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MINGAS: THE GAME AS A POSSIBILITY OF OPENING, CRITICISM AND CHALLENGE

Milena Estefanía RODRIGUEZ AZAⁱ 

ⁱ Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla – BUAP, Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades (ICSyH). Puebla, Pue., México.

Author Of Correspondence: Milena Estefania Rodriguez Aza mlnrodriguez92@gmail.com

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Abstract

This text is part of my own process to enunciate a topic of interest to be worked on as a doctoral research proposal, so it is just an outline of concerns and ideas for which, before going into what could be “the game” as a comprehensive approach, it is necessary to establish some notions about the *Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca* and make some notes on the Mingas, to go on to propose a critical reading.

Descriptors: Minga; Game; State; Fight and Resistency.

MINGAS: O JOGO COMO POSSIBILIDADE DE ABERTURA, CRÍTICA E DESAFIO

Resumo: Este texto faz parte do meu proprio processo para enunciar um tema de interesse que alcance a ser trabalhado como uma proposta de pesquisa de doutorado. Por isso é apenas um esboço de preocupações e ideias para que, antes de dar voltas naquilo que poderia ser “o jogo” como aposta compreensiva, é necessário estabelecer

MINGAS: EL JUEGO COMO POSIBILIDAD DE APERTURA, CRÍTICA Y DESAFÍO

Resumen: Este texto hace parte de mi propio proceso por enunciar un tema de interés que alcance a ser trabajado como propuesta de investigación doctoral, por ello es apenas un esbozo de preocupaciones e ideas para el que antes de dar vueltas en lo que podría ser “el juego” como apuesta comprensiva, es necesario establecer algunas nociones alrededor del

<p>algumas noções ao redor do <i>Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca</i> e fazer algumas anotações sobre as Mingas, para pensar em propor uma leitura crítica. Descritores: Minga; Jogo; Estado; Luta e resistência.</p>	<p>Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca y hacer algunas anotaciones sobre las Mingas, para pasar a proponer una lectura crítica. Descritores: Minga; Juego; Estado; Lucha y resistencia.</p>
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INTRODUCTION

Where do the Mingas come from?

In Colombia the Indigenous presence has a political trajectory of resistance and struggle that potentially exceeds the sociological reading of its **population**, (according to the National Census of Population and Housing - CNPV of the Dane in 2018 the indigenous population represents 4.4% of the total population in Colombia).¹ Mainly in the struggles for the recovery of lands that are linked to a political project of collective survival that, in principle involves and articulates efforts with peasant, afro-descendant, and mestizo organizations.

In the southwest of Colombia, the struggles of the *terrajeros*^a and *comuneros* in the 1970's were articulated as cooperatives against dispossession and land invasion, strongly influenced by the struggles that took place between 1910 and 1950 in the departments of Cauca, Tolima and Huila in defense of the *resguardos*^b, and with the demand for the application of the law that maintained them, at least in the order of public debate installed by the demands of *Manuel Quintín Lame*.^{2,3}

In 1971, the first assembly of farmers and community members from the north and east took place, with more than 2000 participants from different delegations of the department of Cauca, and it was there, in “The Assembly of Toribio” that took place on February 24, where they agreed to support and articulate their struggles and “for that, to unite, they created the CRIC”⁴ as the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca. Among the first agreements it was decided not to pay

^a The terraje is a “system of linking the indigenous worker to the Andean hacienda through which, for the right to work a small plot of land, the terrajero and his family were obliged to work several days a week, without any other compensation in the tasks of the hacienda”.

^b Legally recognized indigenous territories are divided into: 1) colonial resguardos, which are those territories with titles that were granted since colonial times and are recognized as such by the Colombian State, 2) resguardos of republican origin, which are those titled through modern state agrarian institutions, and 3) indigenous lands acquired by the current National Agrarian Fund, which are in the process of being constituted as resguardos.

for the *terrajés* and to challenge the Colombian Institute for Agrarian Reform - INCORA, as a governmental figure, to expropriate the lands of *resguardos* that had been appropriated by landowners and return them to the community members and peoples. Also to expand the existing *resguardos* through an Agrarian Law, but without leaving aside the “seizures” or occupations of haciendas as a strategy of recovery.

