

Two ontologies of territory and a legal claim in the Ecuadorian Upper Amazon

Julián García Labrador¹

José Ochoa

Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Spain

Independent Researcher

Abstract

The Secoya nation (*Siekopai*) of the Ecuadorian Upper Amazon, in its request for recognition of indigenous territories in a protected area, has appeared before the Republic of Ecuador's conservation regime with arguments based on an administrative and physical concept of territory. The Secoya worldview and culture, however, supposes an ontology of territory in which the geographic space, updated rituals, and their relationship with nature converge. In this article we analyze this important ontological difference in detail. We compare the territorial subjectivation processes produced by both ontologies: a Cartesian conceptual framework in the case of the State's political geography, and the Secoya's phenomenological ecology. Since the Secoya include a management plan for the protected area in their petition, it would seem they have internalized the State's rule regarding the principle of sustainability within conservation. We argue that sustainability is incompatible with the presence of a phenomenological ecology that makes them political subjects, and therefore it is a strategic inclusion that does not respond to their socio-ecological reality.

Keywords: Ecuadorian Amazon, legal request, territory, Amerindian graphism, subjectivation, ontology

Resumé

La nation Secoya (*Siekopai*), située dans la haute Amazonie équatorienne, a formulé une demande légale à la République de l'Équateur, dans un processus de reconnaissance des territoires indiens, dans une aire protégée, fondée sur un concept administratif et physique du territoire. Or, la cosmovision et la culture Secoya se fondent au contraire sur une ontologie du territoire, dans laquelle convergent l'espace géographique, son actualisation rituelle ainsi que sa relation avec la Nature. Dans ce travail, nous analysons en détails cette divergence ontologique fondamentale, en établissant une comparaison entre les processus de subjectivations territoriales qu'elle produit. Nous mettons au jour le cadre conceptuel cartésien dans lequel se meut la géographie politique l'État là où les Secoya habitent une écologie phénoménologique. Puisque les Secoya incluent dans leur demande un plan de gestion pour l'aire protégée, nous nous demandons s'ils ont internalisé la règle de l'État concernant le principe de durabilité du régime de conservation. Nous répondons en indiquant que la durabilité est incompatible avec la présence d'une écologie phénoménologique qui les constitue en tant que sujets politiques et qu'il s'agit donc plutôt d'une inclusion stratégique qui ne répond pas à leur réalité socio-écologique.

Mots-clés: Amazonie équatorienne, demande légale, territoire, graphisme amérindien, subjectivation, ontologie

Resumen

La nacionalidad Secoya (*Siekopai*) de la Alta Amazonía ecuatoriana, en su solicitud de reconocimiento de territorios indígenas en un área protegida, ha presentado ante el régimen de conservación de la República del Ecuador argumentos basados en un concepto administrativo y físico del territorio. Mientras tanto, la cosmovisión y cultura Secoya supone una ontología del territorio en el que convergen el espacio geográfico,

¹ Dr. Julián García Labrador, Visiting Professor, Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Madrid, Spain. Email: [labradorjg "at" gmail.com](mailto:labradorjg@gmail.com). Dr. Jose Ochoa, Independent Researcher. Email: [joseochoa "at" gmail.com](mailto:joseochoa@gmail.com). The authors would like to acknowledge the Siekopaai indigenous communities in the Aguarico River drainage for their openness to our interest in their worldview, and the article referees.

los rituales actualizados y su relación con la naturaleza. En este artículo analizamos en detalle esta importante diferencia ontológica. Comparamos los procesos de subjetivación territorial producidos por ambas ontologías: un marco conceptual cartesiano en el caso de la geografía política del Estado y una ecología fenomenológica en el caso de Secoya. Dado que Secoya incluye un plan de manejo para el área protegida en su queja, nos preguntamos si han internalizado la regla del Estado con respecto al principio de sostenibilidad del régimen de conservación. Respondemos indicando que la sostenibilidad es incompatible con la presencia de una ecología fenomenológica, que los convierte en sujetos políticos y que, por lo tanto, es una inclusión estratégica que no responde a su realidad socio-ecológica

Palabras clave: Amazonía ecuatoriana, petición legal, territorio, grafismo amerindio, subjetivación, ontología

1. Introduction

Simón adjusts his *Cushma*², while the *Secoya* delegation negotiates at the Ministry of the Environment. Roque wears face paint, clamoring for *Siekopai* territory behind a banner. Along with them, one hundred *Secoyas* wait for the Minister of the Environment to come out. The profusion of colors, feathers, lines and geometric motifs is striking (Figure 1). The *Secoya* or *Siekopai* have traveled all night to get to Quito from the Ecuadorian *Oriente* – this is how the Amazon region is known. Their presence in Quito is a sign that something is wrong. In the words of Ingold, "Something [. . .] must be wrong somewhere, if the only way to understand our own creative involvement in the world is by first taking ourselves out of it " (Ingold 1995: 58).



