My question of how to defy the coloniality megaphone calls into question the settler colonial technologies launched on ancestral territories, storytelling, and imaginations. The frame of settler technologies helps forecast that coloniality will continue to force the uplifting of masculine hegemonic narratives in Las Tunas; however, the multi-vocal facets of *testimonio-territorio* challenge the forecast and futurity of coloniality in ancestral storytelling, territory, and the imaginary and plot the decolonial direction in *testimonio-territorio*.

*Testimonio-territorio* theorizes from the voice and body in resistance. The methodology builds on Indigenous women’s cosmologies of *cuerpo-territorio*. Indigenous feminist geographers in Latin America have created *vinculos*, or fused bodies and territories in their lens of *cuerpo-territorio*. The cosmology of *cuerpo-territorio* is a “*cosmovisión liberadora*” for Lorena Cabnal (Cabnal, 2010, p. 22). The Indigenous feminist activist and scholar renders *cuerpo-territorio* to be a liberatory cosmology because knowledge of women's ancestors is recuperated, named, and recognized for their resistance, and influence on narrative (Cabnal, 2010, p. 22). *Testimonio-territorio* encapsulates this cosmology because the voices of *Montubio*36 women in Las Tunas evoke the alternate knowledges and silences of their voices and their women ancestors. *Cuerpo-territorio* privileges body, I bring *testimonios* to offer how storytelling can critique narrative production that affects body, territory, and subsequent relations.

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36 The *montubio* indigenous identity in Ecuador refers to ancestral communities in the Ecuadorian coast.
Testimonio-territorio contributes to cuerpo-territorio because of how the testimonio-territorio challenges the coloniality megaphone. The cosmology centers on women’s and women ancestors’ cuerpos y voces en resistencia—the stories of women’s bodies and voices in resistance to the colonial megaphone’s filtering of the masculine dominant territorial narrative. Testimonio-territorio manifests the existence of alternate knowledges of territories that flourish from the cuerpos y voces en resistencia. Due to her legacy as the first woman president of the Comuna, Maritza Mendoza has a voz y cuerpo en resistencia.

Allá en el 2008, tuvimos un problema con el abogado...que tiene una hostería...Bueno, él abrió un camino, hizo un puente con caña y todo. Entonces siempre a nosotros nos habían dado la concesión del manglar...Nosotros defendemos mucho [el manglar] porque es el último remanente que tenía de manglar acá en la zona sur de Manabí. Siempre luchábamos para cuidar ese espacio porque también nos habían dicho que estos manglares son un soporte para algún desastre natural. Con todo eso, nosotros nos empoderamos, creamos un sentimiento de pertenencia de cuidar (Mendoza, 2023).

Back in 2008, we had a problem with the lawyer...who owns a hostel... Well, he opened a path, made a bridge with cane and everything. So they [the government] had always given us the mangrove concession...We defended [the mangrove] a lot because it is the last remnant of the mangrove here in the south of Manabí. We always fought to take care of that space because we had also been told that these mangroves are a support for some natural disaster. With all this, we empower ourselves, we create a feeling of having the right to care (Mendoza, 2023).

In her tenure, Maritza faced a challenge with a lawyer who looked to expand his hostel property over the mangrove. The community continually protects the mangrove because of its importance

37 Thank you to Dr. Carla Macal for capturing my argument after our Literature Review conversation
38 River and the whole learning collective and classmates in Race, Gender, and the Environment offered the term “alternate presences” to explain the concept of alternate epistemologies existing while colonial and patriarchal frameworks actively try to extinguish them. “Alternative Presences” emerged we were reading Robin Wall Kimmerer’s Braiding Sweetgrass, Max Liboiron, “Ch. 3: An Anticolonial Pollution Science,” in Pollution Is Colonialism; Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, “Nishnaabeg Anticapitalism,” from As We Have Always Done (2017); Macarena Gómez-Barris, “Introduction: Submerged Perspectives” and “Chapter 4: A Fish-Eye Episteme: Seeing Below the River’s Colonization,” from The Extractive Zone (2017). Alternative presences emerge from the anti-colonial and decolonial ways of living outside the frameworks of capitalism that have always existed. Discussions of decolonial epistemologies are not new formulations but reflect the alternative presences that demonstrate ongoing decolonial ways of living.
39 Pertenencia directly means having the right to hold, as in the right for the mangrove to belong to the community. I found I could not fully translate this in the vignette.
to the community and rescues the mangrove from vanishing. Her voice of resistance offers an alternate story around empowerment to protect the territory and cement the right to care for the territory. Maritza employs the testimonio-territorio cosmology as she subverts the hegemonic masculine narrative with her alternate resistance knowledge of care.

