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Environment And Indigenous Peoples: A Commitment To Ecological Sustainability And Cultural Diversity

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Abstract. This research is based on the need to discuss the responsible use of natural resources, on the predatory and devastating role that the human species has played on this planet. But as the research process progressed, other variants of the problem emerged, since it was identified that the irrational use of natural resources has not only affected the ecosystem but has also impacted the lives of various indigenous communities in Colombia. In many cases, these communities realized over time that their ancestral territories were decimated to the point of being cornered into small areas of land with limited access to natural resources, which are necessary for the development of their daily activities and, in the absence of these resources, they experienced a process of colonization that is leading to their extinction as an ancestral culture. This is the actual context in which this research is located, for which the qualitative approach is used since interviews were conducted with four people who are knowledgeable about the problem and who provide valuable information about the understanding of the consequences. This allows concluding that by working towards sustainability and the sustainability of natural resources, society is contributing to the survival of these indigenous communities that are part of the cultural heritage of the nation.

Keywords: Sustainability, cultural diversity, indigenous peoples, indigenous communities.

1. INTRODUCTION

For several decades now, ecologists and specialists in environment and biodiversity have been warning about the serious risks posed by climate change for the preservation of the plurality of life on the planet, the interdependence that exists between ecosystems and species, and the fragility of the balance involved in their coexistence (Núñez & Luzardo, 2011; Martínez & Acosta, 2017; Méndez, 2018; Ochoa, 2018).

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However, the exponential growth of industrialization and the habilitation of large extensions of virgin nature for agricultural exploitation have brought with them not only a substantial reduction of space for wildlife, increasingly restricted to limited territories even below the essential, but has also altered the balance of many ecosystems and has even swept others away definitively (Pérez & Farah, 2002). With a false appreciation of the ferocity of nature, always capable of reproducing and prospering spontaneously, human activity has been altering environmental conditions at such a speed that in such a short time (compared to the thousands and millions of years of evolution needed to reach their current state) many species have been on the verge of extinction, some have disappeared completely, while others survive in spaces confined by man, unable to recover their original environments and survive in them. This is pointed out, among many other authors, by Herrera (2011), who affirms that

The insatiable human occupation of the territory is causing an unprecedented rate of transformation of natural systems (Lindenmayer and Fisher, 2006). For example, between 2000 and 2005 alone, it is estimated that an annual average of 130,000 km² of forest cover was lost, mostly for livestock and agricultural purposes and the expansion of urban areas (FAO, 2006). It is not surprising, therefore, that habitat loss and fragmentation are among the main causes of biodiversity loss on a planetary scale (Baille et al., 2004) (p. 21).

Human intervention in the natural world has been overwhelming and its consequences are long-lasting (Artaraz, 2002). The diversity of life on the planet has reached such a level of threat that it is no longer enough to initiate reforestation campaigns in parks and avenues in cities. Or to create and sustain natural reserves in the continents where biodiversity has been most seriously attacked, such as in the African savannah, the Amazon or the jungles of Southeast Asia. The problem is much more severe, as it implies not only the responsibility of governments and companies, but also the commitment of all people to assume behaviors that remedy the damage, of course, but mainly to prevent and stop it (Núñez, 2021). The individual recognition that each act of ecological unconsciousness threatens the fragile balance of biodiversity is, at this moment in history, the most important mechanism to safeguard the richness of life on the planet. And this applies both to those who exploit fossil fuels or cut down forests for timber exploitation and to those who indiscriminately use and discard plastic bags in their homes or stock their pantries with ultra-processed goods from distant places, instead of preferring local or fair trade products (Egaña, 2016; Morton, 2021). The degree of influence of human behavior on the planet has been so severe that some scientists, among them Maldonado (2016), are already considering that

Human colonization of nature has reached such an extent that there is reason to believe that we have left the Holocene behind to enter a new geological era characterized by human influence on the functioning of the global planetary system: the Anthropocene. Far from being a mere scientific curiosity, this re-categorization of the relationship between humans and the global environment constitutes an epistemological shift with profound normative consequences, posing new challenges for the species as a whole (p. 795).