Figure 1: Siekopai Nation before the Ministry of the Environment of Ecuador, on November 29, 2017. (Photo: Julián García)

² Knee high robes, used habitually by the men. There are *cushmas* of a single color and there are also *cushmas* with geometric motifs, which symbolize the ecstatic experiences of shamanic practices.

On November 29, 2017, the Secoya of Ecuador submitted a petition to the Ecuadorian Ministry of the Environment for 44,882 hectares (ha.) of *Pë'këya* ancestral territory, in favor of the Siekopai (Secoya) nation of Ecuador. This ancestral territory is located in the Cuyabeno Wildlife Production Reserve belonging to the National System of Protected Areas of Ecuador (SNAP, its initials in Spanish). This reserve was created in 1979 and covers a total of 603,380 ha. The Secoya demand territory in the reserve located at the "Lagarto River, from the mouth of the Imuya River in the southern area to a tributary of the Lagarto River called Quebrada Sur (Aguas Blancas River) northern area" (Nacionalidad Siekopai 2017: 1) on the border with Peru. Two other protected areas belonging to Peru, the Güeppí Sekime National Park and the Airo Pai Communal Reserve, are also part of these ancestral lands (Figure 2).

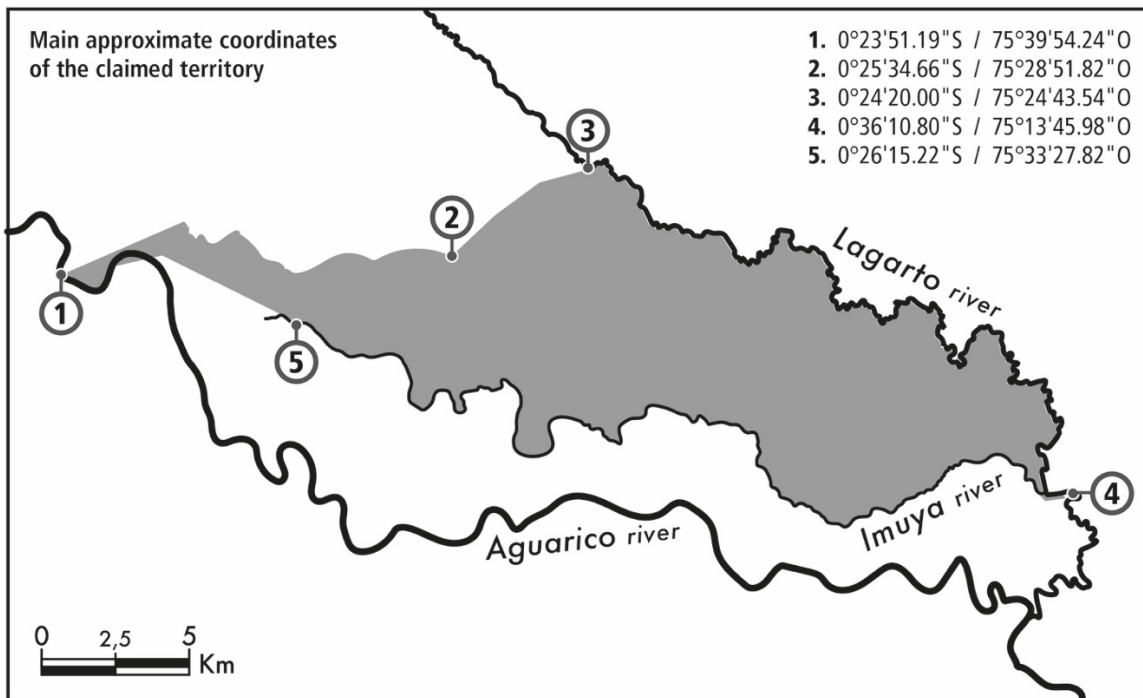


Figure 2: Ancestral lands demanded by the Secoya (Siekopai). The coordinates are approximate. (Figure prepared by: Nacionalidad Siekopai 2017: 34)