The alternate stories that construct testimonio-territorio change how territory is shaped and imagined. Maritza’s testimonio-territorio contribution exemplifies a multi-species, care-based and reciprocal imagination of territory. Maritza continues,

*Siempre es lo duro porque en la comunidad de una o otra manera, nuestras tierras se están a poquito a poco dividiendo con mucha gente que son personas cómo nosotros pero no sabemos realmente. Y nosotros debemos cuidar porque nos dado nuestras familias. Tenemos todo en esta tierra hermosa—agua, río, mar, monte, montaña. Entonces yo les digo que no vendan. Yo luchaba, en ese año no hubo usufructos. Ese fue un año y cómo quieran salimos adelante, yo a los 6 meses me dolía la cabeza, ya estaba muy cansada. Decía, pero debo seguir, debo seguir* (Mendoza, 2023).

It's always hard because in the community, in one way or another, our lands are being divided little by little by many people who are people like us but we don't really know. And we must take care [for our lands] because it has given us our families. We have everything in this beautiful land—water, river, sea, forests, mountain. So I tell them not to sell. I struggled, in that year there were no usufructs. That was a year and however we moved forward, after 6 months I had a headache, I was already very tired. But I must continue, I must continue (Mendoza, 2023).

Maritza’s story of resistance and struggle bears witness to visions and relations to territory that aim to center community, care, and reciprocity in testimonio-territorio. Her opposition to the division of territory is a similar theme in hegemonic narratives, yet her story of resistance departs from the dominant masculine thread because of how Maritza centers care—the sentimiento de pertenencia de cuidar and the urgency to cuidar porque nos dado nuestras familias. Maritza is producing defiance narratives that craft the feeling of having the urgency and right to care of the territory because it has given the community, their families. Maritza inserts multibeing care in the stories and knowledge and imaginary of the territory of Las Tunas. The care-based narratives
of *testimonio-territorio* shape land relations within territory and the territory imaginary to be about care, reciprocity and community. The mangrove presents that care with territory is rooted in multi-species reciprocity; the mangrove has protected Las Tunas, and they work to care for the mangrove.

Care-based territorial narratives and reciprocal relations are the decolonial directions of *testimonio-territorio*. The ongoing decolonial direction confronts the hold the coloniality megaphone has in territorial narrative production and knowledge in Las Tunas. *Testimonio-territorio* subverts the position of the coloniality megaphone in narrative and knowledge production. The decolonial cosmology of *testimonio-territorio* embraces community and care in territory relations. The community of *La Comuna* is strengthened with the care and homage connection to the territory; Maritza recognizes that “[t]enemos todo en esta tierra hermosa—agua, rio, mar, monte, montaña.” She narrates, connects to, views, and imagines her territory with care, as “beautiful land—water, river, sea, forest, mountain.”
Conclusion: Making a move towards environmental justice and embracing stories

I made a promise to return to La Comuna Ancestral Las Tunas to listen to the stories of the ocean, river, and mountain once again. I returned in the summer of 2023 to listen to the gaps and silences of what came to be the dominant stories and to emphasize that the project of territorial knowledge and narrative production is at stake. In the silences, the existence of women’s testimonios emerged. The subjugated knowledges of women—Doña Leito, Graciela Tomala, and Maritza Mendoza—and their territorial stories flourish in testimonios.

I return to my inquiry: how do testimonios of women of La Comuna Ancestral Las Tunas in southern Manabí, Ecuador shape the territory and, by defying the silencing of their stories, offer an alternate and decolonial narrative of the territory? Amplifying testimonios of women exposes the resistance to the dominant masculine knowledge. Through testimonios, the Comuna will learn about mechanics of the colonially megaphone that filters masculine stories and establishes the masculine epistemological control of the material and the oral archive. The existing stories and epistemologies embedded in testimonios defy the hegemonic territorial narratives and offer alternate depictions and relations to the territory of Las Tunas. Testimonios have shown the territorial stories and epistemologies that exist within the silences of dominant knowledge production in Las Tunas. For example, when juxtaposed with the anthem of Las Tunas, the foundational fragment of the material archive, Doña Leito’s testimonio of a once fertile mountain fills the knowledge gap about the transformation of territory.

I propose testimonio-territorio, a feminist geography cosmology centering multi-vocal epistemologies that emerge from weaving testimonio and territory. Testimonio-territorio encapsulates the intervention subjugated knowledges has on the territory of Las Tunas. The
subjugated epistemologies story the territory and build a decolonial territorial imaginary with multibeing voices.