The origin and process of the CRIC has been widely documented from different perspectives, authors and approaches, even as a process, recovery and documentation tasks have been carried out by the Organization, as well as different governmental and/or academic organizations have focused their interest in this process⁴⁻¹¹ among others. In the same way, within the assemblies the principles with which this Council was created were promptly questioned, as it was created in the context of peasant struggles and the formulation of an agrarian State policy in which they were not **recognized** as citizens, their bets took the form of the legal demand, and the organization of the peasant model.

By the second (1972) and third (1973) assemblies, these criticisms were already on the table and the principles had been reformulated, as well as the “enemies were unmasked”⁴ to prevent the assemblies from taking place, since the strength that the CRIC took as a coordinator of struggles was already beyond the department of Cauca.¹² The church, mayors, ministers and even town councilors sought to dismiss and deactivate the articulation, to the point that the national government declared a public order emergency, for which the indigenous men and women were attacked, repressed by the public forces, detained, and even assassinated. This would not be the first or the last time that they were brutally attacked by the government and the alliance with **businessmen and politicians**.¹³

In this quick overview of the formation of the CRIC I would like to point out three premises that were and have been reiterated by the comunards: first, **the indigenous movement does not have as its basis or purpose the racial struggle, it is not a racial movement but a movement of fighters organized according to the needs of their struggles**.¹⁴ They start from the recognition of a project of death that attacks peasants, indigenous people, workers, men and women in the countryside or in the city, so they point out the need to **learn to fight together**, although we are not the same.

Second, the non-payment of *terrajés* has at its core the resonance of **the land for those who work it**. The refusal to *terraje* is explicitly the rejection of “the form of labour in which

another takes advantage; the problems of land, health, education, clothing, market are the same as for everyone, they keep our work, they have because they live off our work [...] in the world there is always a struggle. The rich fight to keep the land and the work of the poor. And we the poor fight not to leave and to be able to improve our lives".⁴⁽²⁹⁾ Here, the recovery of the land is only a step, because there comes the reformulation of how to organize ourselves and how to work in other ways?

Third, **there is no father government**, the State as guarantor of rights is nothing more than a speculation on particular ways of life and their manipulation in pursuit of economic growth at the expense of the collective and its differences, an organization in which the church, landowners, businesses and politicians, seek to continue to take over both the land and our work. For this reason, the construction of life plans or projects that seek to strengthen the process of territorial, environmental, political, economic, educational, health and self-rights autonomy¹⁴ are presented as an obstacle.

By the 1990's with the entry of **multiculturalism** and the emphasis placed on the policies of this perspective, with the difference as agglutination for the incorporation and continuation of the colonial discourse, the need to geographically and demographically unify **the indigenous** intensified, that is, to reassign the place of the indigenous to translate it in an administrative way, in what some authors have called **State indigenism**¹⁵ or the **permitted Indian**¹⁶ with which a planned integration to the national project of the **problematic others** is intended, *either* by assimilation or elimination.

Problematic? why or for whom? The negative valuation of the **indigenous** for the **progress** that has been installed as a discourse in Colombia, has a strong link with the strength of the mobilizations (Mingas, mainly) that, although they are made with the red and green flags of the CRIC, they manage to articulate and to summon *hartazgos* that are not easily sectorized, this has had the reaction of a machinery of terror, persecution and criminalization from the State and paramilitary forces. Likewise, it is a complex historical process that manages to open a Constitutional framework since 1991, in which indigenous peoples are recognized as **subjects of rights**, and after a long process of claims formulated a necessary legal limit but that became an encirclement for the process of building autonomy.¹⁷

Later, this process of encirclement was emphasized with Plan Colombia (the US war on drugs) as a war policy accompanied by the signing of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) as

supranational constitutions at the service of the new legal person, the sole subject **of rights**: the transnational corporation. The areas of Indigenous Cabildos were surrounded both militarily and by non-governmental organizations with the financing of **productive projects**.