In addition to the threats to biological diversity posed by this frenetic change in the lifestyle habits of people, who are increasingly consuming products whose manufacture seriously affects the natural balance, a severe consequence of the unawareness of landscape change that is not sufficiently noticed has to do with its effect on cultural diversity (Cabezas, 2021; Carrasco, 2022).

Man often forgets that he is part of nature and its rich variety and, despite the evidence and proof that the alteration of the natural balance entails serious consequences for his subsistence, he persists in maintaining an outdated anthropocentric perspective (justified in previous centuries, but unsustainable in the present), the opposition between nature and civilization, according to which ecosystems are at the

service of man and constitute objects marketed according to their benefit (real or potential) for the human species (Gudynas, 2010).

Proof that human development is inextricably intertwined with ecosystems is to be found in ethnic diversity itself; indeed, the fact that over the centuries different human groups have developed particular phenotypic varieties has to do with the need for adaptation to their environment. Skin color, for example, has to do with the different degrees of exposure to ultraviolet radiation from the sun, higher in tropical regions or higher altitudes and lower in subtropical regions. As a mechanism for better uptake of this radiation, in principle necessary in that it enables the synthesis of vitamin D, essential for biochemical processes such as calcium absorption, subtropical peoples generally have fair skins. In contrast, the skins of tropical peoples are usually darker and rich in protective melanin pigments, especially eumelanin, which protect against the adverse effects of excess ultraviolet rays (Gerbaudo, 2009).

At the cultural level, the multiplicity of climates and landscapes has also influenced the different human groups in terms of their traditional ways of life: food, medicine, clothing, means of transportation, communication or isolation from other peoples, worldview, religion, etc. Therefore, man is not only the beneficiary and custodian of nature but has also been historically and culturally shaped by its diversity (Martín-López et al., 2008).

This diversity has been recognized throughout history by different people. Indeed, although the modes of communication and transport have undergone dizzying changes in the last century, few people have ignored the existence of other different modes of transport in their chronological course. Travel, trade, clashes for territorial domination, explorations in search of goods and riches... There are many mechanisms through which some cultures have become aware of other cultures throughout the ages. But it is also true that throughout history some peoples have considered others inferior and through wars or conquests have sought their subjugation and even their extinction. In this way, some cultures (and even entire civilizations) have been absorbed by others, annihilated, or extinguished, for example the successive civilizations that arose in ancient times in the regions of the Middle East (Hittites, Amorites, Mesopotamians, Assyrians, etc.). Sometimes, as in the case of the Rapa Nui, on Easter Island, they have been at serious risk due to the depredation of their natural environment and interbreeding with Creole populations (Pagel, 2012).

This last case is emblematic of the alteration and danger to human life and cultures when the environment is altered. This alteration sometimes has to do with the very rhythms, sometimes cataclysmic, of nature itself, such as earthquakes or floods. But it also happens when man intervenes to such a degree in natural spaces that he ends up exhausting them and making his survival in them impossible (Zurrita et al., 2015).

There is, however, another kind of more gradual (and therefore sometimes less visible) change in human life on the planet that has always been in the making, but which has gained speed and acceleration at the same pace as industrialization and the reduction of biodiversity. This change has to do with the cornering of local customs and traditions, increasingly threatened by the mechanisms of a sometimes misunderstood globalization (Castells, 2010).

The traditional and transmitted social behavior, which is what can be broadly called culture, has been diverse in the different spaces of the planet. Indeed, each people, in addition to inhabiting a space, has established a relationship with it and has developed ways of life, subsistence, shelter and protection from the elements related to the characteristics of that environment. But also about it, it has created styles of social interaction, models of organization of public and private life and even value systems and symbolic forms for the explanation of life, its origin, meaning and destiny (Vanegas & Gamboa, 2022a). A people is, therefore, more than an ethnic group: it is a culture, a way of life (Zarrilli, 2000).

Historically, peoples have often become nations, which are the political face of the organization of a geographically situated culture. But a nation rarely consists of a single people. Indeed, more often a nation is home to different peoples, but also often one among them arrogates to itself the power and the right to govern. It is also often the case that the dominant ethnic groups and cultures make their ways of life official and impose them (either deliberately through rules and laws, or by the weight of their prestige and customs) on the other peoples under their sway. The birth and survival of European nations during the Middle Ages, for example, were possible under the axiom of a nation: a people, a territory, a tradition, a law, a king, a language and a faith, for example, the case of Spain (Pérez, 2001). Thus, forms of culture without political power have been at risk of being neutralized and absorbed by those of the people in power. Others, however, have survived despite political subjugation, precisely as a mechanism of defense and reaction to the other oppressor (Muñoz, 2010).