The Secoya or *Siekopai* nation live in the highlands of the Amazon basin. Their language, *Paikoká*, belongs to the Tukano family. Aikhenvald (2012: 45-47) argues that "these languages seem to have emerged from the Andean jungle of the Vaupés River in very remote times. From here, they descended towards the *Oriente*, inhabiting areas between the Querarí and Apaporis (Eastern Tukano) and towards the south, between Caquetá and Aguarico." Early explorers and missionaries, called the Tukano "shaggies"³ on account of their long hair. Currently, the Secoya inhabit the riverbanks in areas on the border between Ecuador and Peru, and along the Eno, Aguarico, Napo and Cuyabeno rivers in Ecuador, as well as the Yaricana, Yubineto, Angusilla and Santa María rivers in Peru. According to public deeds, they have title to 42,614.31 ha. in Ecuador. There are 650 inhabitants distributed among five communities: San Pablo de *Catetsiaya*⁴, *Siecoya Remolino* and

³ *Encabellado* in the original Spanish.

⁴ The community of San Pablo de *Catetsiaya* was colonized at the request of missionary Johnson of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). He convinced Cecilio Piaguaje to establish the community of San Pablo, near Shushufindi. Families

Bellavista in the San Roque parish (Shushufindi county), and *Eno y Waiya*, in the Tarapoa parish (Cuyabeno county).

The Secoya were displaced from the territory they demand by rubber tappers and landowners in the first thirty years of the 20th century. Later, when a border conflict with Peru broke out in 1941-1942, the remaining families left the territory, which was occupied by the Ecuadorian and Peruvian military. The conflict lasted almost seven months and ended with the establishment of the current borders between Peru and Ecuador by the Protocol of Rio de Janeiro. Ecuador lost some 200,000 km² and the Secoya families were divided by the new militarized border. Ecuador established a permanent military detachment in Zancudo Cocha, and every time the Secoya tried to return to their territory they were intercepted by the military. In the early 1970s some Secoya were detained by the military and accused of being Peruvian spies. The intention to return to this territory was not only motivated by the ancestral occupation recorded in the oral accounts, but by the ritual connection with place. According to the shaman Cesareo Piaguaje, that place is important because it is where the relationship with the water spirits and with the ancestors of the Secoya takes place. Every time the Secoya have managed to return to the place they have performed the rituals of the *yajé*.⁵

With the establishment of the Fauna Production Reserve of Cuyabeno in 1979, the Ecuadorian State not only reserved the protected area under state administration through the Ministry of the Environment (MAE), but proceeded with the legal recognition of territory for other indigenous groups not native to the area, leaving the recognition of the Secoya unresolved. In 1972, several A'i Cofán families from Dureno had moved to Zábalo, in Cuyabeno, fleeing the oil exploitation in the vicinity of Shushufindi (where Dureno was). In 1995 the Ministry of Social Welfare recognized it as a center and in 1999 50,000 ha. between the Güepi River and the Tupayacu (Quebrada) were assigned. On the other hand, the Kichwa community of Zancudo Cocha was recognized on July 26th 1979 with an initial area of 254,760 ha., when the Reserve was created by Interministerial Agreement No. 322. In 1991 an extension brought this to 655,781 hectares. The Kichwa community of Playas de Cuyabeno was established in 1979. In 1990 it was registered as an association, and in 1993 it obtained legal status of the Ministry of Social Welfare. In 1996 it signed an agreement with the Ecuadorian Institute of Forestry and of Natural Areas and Wildlife (INEFAN), by which it commits itself to the use and management of 77,230 ha. In 1979 the Siona, from the same linguistic group as the Secoya, signed an agreement with the Ecuadorian Institute of Agrarian Reform and Colonization (IERAC) for 145 ha. of legal ownership in Puerto Bolívar. They now have a total of 47,888 ha., of which 7,888 ha. is legalized for three communities (Puerto Bolívar, *Bi'aña* and *Orahuëaya*), and another 40,000 ha. is in a use agreement with the former INEFAN.

The Secoya were left out of this legalization process because families were divided by the war with Peru in 1941, and the new community of San Pablo de Katetsiaya was far from the area in question. The Secoya have made a series of petitions for land, to no avail. In 1993 Elías Piyahuaje presented a demand for recognition of the *Pë'këya* territory at the meeting between the CONFENIAE (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon), the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The petition was dismissed on the grounds that the area falls within the "national security zone" on the border with Peru. The Cenepa conflict in 1995 once again stressed the border relations between Peru and Ecuador, increasing the military pressure on the territory in question. In 1997 the Secoya again filed a formal petition with MAE attaching a map with the first delimitation. There was no response from MAE. The 2017 petition discussed in this article refers to the same territory and is presented, according to Justino Piaguaje, president of the Secoya Nationality, in the same terms as previous ones.