I remember seeing la *abuela* Julia y el *abuelo* Alejandro, Byron’s grandparents, weaving with *paja toquilla* and displaying their *toquilla* straw creations (see Image A7). The *abuela* and *abuelo* display decolonial possibilities of *testimonio-territorio* since their creations celebrate the central role in Las Tunas of multibeing stories of the “fibers from a palm tree characteristic of the Ecuadorian coast” (UNESCO, 2012). Stories of the ancestors of Las Tunas, of the multibeing richness, and the territory’s abundance of coastal palms are weaved with the *paja toquilla*. These knowledges and stories usher in an anticolonial territorial archive of ancestors, the multibeings and their voices. *Testimonio-terriotorio* uplifts the *abuela* and *abuelo*’s engagement and
grounding of *paja toquilla* to construct a living archive, raising and documenting a living space where many forms of seeing and understanding the territory are found.\(^{40}\)

The story that I close with is the mourning of Jahaira Isabel Ponce Del Peso. Her voice is part of the mosaic of *testimonios* of patriarchy, community, and territory. I did not have a chance to meet her personally, but I heard about her contributions to the *Comuna*. In Graciela Tomala’s *testimonio*, I asked, ¿cual es el papel de la mujer no solo en la Comuna pero en el conflicto? What is the role of women not only in the *Comuna*, but in the conflict? Graciela named the group of *dirigentes*, they are un grupo, pero de ese grupo hay tres barones. The group of people in the directive are in charge of different aspects of Las Tunas, the group has three men, but [p]ara cada mujer, hay una dignidad que cumplir: En este caso, tenemos la compañera Jahaira, es dirigencia de lo que es la familia [y la mujer]. For each woman, there is a dignity to fulfill. Jahaira was in charge of directing the realm of the family and the woman in Las Tunas. She held a position that sought to see how to improve the conditions of families and women.

Jahaira’s story will be heard, the community will forever hold her memory of care for families and women. The territory embraces her story—of joys and deep care for her community. Her voice cuts through the silences embedded in the territory. I echo the Latin American feminist protest statement: *Ni una más, ni una menos. Que vivas nos queremos, que vivas nos amamos.*

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\(^{40}\) Thank you Profe Norman Valencia for your closing thoughts of our Fall 2023: Narrating Neoliberalism class. The reflections found their way to this thesis. ¡Gracias!
Appendix A: Images

Image A1: Letters of Las Tunas in the malecón, or pier. (Source: María Durán González)
Image A2: Location of Las Tunas (Source: surf-forecast.com)
Image A3: Satellite image and delineation of la Comuna
Image A4: Manabí separated into 22 cantones. (Source: Familysearch.org).
Image A5: Tagua tree in Ayampe Reserve. (Source: María Durán González)
Image A6: Unripe Tagua, when it is not hardened yet, the tagua is a type of fruit. It takes like an apple. (Source: María Durán González)
Image A7: *La abuela* Julia (right) y *el abuelo* Alejandro (left) celebrating the International Day of Rural Women on Oct 15th, 2022. They are pictured selling their *artesanías*, or handicrafts in the Valle de la Virgen parish in the cantón of Pedro Carbo. (Source: Funprocom Puerto López Facebook).
Appendix B: Graphics

Graphic B1: Depicting the geographical organization of the Comuna. La Comuna Ancestral Las Tunas forms part of the “cloud” of the parish of Salango; the “sky,” or the cantón of Puerto López, in the province of Manabi, Ecuador.

(Source: María Durán González)
Graphic B2: Umbrella of *La Comuna Ancestral Las Tunas*. The umbrella holds the 4 precincts that make up the *Comuna*—Puerto Rico, Las Cabañas, Las Tunas, and Ayampe. (Source: María Durán González)
HIMNO A LA COMUNA LAS TUNAS

I

Salve oh salve gloriosa Comuna
Grandes hechos hoy narran tu historia
Son heroicas, tus grandes victorias,
Con esfuerzo, constancia y valor.

II

Defendiste ha sido el anhelo
De tus hijos nobles y valientes
Enfrentando a los terratenientes
Que humillarte quisieron a tí.

III

Fundada por Carlos Manuel Jara,
Oh soberbia Comuna Las Tunas,
Del gran hérote fuiste la cuna
Orgullosa, soberana y sin par.

IV

Abrazando viene a Puerto Rico,
Las cabañas, Las Tunas y Ayampe
Con gran furia y destreza incesante
al tirano hicieron sucumbir.

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V
Tu inmensa y fértil montaña,
Con sus aves en diáfanos trinos,
El marfil, vegetal que obtuvimos
Celebramos gran triunfo al fin

VI
Eres fuente de grandes riquezas
Y el océano, bañando tus playas
Enfrentando tan duras batallas
Al fin libre te han visto crecer.

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Letra y música: Alfredo Luis Pilligua Delgado
Cantantes:
Año: 1995

Document C1: Anthem of La Comuna Las Tunas (Source: Directiva de la Comuna Ancestral Las Tunas)
References