In 2004 the CRIC launched the call for the First Indigenous and Popular Congress, where the Minga was **born** in the September mobilizations and in the already existing, by then, collective agenda in which the **rejection of the Economic Model of Global Capital expressed in the FTAs** (Free Trade Agreements) was openly manifested. The Minga was not formulated primarily for legal recognition or as a bureaucratic demand of native peoples, but as a bet of articulation between peasants, indigenous peoples, women, even student organizations, which explicitly denounced and rejected the **Project of Death** of which the FTAs were a part, that is, capitalism in its neoliberal facet.

In principle we would have to point out the Minga as an expression of the struggle and resistance of the CRIC, which recovers the word Minga from the Quechua word *Minka*, and refers to the form of pre-Hispanic collective work of Andean communities and peoples, which has taken the form of protest, reflection and assembly in the southwest of Colombia. However, as important as this widely worked and studied reading is, it seems to fall into the partialization and risky reduction of the Minga as an indigenous form for recognition, or its focus within ethnic and/or racial studies. Even when it is pointed out of great relevance for the issues treated as **communitarian**, it seems to remain in the **indigenist** reading.

The Mingas, although they constitute an expression within a broad process of political formulation, which calls itself Autonomies of the CRIC^c,¹⁷ have managed to have in the center the tension of the 3 premises that I pointed out above. As ways of events, rallies, blockades, marches and assemblies, the Mingas have managed to retake the bets of articulation beyond the indigenous, the call to the Mingas is an invitation to a time of rupture, a space that overcomes the separation between countryside and city, as well as the notion of the public and the private, and the traditional readings of social movements and the left. Normally they are understood as extraordinary times of protest, but the Mingas are built in long-lasting times that for more than 20

^c In a descriptive way, and following Vilma Almendra, today the CRIC groups 19 forms of indigenous authority represented in the traditional authority of the cabildos; 14 collective territories recognized as resguardos and a community structure organized through five Tejidos de Vida that try to integrate from diverse territorial scopes as bets of collective and daily life in eight indigenous peoples: Nasa -Paéz, Guambiano Yanaconas, Coconucos, Epiraras -siapiraras (Emberas), Totoroes, Inganos and Guanacos.

years have managed to leverage, reformulate and reflect on the construction of political spaces from the everyday.

The reformulation of the work as an invitation to concrete **action**^d through mobilization, **walking the talk**, is constantly presented by the media, academics and even by spokespersons as actions of complaint against the non-compliance of the State, thus reducing the Minga to a reaction or demand for rights. However, it is important to investigate in the Minga the matter of how the efforts of other forms of work and construction of social relations are formulated when it seems that all the time it is being elaborated and proposed in the margins of the State and against the State.

Beyond this, I propose a **different reading**, which starts from the reconstruction of the Mingas, not from the starting point of the demands and requirements to the State as a mobilizing force; but, strategies and open manifestations of the dispute to decentralize the politics of the State, to unmask the discourses of democracy within its own margins: rights, representativeness, participation... **a game** of open dispute, which is not a merely Indigenous manifestation of legalistic negotiation, but a bet to build an expanded process of articulation that breaks with the sectorized perspective of social struggles, proposing an amplitude in the dimensions and forms of struggle, an open process of massive mobilization, which although it is sustained by strong processes mainly in the north of Cauca, its impact encompasses much of political and current history of Colombia.

Alongside the handkerchiefs and canes the struggle goes against segmentation; they are not trade unionists, but they go with the workers, they are not universities, but they go with the students, they are not landowners so they go with the peasants, and they are not only indigenous so they go with the Afros, with women, with social leaders and neighborhood organizations, yes, **the Minga is all of us, because we are all attacked by the same disease, and we will have to learn to fight together to remedy.**

Before telling a little of this different reading, it is necessary to take a look at the perspectives with which the Mingas have been read.

^d For more on the Action concept: Stirring up Capitalism, John Holloway 2011.

READINGS AND PERSPECTIVES

As already mentioned, the interest in the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca and the Mingas has not been minor, given the political impact and its visibility mainly in the South West of Colombia, and even in the whole country. This, added to the links that have been established with other organizational processes mainly in Latin America, as well as the support and solidarity received from academic spaces and social organizations, in addition to the attack and pointing out of the media and government agents and/or businessmen.