The petition that we analyze in this article proceeds on two fronts: the legal claim to territory, and the bio-spiritual practices that have been maintained with the territory. The Secoya make socio-historical, economic, spiritual and cultural arguments to claim their lands. In their proposal, they provide a historical overview and an anthropological explanation of their identity and their relationship with the territory. It is

arrived between 1973 and 1975 (as a reference, note that the capital of the province of Sucumbíos, Nueva Loja or Lago Agrio, was founded in 1971).

⁵ A psychoactive drink made from *Banisteriopsis caapi* and other ingredients.

remarkable that they mix legal and anthropological elements, and references to a historically documented past, together with an exhaustive management plan for the petitioned territory, in line with their location in a protected area. The Secoya were forced to submit their territorial petition in the terms provided by Ecuadorian law, but, as will be seen below, they also portray aspects of their relationship with the territory that concern identity, and performance. The political-legal notion of territory is one thing, and the territorial practice of the Secoya tradition is another. Therefore, we distinguish two ontologies of the territory in the same legal petition. We are aware that speaking about territorial ontology is problematic. According to Soja, "neither my earlier work nor Sack's provides a satisfactory social ontology of territoriality" (1989: 150).⁶

Our position implies an assumption of a "formal ontology" under the political-legal notion (Husserl 1970a, III: §11) which deals with universal concepts that classify each way of being in social and natural fields. Therefore, territory would be a universal concept that the Secoya expect to apply in the material world. On the other hand, according to Arturo Escobar, we understand that there is a relational ontology, "in which nothing (neither human nor non-human) pre-exists its underlying relationships" (2015: 93) and according to which "territory is defined as collective space, composed of all the necessary and essential places where men and women, young and old, create and recreate their lives. It is a place of life, which secures ethnic, historical and cultural survival" (2015: 96). These are two ontologies that operate in different dimensions, but that intersect in the Secoya's petition.

Formal and relational ontologies are incommensurable (Graeber 2015; Killick 2014; Povinelli 2001); they cannot be compared by one single approach. This not only implies there will be a misunderstanding between state agents and indigenous peoples (Di Giminiani 2013), but also, different subjectivation processes (Humphrey 2008; Strathern 1996; Wagner 2001). We assume ontological pluralism as a starting point, which requires that we define our approach. Our approach is not typological, since that implies classification systems that prevent us from looking at phenomenology. As Descola (2013: 112) explains, "that distinction is certainly an analytical rather than a phenomenal one, as identification immediately assumes a correlation to the object that is being provided with an identity." We would rather adopt methodological pluralism (Holbraad 2012, 2013; Latour 2005) that enables us to think about subjectivation processes. In order to do this, we open ontological pluralism to a phenomenological approach, which will allow us to understand the Siekopai's territory as a "saturated phenomenon" (Marion 2002): a phenomenon that outstrips our concepts, leading to new ways of understanding the composition of the subject. That is, phenomenological analysis allows us to understand the primacy of the phenomenon over the subject, in this case, the primacy of the territory over the subject. The Secoya understand themselves from their relationships with the environment and this is what they try to explain in the legal petition. This is key to understanding the fundamental difference with the ontology of Ecuador's conservation regime, which assumes a previous subject able to objectify nature through control mechanisms.

States have implemented conservation areas in which "officials and global interests seeking to preserve the 'environment' have disabled local systems of livelihood, production, and socio-political organization" (Robbins 2012: 178). This conservation model has been exercised under the control of institutional systems with technical-administrative solutions, exerting a hegemonic governmentality (Bryant 2002) over territories and populations. For this reason, Robbins (2012) refers to this process of "conservation and control" as a narrative, where control over the environment has been taken away from local groups through certain functional devices such as sustainability, nature or governance. We would like to emphasize that it is precisely the empty condition of these conceptual devices that is at the root of the de-politicization of the socio-ecological debate and the friction with local communities. Sustainability, an empty signifier *par excellence*, has become a fantasy that "reinforces the formation of a post-political consensual order and poses real challenges with respect to the crucial socio-ecological problems we face" (Swyngedouw 2011: 54). Given that there is no alternative to this consensual order in the form of an expert or technocratic bureaucracy (Blühdorn 2006; Crouch 2004; Jörke 2005), and that this governance model is assumed to be neutral and true, the ecological ontologies of local

⁶ In the 1960s, Soja attempted to take the territorial problem towards a socio-political interpretation, in a context dominated by the bioethological current.

groups often find no place in governance, and are de-politicized.