But in addition to political reasons, the vitality of certain peoples has been diminished for various other reasons: catastrophic natural events, famines, pandemics, wars, invasions, miscegenation, internal political struggles or cultural assimilation. This last case is the case of so many peoples conquered by the Roman Empire. And it is also the case, although in combination with other factors, of many indigenous American peoples during the process of European conquest and colonization, but also in the times following national independence (Zárate, 2014).

It is difficult to establish the American Indian population and its distribution by peoples by the end of the 15th century. Even today, due to insufficient ethnographic and linguistic research, the establishment of the number and characteristics of the different ethnic groups and their kinship is doubtful. The current borders between countries were drawn under different parameters from the political and social organizations before the arrival of the European powers. And it is also obvious that the demographic density, as it is still today, was very disparate. However, some historians put the American population at about 60 million by the time Columbus landed and the successive waves of explorers in the Caribbean basin, then spread along the Atlantic and later the Pacific coasts (Koch et al., 2019).

In a few years this population would decrease by approximately 90%, due to the struggles of the conquest and the enslavement of part of the population, but, above all, due to the diseases brought by the Europeans, such as smallpox or influenza, for which the immune system of the American population lacked defenses (García, 2009). As an example, it is worth citing the case of the Tainos, ancient settlers of the Antilles, officially extinct (at least culturally) by the mid-16th century, mainly due to the aforementioned epidemics (Mira, 2017). It should be noted that this people was officially declared extinct around the year 1565, when, according to data from a census, only 200 aborigines of this ethnicity were counted in Hispaniola, an island now occupied by the Dominican Republic and Haiti. However, there were probably survivors who later interbred with the conquering European population and African slaves. In fact, at present, thanks to DNA tests and the transmission of oral histories within certain families, a group of people is claiming their ascription to this ethnicity in Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and the United States (Bracuttei Estévez, 2019).

The same can be said of continental Hispanic America, which, except for almost all of Uruguay and part of Argentina (whose current population is descended from successive flows of European emigrants, mainly in the 19th and 20th centuries), is mestizo. The indigenous American population, however, is still numerically significant, estimated at between 40 and 60 million people, which represents a tenth of the total number of the continent's inhabitants. The Inter-American Development Bank, the Latin American Demographic Center, the Inter-American Indian Institute and the Fund for the Development of Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean all agree on these figures

(Bello & Rangel, 2002). Concerning the distribution by ethnicity and related peoples, the proportions are less clear, as it is estimated that there are between 400 and 750 ethnic groups (Del Popolo & Oyarce, 2006). Sometimes the identification of a subject as a member of an ethnic group is quite reliable (physiognomy, mother tongue, genealogy and even by DNA testing), as is the case of so many Quiché Mayans in Guatemala. Others, on the other hand, may consider themselves indigenous (without necessarily being so), deny their ethnic affiliation or ignore it for different reasons: pride/shame, speaking or not speaking an indigenous language, degree of miscegenation, knowledge of the culture, etc. In any case, five American countries account for 80% of the current indigenous American population: Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Peru and Mexico (Hopenhayn & Bello, 2001). The latter, with twelve and a half million, is the country with the largest number of American Indians at present. Some ten families of unrelated languages are spoken there and the estimate of the total number of pre-Hispanic languages ranges from about fifty (according to the most conservative estimates) to three hundred, which would be approximately equivalent to the number of languages existing at the time of the conquest (Flores, 2008).

As can be seen, the calculation of the American Indian demography is a complex task. And it is so for different reasons: incomplete or poorly elaborated censuses, loss of cultural identity traditions (mainly languages), processes of miscegenation and acculturation to Creole ways, marginalization and exclusion, etc. A well-documented case is that of the Yaruros or Pume, on the border between the Department of Casanare in Colombia and the State of Apure in Venezuela, with a few families who still recognize themselves as indigenous and about a hundred speakers of the language, but who do not want their children to learn and use it so that they do not suffer the persecution and marginalization to which they were subjected (Orobitz, 1999; Ramírez, 2010).