The general lines from the academic production in the sources reviewed so far, present four readings that intersect: the Latin American de-colonial thought, the Liberal reading and/or of recognition, the own reading inside the CRIC and a critical reading that seems to be done outside. For now, I will quickly point out the most relevant discourses within the de-colonial reading as one of the most present.

The conception of modernity in crisis as a European construction seems to be the starting point in which several works are situated to present the CRIC or the Mingas, and in general different organizations as efforts to reposition a peripheral thought. In general, the works of Arturo Escobar,¹⁸⁻²⁸ as well as Boaventura de Sousa Santos²⁹ have been well received not only in the academic sphere, but also within the organizations or movements, both of which also share the perspective of the Minga as a means or social manifestation for **development**, mainly of the indigenous communities.

For his part, Escobar tries to gather the discussion of two decades within social movements and organizations in what he calls a **change of era in** which globalization and modernity are in crisis.²⁸ Globalization is seen as a project of death inscribed in capital with a marked imperialist connotation, in this context for the author the transformation goes **beyond** the State, involving an epistemic rupture with the great European paradigms (including Marxism) that represent an obstacle to the formulation of a **culture** of politics from the **colonized**.

Although he affirms that the **indigenous, Afro-descendant and rural or urban movements with a strong territorial or communal base mark a break much deeper than a simple turn to the left**, his critique of development as a naturalized way of dreaming of thinking or even of being, proposes an overcoming through two concepts: neo-development and post-development, as a progressive line of advance as a break between the first and the second. A movement that appeals to a State capable of making the transition from anthropocentrism to

biocentrism, as the axis for the second concept. Although the State is a Eurocentric formulation, for the author it is the agent capable of changing the path of development, as long as it is embodied by *post-development* oriented identities and subjectivities, which only come from non-State forms of organization.

Much of Arturo Escobar's work¹⁸⁻²⁸ is ethnographic in nature, which underpins his theoretical wagers, and although it is undoubtedly rich, it is important to highlight that the political implications of repositioning governments as agents of change from the State places not only the Mingas, but also the different community councils and movements in the line of dialogue with the State as the determiner of the forms and representations of social and community life, once again separating politics as a sphere of power from the top down; Contrary to the efforts of the same author to point out the importance of the alternatives of the worlds below, it seems that these can only be maintained in consonance with a political project that guarantees itself as a government.

Thus, it is not surprising to read that most of the works and articles compiled refer to the Mingas as moments of demand in the face of the non-fulfillment of the State's promises, or that social inclusion is considered as a constitutive element of **democratic radicalism** in which the development of the nation has as a requirement the development of the **marginalized and excluded**, as we read in Obando J,³⁰ López Cortes³¹ and others.

A reading that fits well and is even accompanied by the elaborations that propose the protagonist emergence from geographically located subalternities that almost carry **transformation** as a natural endowment, which have even had a great relationship with the progressivisms of the region, and that, although it highlights the forms and political expressions of knowledge and knowledge such as the indigenous ones, it also assigns them a place of realization from the peripheral or marginalized condition.

This is the influence of the **colonial wound**³²⁻³⁵ as an ontological event where it seems that the problem is not the constitution of a global process of capitalist production that uses colonialism or hierarchies such as patriarchy for its expansion, but a geographical process of handicap that can only be overcome in opposition to everything outside, a self-absorption of powers that are only seen in relation to a bad, white and homogeneous European other.

In these widely expanded discourses as a recipe book for the validation of de-colonial thought, these experiences of struggle validate themselves on the basis of the geographical location in which they take place, making apologies for the local as if somehow the "outside of capital"

were in Latin America and this would be realized by itself and in itself, a bet on the local that rejects not only theoretical perspectives from outside, but emphasizes the preeminence of a colonialism that seems to have no direct link with capitalism, other than from the influence of the empire.³⁶⁻⁴⁰ Let us recall Fanon, when he points out that the problem of the black is not the white, but “a capitalist, colonialist society, accidentally white, that exploits and racializes him in order to legitimize exploitation”⁴¹ this reading seeks to overcome the colonial trauma, not to make of it the designation of fundamentally binary functions or roles.