In the Secoya's territorial petition we find a resistance to this consensual order, since they reflect their relationships with the environment through their traditional ways of life, interpreted in this article as "phenomenological ecology." In a phenomenological ecology, the beings of an ecosystem are located by their appearance rather than by their being. In this way the affirmation of the being of a subject will always be subsequent to its appearance and will be realized thanks to the relations with the environment in which it appears. However, inclusion of a "management plan" (Siekopai Nationality 2017: 36) in consonance with "sustainable management" (p. 48) under the conservation regime of the Cuyabeno Wildlife Production Reserve makes us wonder whether the Secoya have succumbed to self-discipline (Dean 1999; Swyngedouw 2009) or have "internalized the State's rule" (Robbins 2012: 179).

If for Swyngedouw sustainability is a fantasy, for Žižek (2002) nature does not exist. It, too, is an empty signifier, associated with a metonymic chain of historical and cultural referents and therefore "de-politicized" (Swyngedouw 2011: 53). In the case of protected areas, "nature" is associated with the Garden of Eden: a space without people; empty, neutral, free from human actions. Aesthetic ideals are prioritized, as is the maintenance of original conditions, as if social relations in the environment had never taken place. When parks follow these aesthetic ideals, they attempt to make local communities give up their socio-ecological practices and assume the postulates of a conservation regime. However, in the Secoya's case, they are forced to renounce not only their socio-ecological practices, but also their phenomenological ecology and the vision of the cosmos in which nature is by no means an empty signifier.

Our argument is that the Secoya's inclusion of a management plan is an unrealistic dimension of their strategy for political recognition of their territory. They could not accept the aesthetic territorial ontology underlying the State's conservation regime, because that would directly threaten subjectivation processes that depend on phenomenological relationships with the lands in which they live. In other words, through making their request the Secoya strategically adapted to the governance of the State, while being careful to not abandon their relations with the environment.

In this article we **first** analyze how the interaction between the Secoya's legal petition and the territory plays a role in their subjectivation processes. **Secondly**, we review the legal provisions in Ecuadorian law regarding ancestral territories and their role in the State's territorialization of protected areas, since the Secoya's petition for ancestral territory had to conform to these requirements. **Third**, we compare the State of Ecuador's territorialization dynamics to the Secoya's territorial subjectivation performed over generations. This comparison will allow us to reveal the different ontologies of the territory and their incommensurability, showing that the Secoya are impelled to adjust legally to a territorial ontology that is foreign to their culture. This adjustment does not mean that the Secoya assume a de-politicized feature of nature. Rather, they strategically include a management plan in their petition to preserve their ecological relationships with the environment by which they constitute themselves as subjects acting politically in territory, as other indigenous groups in the region have done (Chaves-Agudelo, Batterbury and Beilin 2015). The information in this research comes from both the documentary review and from our fieldwork in the Secoya communities of San Pablo de Katyaiaaya and Siekoya Remolino between 2015 and 2018.

2. The *Siekopai* and the territory

The Secoya speak *Paikoká*, an agglutinative language belonging, as we indicated in the introduction, to the Western Tukano family, in which the word "territory" does not exist. As indicated by Irma Criollo, bilingual teacher in the community of Puerto Bolívar, in *Paikoká* there is as a compound expression to identify territory: *yěja Kuekuesiko* (demarcated land, measured land). The word *Yěja* means "country, soil, land, world" in Johnson's Secoya vocabulary (Piaguaje 1992) and *Yija* is translated as "earth, land or region" according to Wheeler (1987) in the Siona dictionary (dialect variant of *Paikoká*). *Yěja* is used to indicate things as different in semantic breadth as "terrain" or "world." For this reason, the *Paikoká* adds significant morphemes to limit the semantic value and adjust referentiality. Thus, *yěja coca* means "land issue"; *yěja KueKuese 'e ñaco* is "map"; *yěja ñu'cueye* indicates "earthquake" or "earth tremor."