In this sense, it is necessary to point out the disparate defense (almost always insufficient and sometimes even nonexistent) of the multicultural heritage of the peoples of the Americas, whose governments have chosen to promote more or less uniform national cultural idiosyncrasies: the national identity, which concentrates on Creole (mestizo) traditions and excludes (or minimizes) pre-Hispanic aboriginal signs (Assies et al., 2002), reduced to the recognition of a few words, a certain artifact, a song, a dance or a cooking dish.

In many Ibero-American constitutions, it is agreed that their indigenous cultures are part of the national heritage, even if they are very much in the minority. And it is also included as an obligation of the State to guarantee their survival through education mediated by teachers specialized in the languages and traditions of these peoples (Gamboa, 2016). In practice, however, this letter of intent does not go far enough beyond the realm of desideratum (López, 2013). As of today, as has been said, the necessary research remains to be undertaken to adequately inventory the number of American indigenous peoples, and the even greater task of describing their cultural heritage and attempting to preserve it among their heirs. And a major issue, which will be discussed later, has to do with the necessary relationship between the conservation of biological ecosystems and the safeguarding of the original cultures since it is in the former that the others were forged.

In the case of Colombia, the original peoples censused in 2018 amounted to 115 and agglutinate 1,900,000 people, representing just 3.4% of the national population (IWGIA, 2019).

The National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC), for its part, recognizes the existence of some 65 indigenous languages. Linguists such as González (2001) or Rodríguez (2008) establish eight distribution zones: 1) Southern Amazonia, 2) Northern Amazonia, 3) Orinoquia, 4) Southern Andean, 5) Pacific Coast, 6) Serranía de Perijá and Motilones, 7) Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, and 8) Guajira Peninsula. As can be deduced, the location of the indigenous peoples and the mapping of their

languages are in marginal territories for the nation's development centers. Likewise, the socio-educational situation of these peoples and the consideration they receive from the rest of their fellow countrymen are marginal, mainly due to a series of inherited prejudices, but also to the insufficient governmental provision of means for the knowledge and preservation of the multicultural heritage of the nation.

In this regard, it is worth noting the interrelationship between ecosystems and indigenous peoples, since the preservation of the former is a *sine qua non*-condition for the survival of the latter. Indeed, it has already been said that the cultural diversity of man is closely linked to the natural environments, which have determined first of all his material survival (food and adaptation to the climate) and then his social organization and the life of the spirit. The Sahara desert explains the Tuareg culture as much as the Scandinavian snow explains the Sami of Lapland or the Central American rainforest explains the Mayas.

However, the current fate of indigenous peoples, especially when they are minorities in countries with a more or less homogeneous culture, is uncertain, because while they suffer marginalization if they maintain their ancestral customs, to integrate they must accept acculturation since their traditional ways of life are often incompatible with the organization of mestizo societies (Máiz, 2004; Rodríguez, 2008). The degradation of nature and the occupation of their spaces by miners, loggers and cattle ranchers reduce their spaces (Ayala, 2010). All of this, in the face of indifference and lack of support from the Creole population.

In this sense, one of the little-considered aspects of the impact of climate change and the degradation of nature is the harm that natural deterioration represents about the protection of the idiosyncratic cultural diversity of indigenous peoples. The preservation of their natural environments is unquestionable for the safeguarding of their traditions, customs and identity.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research process fits the characteristics of a qualitative study since “they are investigations centered on the subjects, which adopt the perspective of the interior taking the phenomenon to be studied integrally” (De la Cuesta, 1997, p. 13). Additionally, other characteristics of qualitative research are highlighted (Vanegas et al., 2022), for example, it takes place in the natural context where the participant person is, visualizes the social phenomenon integrally, is emergent and is not rigid (Burgos, 2012). The hermeneutic phenomenological method is resorted to Vanegas & Gamboa (2022b), given that it leads to “the description and interpretation of the essence of the lived experiences, recognizes the meaning and importance in pedagogy, psychology and sociology according to the experience collected” (Fuster 2019, p. 202). Then, five people with the following profiles are considered key informants:

- Informant 1: He is a 32-year-old man from the Motilón Barí community who is a law professional. He left his community more than twelve years ago, but today he works in various activities associated with the defense of his community but from the capital of the Department of Norte de Santander.
- Informant 2: She is a 24-year-old woman from the Wayú population who entered higher education to study Business Administration, but after eight semesters she dropped out of the training process and returned to her community due to family problems.
- Informant 3: He is a 20-year-old man from the Eperera Siapidara community who is studying in the city of Cali, but is recognized in this city as a cultural agent who has fought for the preservation of the customs and indigenous cultures of the south of the country.