In consonance with the need for the realization of democracy, and giving continuity to what appears to be a de-colonial reading of rights, Boaventura de Sousa Santos²⁹, another of the most cited in the works shortly reviewed, who has also been invited to Mingas of thought and political-academic activities, seems to point out that the problem encountered by *the autonomy bets* is one of types of governments and not of State. In this, the agreement with Escobar¹⁸⁻²⁸ is obvious.

Although the depth of Boaventura de Sousa²⁹ seems to go further when he affirms that, given the impossibility of conceiving the end of capitalism, the **alternatives** for some organizations and struggles have been restricted to making the experience in this system less painful, when he speaks of the relevance of the political-organizational forms of the processes that sustain the Mingas, the core of the argument takes up the question of “where knowledge is produced, by whom and for what purpose”, arriving at the reaffirmation that the ways of knowing and knowing that take place in Latin America are or are counter-modern by the fact of being geographically located outside Europe, an argument that as such is developed in “**Epistemologies of the South**”²⁹, and supported by Mignolo’s conception of *border thinking*.³²

Following this discourse, the possibility of freeing democracy from its European **yoke** by taking the form and the faces of the *comuneras*, of emphasizing the consolidation of non-hegemonic democracies is strengthened, giving singular importance to the question of rights as a tool of struggle without which a political project at any level could not succeed, hence linking the claims of the Mingas as a support for rights, and that this is their fundamental role, to translate the needs of **struggle** into practical forms of citizenship. However, this perspective that reads as radical or counter-hegemonic has even been criticized as a reduction of the political perspective of the construction of autonomy processes, such as the Cuaca. Nevertheless, the proximity of the author not only in academic but also in political elaboration in some scenarios has been decisive in the formulation of perspectives and readings from the consolidation of a social rule of law.

The absence of a clear relationship between State and Capital, seems to personify the antagonism in an immediate way or to position it in geographical poles fully realized as opposites, but if the Mingas are bets for other forms of work, the way in which they clash or negotiate with the State is not determined neither by rights nor by democracy, rather a multi-dimensionality of disputes is configured within the struggle against the project of death, exploitation and repression, which is capital as a social relationship.

The explanation as to the relationship that is established with a certain government that performs the functions of the State and the social organizations of protest, resistance and/or autonomies, cannot be explained, exclusively, as a relationship of instrumentality of the State apparatus, that is to say as a mere **tool**, this simple explanation (and valid as it may seem) only shows the surface, but what is it that makes this answer possible? What is the specificity of the need for such a tool? Is it the violence that has characterized Colombian history? Is it because this country has not experienced a government other than the rancid military right?

Perhaps the questions are formulated in a particular way, but in reality they are only close to the surface.

WHERE THE GAME COMES FROM

The game is not a theoretical category as such, it is a statement that comes from Alejo, a *minguero* who while we were talking about autonomy in the youth process of which he is a part, said:⁴²

The problem is that if you see well the State is always there, but sometimes it seems stale and military, but when you realize it is in your house, when you go to a doctor's appointment it is also there, when we are with the boys in a Minga school and they come to tell us "what a good process boys, we have such a financing project".... the problem is not to see it, to think that because you ignore it, it is not there or that it is only there when there are -electoral- campaigns, and of course you can say that by doing or presenting a project with UNDP or a mayor's office you are losing autonomy, but even if you do not go, they will come and it is better to know how to play them, just as they do with us, the autonomy is not won, and just as you lose something you fight for other things, nothing is fixed^e .⁴²⁽¹¹³⁾

^e Part of this interview is published in reference 42. But for this presentation it has been extended to unpublished material corresponding to the work of the author herself.

Although the conversation with Alejo returned to the fact that **the game** was to know the approach and strategies that as government plans, public policies and projects outlined the participation and institutionalization of local political incidence processes, in **which the game** consisted in learning how to elaborate a discourse according to the indicators that government entities needed to limit interference, reduce the risk of infiltrated agents in the communities, and why not execute resources in a way that would address logistical issues within the Minga processes, without becoming the support of the same. Thus, for example, the evaluation reports submitted as evidence would be elaborated in a careful and concealed manner that would avoid putting the companions and the processes at risk.