Yëja is not, however, the only term that expresses the Secoya's relationship to the environment. The lexeme *re'oto* means "region, area, zone, extension" (Wheeler 1987) and is the most similar expression to "space." In *Re'oto*, territory is more than surface. The translation of "atmosphere" or "environment" is also accepted by the Secoya. *Ma'tëmó* is another of the Secoya's expressions to refer to space, which they translate as heaven or higher world. *Ma'tëmó* is the expression used to speak of the supernatural world, which is deeply imbricated with the environment in which they have lived for generations.

When speaking of territory, the Secoya make no distinction between a substantive meaning (*Yëja*) and more subtle terms (*re'oto* and *ma'tëmó*). This linguistic analysis allows us to affirm that the ontology of the Secoya's territory cannot be understood without integrating all the elements. This is reflected in their myths and their perception of the cosmos, which divides space into three large regions: sky (*Ma temë*), earth (*Yëja*) and underworld (*Yeja wë'ewë*). The regions are intertwined by a replication of beings that appear in one or another place. In fact, the upper world is space that operates as an "inverted world" (Toporov 2002: 48). That is to say, the upper world (*ma'tëmó*), extension of the sky, shows a face that is complementary to the sensitive reality of the ordinary world (*Yëja*).

The variety of terms used to refer to the lands, their semantic breadth and their interrelationship indicates that, for the Secoya, territory is more than merely the surface of the land. It is a territory that cannot be separated from its cosmology, which is reproduced in graphic art, narrated in myths and lived through ritual practices.

Rituals and territory

We know of the Secoya's perception of the world thanks to their elders, who point out that territory cannot be understood without six spaces where life takes place:

- *Yëja* – terrestrial surface
- *Okoda'ka* – aquatic world
- *Yejawë'ewë te'te-* underground world
- *De'owe'ña* – atmosphere
- *Ësë ma'a* – path of the sun
- *Matëmo* – sky

In the interviews held with *yajé* drinkers Cesareo Piaguaje, Simón Yaiguaje and Cesar Piaguaje we found that the greater the experience of taking *yajé*, the greater the number of spaces described. For the Secoya, territory is a spiritual and relational domain rather than a linear delimitation, confirming Ingold's thesis that "land is a much more energetic configuration of earth and air, water and minerals, animals and plants as well as people, in contrast to a surface area contained by lines on a map" (Ingold 1986: 147). The Secoya link spiritual places with physical references and paths known and practiced by them. In their legal petition, they recognize four spiritual interaction paths, connecting rivers and communities and ten spiritual places in relation to the petitioned territory (Nacionalidad Siekopai 2017: 23-28). Spiritual places are linked in one way or another with an intake of *yajé*, a brew that produces heightened states of consciousness, by which the Secoya spiritually travel to the above-mentioned places, meeting with their ancestors. The Secoya's testimonies show that the elders who consume *yajé* find their deceased in spaces of consciousness to which they travel in their trances. Simón Yaiguaje said: "On top of everything, I took *yajé*, but a very thick [drink]. And this showed me the entire world. Everything, everything, everything. Even the desert. And I would sing there. And it came as a rainbow. That's how it was. And I found my late uncle, Fernando, there. There he was."

For the Secoya, then, there is an intimate connection between physical spaces and spaces of consciousness. The territory is a shamanic territory – a spiritual relationship that unites the Secoya with their surroundings through ritual performances – rather than a delimited space. In fact, through heightened states of consciousness, they are able to establish a common spiritual topography, which, for them, constitutes the core of their notion of territory. Thus, myths about their origin (geographically referenced at the basin and river Wajoya, currently in Peru – the equidistant center from the ancestral limits presented by the Secoya) are updated

by consuming *yaje*, linking territory and origin (Figure 3). The Secoya's territory, as a network of spiritual paths, constitutes therefore a "mystical geography" (Bonnemaison 1992: 74) where places acquire their own ontological dimension as "geontologies" (Povinelli 2013).