- Informant 4: He is a 53-year-old man of Venezuelan nationality. He is a teacher and researcher with a PhD in Education and a Post-doctorate in Social Sciences. He has worked on various research projects with the Wayúu community in the State of Maracaibo in his country.
- Informant 5: He is a 68-year-old man of Chilean nationality. He is a research professor with Master and Doctorate studies in Education. He has dedicated his whole life to the study of Latin American indigenous communities, he is the director of the line of research in Interculturality and Critical Decoloniality in a network of researchers at the Ibero-American level.

Contact with the informants was made by various means (in person, by telephone, via Google Meet, WhatsApp or email) and the main objective of the conversation was to determine their opinion and perception of the effects that the irrational exploitation of natural resources within their ancestral territories has had on the indigenous communities.

2.1 Perceptions of informants

The following are the opinions given by each of the key informants who agreed to be part of this research, concerning the objective pursued.

Informant 1. He states that he and his family are members of the Motilón Barí community located in the Catatumbo Barí park, his memories as a child are concentrated in the experiences of the culture, such as living together in groups of people within a structure of three huts organized in a circle, where he had both brothers in law and blood brothers; the performance of various activities such as hunting animals typical of the region, agriculture focused on the cultivation of sweet cassava (mainly) accompanied by sugar cane, corn, cocoa and bananas, fishing on the Catatumbo River and raising animals such as chickens, pigs or cattle. He states that not all of them are involved in all activities, affirming that “many of the skills they possess have been received from their parents and they, in turn, have received them from their parents”, that is, that the occupational roles within the community are a generational legacy. He assures that, within their culture, “our ancestral territories have been blessed with biodiverse natural wealth (in fauna and flora) and the quality of their lands, which they commit to use correctly without destroying it”. But with the arrival of settlers, high concentrations of mining resources such as coal and oil have been discovered, which added to their geographic location and left them exposed to many social problems. He comments that his community has been strongly affected by the civil war in the Catatumbo Region where all the armed actors have victimized them without differentiating whether they are self-defense groups, guerrillas or the national army itself. Among his childhood memories, he assures that “I had to witness the death of several members of his community and some of his family members, all innocent, who were killed just for trying to defend their lands and customs”. That situation was his main motivation to first leave the region (at the initiative of his parents) so that he could study and enter the university to study the law program. He affirms that “the members of his community have been losing not only territory due to the actions of the illegal armed groups that are settled in the region, but they have also been forced to change their customs and lifestyle, they have had to become laborers in the planting of illicit crops because glyphosate fumigations have impoverished the land and it no longer has the same quality and productive capacity”. The members of the community have had to adapt to the current economic and social conditions that surround them, at the cost of losing their ancestral knowledge. With a vehement voice he affirms, “for all of the above, I consider that in a few years my community will no longer exist, unless they are the object of diverse actions of the State that guarantees them to live under their customs and in a safe way”, he assures, “I wish to support them

by managing resources with diverse international organizations and to be able to defend them legally, from so many threats that affect them”.