Following Anthony Dest,⁴³ black and indigenous social movements have had to make their way (even) through the State apparatus in a strategy that can be interpreted as a way of building dual power, or in Tischler's terms "Autonomy",⁴⁴ the difference with the traditional left or the guerrilla tradition in Colombia, is that these organizations do not seek to take over State power, but are constantly in tension with it through limits and strategies.

From the organizations of Northern Cauca, the Mingas have rejected the assertions that reduce their processes as claims to the State, **pointing out the legacies of racist dispossession and the State's commitment to capitalist development**, while recognizing the strong pressure of the Armed Conflict as a determinant in the search for legal strategies as mechanisms of denunciation and defense. However, since the Mingas are so popular, Alejo's perspective "clashes" with others, such as that of the comrades for the "Liberation of Mother Earth":⁴³

Other movements, not being able to take it [power], make a pact with the state for a deal of good understanding based on the recognition of rights, which are more like crumbs, drops of honey. The result of this courtship, with courtship and candy, is the institutionalization of the movements. Or rather, the numbing of the tradition of struggle. In this way, many movements took the plunge and married the state. Conversion to what we have always faced. They made a nest inside capitalism with the garb and the discourse of the times of struggle [...].⁴³⁽¹²⁾

From the movement for the Liberation of Mother Earth they radically reaffirm in fact the action, proposing a critique from within the CRIC, in which the daily life is the dispute for land, the occupation through sowing and harvesting, reaffirming forms of land without property in the form of titles, as spaces for life.

But in the end, what the two positions pose is: what are the forms of the State and what are the relations that must be limited, cared for and prioritized in the development of its counter-

capitalist bets, while it constantly reproduces itself (in, against and beyond).⁴⁵ On the one hand, Alejo proposes that the State is not only the form of legal domination of local administration that is recognized as government but a certain way of understanding how life develops from the everyday, as the ways of attending to health and resolving housing have been bureaucratized and are presented as **normality** or naturalized relations.

When Alejo points out that the State is beyond the offices and the military, he complicates the way of understanding it, and even if we respond that it is a **contradiction** not to inquire into it is the same as taking it for granted as the perspective of the **tool**, and as not all contradiction is dialectical, says Pashukanis,⁴⁶ it is important to account for what are the constructions and conditions that make the reading of the Minga appear as the tension between non-compliance and demand, in order to go on to propose the perspective of the **game** as an entry to an understanding of the Mingas as the manifest contestation to the totality of capitalist domination and exploitation.

Hence, my interest is not only to reconstruct the readings of the Mingas but to raise the contradiction within the Mingas and their spokespersons, and to observe from the mobilization and force the ways in which the relationship with and against the State is assumed or not.

This added to a context of particularities in the protest in Colombia (at least as it was seen in the *Paro* of 2021) in which the idea of the guerrilla as claimants has been displaced from the collective imaginary, this is not only due to the long history of a conflict in which it seems that the reading of the armed struggle **was left aside**, but to the political incidence that the Mingas have had, in which the idea of the militant claimant is broken to think of rebellious subjects that break with the idea of the guerrilla, or the isolated and militant struggle, to become the worker, the peasant, the students, the women, the children and the collective and daily construction of other forms or **worlds**.

Finally, I would like to point out three necessary shifts linked to the premises with which I began the text:

1. To overcome the reading of the Minga as an exclusively indigenous process and/or reaction to non-compliance.
2. To point out the theoretical and political implications of these mobilizations as displacements of the struggle in Colombia.
 - 2.1 From the guerrilla tradition (from the mountain to the street).
 - 2.2 From the partisan left (from the political constitution to everyday politics).

2.3 From the seizure of the State as a purpose (to the multiplicity of subjects against the totality of capital and the demystification of State neutrality).

3. To make a reading of the mobilizations of the Minga as a determinant process in the current political history of Colombia, specifically as a manifestation of the struggle *against and beyond* capital.

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