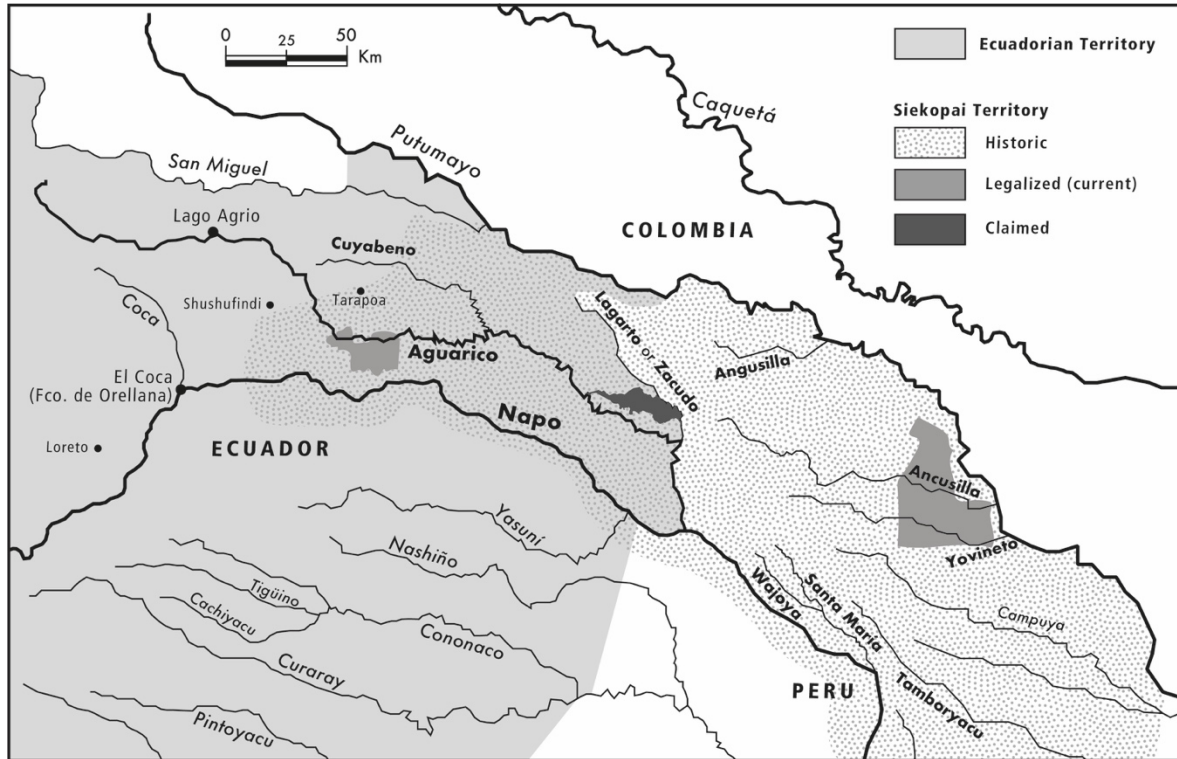


Figure 3: Map of Siekopai historical territory (their own elaboration based on data from the Siekopai Nationality in 2017)

Territorial cosmogram

In his work with the Desana of Vaupés (an Eastern Tukano group from the Colombian Amazon) Reichel-Dolmatoff (1986, 1997) pointed out that heightened states of consciousness generated certain graphic patterns which exemplify the significant benchmarks of these experiences (Figure 4). According to the Desana's testimony, these designs (*Keori*) have territorial implications, because they reference the spaces visualized in heightened states of consciousness (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1997: 89). Each *Keori* of the Desana condenses what Bonnemaison calls "symbol- space" (1981: 256). Turner agrees with this when he states, regarding the Kayapó peoples: "social (re-)production processes are represented and embodied in the layout of Kayapó villages, which, in turn, constitute cosmograms, embodying the structure of cosmic space-time" (Turner 2003: 10). In this way, Amerindian Amazonian graphism points to social and territorial interaction.

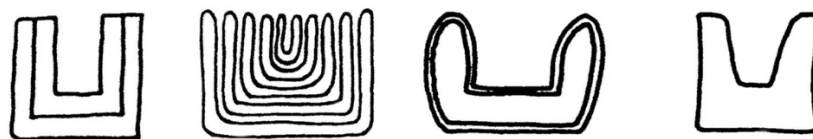


Figure 4: Indication of places of passage, doors in a vision, during a heightened state of consciousness (motif 4 of Reichel-Dolmatoff's compilation 1978: 31).

The Secoya, like the Siona, call their graphic expressions *toyá*. For Langdom (2015) the ritual experience of *yajé* and graphic art are related: "the graphic motifs dominate the initial phases after ingestion of *yajé* and then turn into a background for later images of realistic landscapes and people" (Langdom 2015: 47). *Toyá* is, therefore, a graphic expression for the spaces visited in the ritual. Each *toyá* is composed of a set of schematic strokes, lines that meander, intersect, and intertwine. The sober schematism of *toyá* contrasts with its significant wealth (Figure 5).