Informant 2. I must begin my narration by affirming that “I feel very proud to be part of the Wayúu”, she continues her story by saying that “our people are an example of temperance and we have never let ourselves be bent by anyone or anything”. She mentions that within the tradition of her culture, next to a bonfire almost at dawn, countless stories are told of how the Spanish, the missionaries of the Catholic Church or even the same environmental conditions of the Guajira, have tried to make them change their traditions or beliefs, but they have not allowed it. He briefly mentions that he comes from a *ranchería* near Riohacha where his territory is very arid, with high temperatures and scarce water. “We are a matrilineal society” reason why “being a Wayúu woman is a blessing and a great responsibility” since we must prepare ourselves in skills such as weaving or prepare for life as a good wife or mother, “this happens during the confinement where we only receive advice from wise women”. She mentions that climate change has affected them directly since they used to grow beans, corn, corn, millet, yucca or ahuyama, but with the increase in temperature this activity is becoming more difficult every day. He affirms that they used to drink chicha derived from corn, but due to the inability to cultivate it, they have had to adapt to the consumption of instant sachet drinks, which due to the non-cooking of the water end up causing gastritis. She says that during her studies at the University of Magdalena her objective was always to help her community to have more and better life opportunities. She says that “while studying she realized that people were interested in learning more about their culture and customs, so she proposed to the leader of her community to open the doors of her *ranchería* to tourists. In this way they have generated economic income that helps them to have more dignified living conditions”. He ended his speech by assuring that “despite geographical or social adversities, our stubbornness to maintain our culture has offered us an opportunity to solve part of the problems without losing our cultural identity and we hope to continue living in peace, but with respect for our culture”.

Informant 3. The informant begins his narration with a nostalgic tone clarifying that a good part of the members of his indigenous reservation Eperara Siapidara, located in the Department of Cauca, were victims of forced displacement caused by territorial confrontations between self-defense groups and guerrilla groups operating in the area for the control of coca crops and laboratories located there. He mentions that the members of his community defended their culture and territory as far as they could, “no armed group was allowed to enter our area, control and justice was exercised by the indigenous guard”, but as time went by their defense tools became obsolete compared to those of the illegal groups. He affirms that “some members of his community were killed, others had to join the illegal activities of these groups and others were displaced”. Once in Cali, “we had to settle in marginal neighborhoods where we were taken to schools to learn a language and knowledge that are not part of our cultural identity”. She continues, “in the house where we live, our parents and elders have tried to preserve our customs such as: music, dances, teaching methods, healing of illnesses and handicrafts associated with basket weaving”. From this desire to preserve cultural characteristics, he says, “I began to expose our culture in the activities promoted at school and now at the university, which has led me to recognition by the cultural associations of the Valley. Today, I lead an extensive list of activities aimed at rescuing the values of our community and we have formed a working group with which we have become ambassadors of our community”. He ends by expressing his desire, “the signing of the peace treaty brings with it the restitution of lands that were taken from us, since my community hopes to return to them and continue with their lives respecting and enjoying nature”.

Informant 4. This professional begins his presentation by mentioning that the Motilón Barí are geographically located in the Serranía del Perijá, which occupies territories in both Colombia and Venezuela. He emphasizes that the irrational exploitation of natural resources goes against the interests of these ancestral communities. He affirms that this is a long-standing problem, arising from the dichotomy between nature and culture, which has been a permanent struggle. Citing the book entitled *Territorialidades y Lucha por el Territorio en América Latina*, which addresses the problem of the geography of social movements not only in Latin America, he states that “leaving out nature has enormous consequences”, that is, that the issue of cultural diversity cannot be understood without taking into account the characteristics that affect the environment from a selfish capital-labor point of view. The informant assures that there must be a change in thinking in which “relations with nature and not against nature” are generated. He goes on to affirm that, “research of a diverse nature is required to demonstrate the effects that the processes of irrational exploitation of natural resources have had on indigenous communities”. He assures that these have been struggles that indigenous leaders have been carrying out and suggests as a line of work, to identify which elements of this ancestral cultural diversity have been lost to generate recovery mechanisms (if possible), while also identifying those at risk of extinction to take preventive measures. He concludes, stating that an important element in this analysis of affectation is the type of community, because, he comments that the Wayúu is an example of a community that has fought against all the agents that have tried to affect them, but they have remained firm in preserving their customs, not in their totality, but with minimal affectations, in contrast with other indigenous communities, of which they only conserve the name.

Informant 5. This informant, after analyzing his position, suggests a short reflection entitled *The coloniality of power, knowledge and being imposed in America and the Caribbean*. It is presented below as he has proposed it.

More than 500 years ago, Spanish and Portuguese colonialism needed to legitimize the imposition of their systems on our ancestral indigenous peoples of America and the Caribbean, this process involved the ideological construction of the inferiority of their victims, and served to justify the injustices and loss of their Cultural Identities.

Since colonial and post-colonial domination, ethnocentrism has been the vehicle for the westernization of the world and the current globalization in Latin America and the Caribbean, a model that is opposed to valuing and preserving cultural diversity and biodiversity, whose purpose as a societal model is to standardize and depredate subaltern cultures.

Globalization is a historical process of economic domination and planetary expansion of capitalism, a process led mainly by large transnational corporations whose objective is the depredation of natural resources in our continent that threaten the ancestral communities in their different territories.

In the past, modernization and today's globalization impose a “single cultural model”, behind which all peoples must align themselves, without valuing the richness of cultural diversity. In this perspective, the ancestral indigenous peoples are made invisible in the face of the expansion of global capitalism.

The problem begins when one culture imposes itself on another, as is the case in Latin America and the Caribbean. The history of European ethnocentrism, which emerged from the conquest of America and the Caribbean, created cultural implicitness to legitimize the colonial and post-colonial enterprise. These implicit cultural implicitnesses present today continue to exert their influence on the universality of the knowledge of Western culture.

Latin America is a continent of great richness in its different cosmovisions of our ancestral peoples with a multiplicity of ecological and cultural diversity that far exceeds any reductionist theoretical pretension that seeks to impose its universal truths.

The imposition of the “universality of knowledge” of Western civilization and culture is present today through its satellites such as churches, schools, mass media, universities and institutions that manifest the dominant culture and are inscribed in the logic of exclusion of cultural diversity. This exclusion is conceived as an instrument of homogenization and cultural standardization, which seeks to impose a single model of society, expressed in the different economic and cultural faces of capitalism.

From a Decolonial perspective, cultural diversity is the expression that seeks to achieve the valorization and protection of cultures in the face of the danger of uniformity and “ethnocentric” cultural standardization imposed since the supposed Discovery of America, which resulted in the loss of ancestral identities such as customs, feelings and thoughts that were replaced by a new way of living, producing, consuming, dressing, eating, which has led to the dispossession and abandonment of their territories.

The westernization of Latin America and the Caribbean has resulted in the cultural destruction of its geographic spaces, as a result of the cultural domination of colonialism and post-colonialism. This process of imposition of ethnocentrism has corrupted and ruined so many cultures by invading their territory.

To conclude, I consider that critical intercultural education is the way to value cultural diversity in our continent, whose foundations are opposed to any ethnocentric and excluding education. Critical intercultural education in this perspective works for the dignification of what we are and of the common values of respect and tolerance, with which we recognize and identify ourselves, that is why it is necessary to strengthen respect for ourselves and others, that is, respect for otherness as a source capable of nurturing the dignity that we all need.

3. DISCUSSION

For Rappaport (1985), it is the science that studies the relationships between living organisms and their physical and biotic environments. On the other hand, to speak of the environment highlights the necessary interrelation between nature and culture (Milesi, 2013), a position contrary to that established by Lévi-Strauss (1969) who affirms that nature is everything we have by biological inheritance, while culture, on the contrary, is everything that comes to us from external tradition. Therefore, the modification of culture in response to environmental change is not a simple process in which cultural traits are specified by the character of the environment. In this sense, the perspective of cultural ecology is interesting because it deals with man, and from this ecological perspective it understands and explains the human culture, and the differences and similarities between the cultures of peoples of the present and the past (Rappaport, 1985).

In this sense, the current environmental crisis has caused the transformation of biodiversity and natural ecosystems, facing “the sixth mass extinction” of life on the face of the Earth (Kolbert, 2014), due to human activity, especially by Western civilization. It should not be ignored that Western civilization and culture have contributed to the development of science, technology and human rights, but on the other hand, there is the overexploitation of ecosystems, in the face of aboriginal civilizations and traditional peoples with a deep connection with nature (Santa, 2020), where the use and occupation of land and resources have not been historically recognized by the states (Bryan, 2011).

This has generated an opposition between humans and nature in such a way that discursively separates the environment from humans, and this makes it difficult for people to realize the effects of human actions on the environment. But thanks to indigenous participation in consultations on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, many UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2016), the resulting framework makes explicit reference to their development concerns and is grounded in the principles of universality, human rights, equality and environmental sustainability, core priorities for indigenous peoples. As stated by the U'wa People (2000) "We are born as children of the earth... we Indians cannot change that, nor can the white man (riowa)!", which establishes them as an indivisible part of nature, because their ancestral practices allow for the care of the territory (Espinel, 2022). In other words, indigenous movements are in a particular historical situation to position themselves as powerful social actors within eco-politics by being recognized for their rights and differences, which requires a change of conception about nature, both within modernity and the indigenous themselves (Archila & Pardo, 2001).

For Morin, quoted in Gadotti (2002), ecological awareness poses a profound problem, since life on planet Earth, modern society and the destiny of mankind must be confronted. This calls into question the very course of Western civilization. Hence the importance of promoting social ecology in people due to the destructive impact of man on nature caused by the development of industrialism (Lago & Pádua, 1994), so that various legal mechanisms at the international level, although delayed, are representing an opportunity to document and present cases that evidence affectations in environmental matters (Calderón, 2017).

Following the previous line, the Inter-American Court, in its jurisprudence, determines that the right to the environment is inherent to indigenous peoples, indissoluble from their culture, which recognizes the complexity of life and the interconnection of everything that sustains it (Calderón 2014; Calderón, 2017). In the case of Colombia, biocultural rights result from the recognition of the connection that exists between nature, its resources and the culture of the ethnic and indigenous communities that inhabit them, which are interdependent among themselves and cannot be understood in isolation (Sentence T-622/16, 2016). Therefore, in the scope of the rights that indigenous peoples have, there is a symbiotic relationship between environment and community, which assumes that the existence of one cannot be conceived without the other (Calderón, 2014) but is complementary, in which guidelines are established to protect and preserve the environment, without departing from the possibility of exploiting certain resources to satisfy some human needs.

The above shows evidence of how the ancestral knowledge of native peoples can help manage ecosystems and wildlife. They have unique abilities to perceive how ecosystems are being altered, in dialogue with their traditions, transmitted from generation to generation (McElwee et al., 2020). Therefore, understanding the right to a healthy environment as a "human" right is fundamental, without losing sight of the fact that the right to the environment is not exclusively "human", and therefore may have its scope and autonomy, which should result in a harmonious interrelation between the two (Calderón, 2014) and which would allow for sustainable development of society.

Finally, the above is reflected in considering environmental discourses that allow the emergence of a new "eco-governmentality" that situates indigenous ancestral knowledge and rethinks current knowledge/power relations to propose alternative ecological developments or alternative ecologies led by indigenous movements (Archila & Pardo, 2001). Therefore, environmental protection should be imperative for all who inhabit this planet, and not only for indigenous peoples. It is already clear that science demonstrates the seriousness of the consequences derived from environmental violations and their growing impact on individuals, organisms and the planet itself (Calderón, 2017; Jaimes et al.,

2019). Therefore, a new cultural commitment is needed to manage the right to the environment as a human right to be used and managed sustainably, as the native peoples have historically done.

4. REFLECTION AND CONCLUSIONS

As has been mentioned throughout this document, humans are obliged to take care of the natural resources to which they have access, to offer future generations the opportunity to enjoy the rich biodiversity of the country. This is a call for the optimal use of natural resources, but with ecological and social responsibility. Likewise, society must shelter and protect the diverse indigenous communities that have managed to survive this avalanche of adversities, including the abandonment of the State, the actions of illegal armed groups, and the pressures and pretensions of large multinational companies that have focused their attention on the exploitation of mining resources at the expense of the contamination of water resources and the indiscriminate logging of hectares of virgin forests that have been evolving for years, among many others. It is necessary to defend the cultural wealth and knowledge of each indigenous community that inhabited the national territory long before the colonizing expeditions of the Europeans.

It is recommended from the academy to advance research and social intervention projects that allow documenting the ancestral knowledge of the native peoples that has been transmitted from generation to generation, a situation that makes it very vulnerable to be lost in time when the new generation is tempted by the supposed advantages offered by the western and capitalist world and decides to abandon their territories and cultures, to migrate to the big cities where they come to swell the ranks of misery. For all these reasons, it cannot be affirmed that the bet has been worthwhile since those who have left their culture have not been able to guarantee dignified conditions in this new context of colonization offered by the supposed modernity.

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