For the Secoya, going through ritual spaces is the mental counterpart of physical itinerancy in the field. An outline of a path in the jungle is created, brought into being, or made visible through the *yajé* ritual. Shaman Cesáreo Piaguaje told us that he reproduced the paths he had traveled in the jungle since he was a child through each shot of *yajé*. In this sense, the ancestral paths in the Secoya petition take on a ritual and performative meaning. Following Victor Turner (1992) and Richard Schechner (2003), we understand *performance* as the set of human actions that reinforces or transform situations in existence through the body's presentation. Both the Secoya's itinerant practice and their ritual *yajé* practices allow us not only to understand the actualization of culture, but the possibility that subjects can be transformed through performance as well.



Figure 5: Toyá in ritual crown. (Photo: Julián García)

The interrelationship between territory, ritual experience and graphic expression (*toyá*) allows us to speak of territory as a social being. To the Secoya, territory is not a pristine and uncontaminated landscape (the aesthetic ideals from which national parks were implemented), but a set of eco-spiritual relationships, expressed in *Toyá*. To the Secoya, aesthetics are an expression of eco-social relationships with the environment, contrary to the aesthetics of empty landscapes, a condition to establish natural areas. According to Ingold (2016) social life can be understood as a network or mesh, where each interstice is a knot. Ingold points out that the knot, as a bundle of lines, allows us to think beyond the individual and that correspondence implies thinking about reality not as a union of points (interaction), but as a weave of lines. Their relationship "is not interactive but multilinear instead" (2016: 18).

The Secoya's *toyá* are, effectively, an interlacing of lines (Figure 6). The designs vary but their pattern indicates that these meshes have no beginning or end. According to Ingold, "every end is not a terminal but a moment along the way" (2016: 18). Like other Amazonian peoples, interweaving is an expression of social life. The Uitoto (indigenous group of the Colombian Amazon, geographically close to the Secoya), for example, express this by weaving baskets and songs: "The *jagagi* is alive when it is activated as the community's conduit thread of the community. Every time someone opens their basket, they put it at the service of the community and their own purge" (Vivas 2016: 17). *Jagagi* is the term with which the Uitoto refer simultaneously to the

literary genre, the social action of singing and weaving, and to the result of it: the basket. The Secoya's *toyá* is an expression of their social life and a speculative correlate of the spaces visited in the ritual. They become indicators of the Secoya's territory. Like *toyá*, territory is also a bundle of lines before a physical and demarcated space. We immediately recognize the Secoya's purpose when it submits this complex cultural representation of ancestral roads as evidence in a legal petition to the state. Its territorial ontology is enriched by a relational understanding of space, or, according to Ingold (2016), by a theory of biosocial correspondence.



Figure 6. Secoya elder with facial (*toyá*) lines and in the *cushma*. (Photo: Julián García)

The Secoya's relational ontology indicates a notion of territory conceived in terms of performativity, which forces us to rethink the traditional geography that enriches the Ecuadorian legal framework. According to Massey: "If territoriality is to be appreciated in performative terms, then this repudiation of history as a unidirectional sequence of events has to be matched with a repudiation of geography as a universal plan in which such a history unfurls" (Massey 1999). Questioning the traditional idea of geography becomes clear when the Secoya have to translate their territorial experiences into a normative language. Haesbaert (2014) distinguishes between analytical, practical and normative uses of concepts about territory. Given that the Secoya have not found a normative translation, they refer to cases in which the Inter-American Human Rights System (composed of the Inter-American Commission and Court of Human Rights) has reported a non-formal use of territory:

The occupation of a territory by an indigenous people or community is thus not restricted to the nucleus of houses where its members live; "rather, the territory includes a physical area constituted by a core area of dwellings, natural resources, crops, plantations and their milieu, linked insofar as possible to their cultural limited to specific villages or settlements; territorial use and occupation by indigenous and tribal peoples "extend beyond the settlement of specific villages to include lands that are used for agriculture, hunting, fishing, gathering, transportation, cultural and other indigenous and tribal peoples' rights encompass the territory as a whole. (Inter-American Commission of Human Rights 2009: III.B.40)

The Secoya make use of various governmental documents in their petition for land. For example, they cite the United Nations' International Labor Organization Convention No. 169 on Indigenous Peoples (art.13) to indicate their relationship with space and territory. They also refer to various declarations of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in its judgments on indigenous claims: the case of the *Mayagna* community against Nicaragua; the *Awás Tingni* and the *Yakye* Indigenous Community cases; *Sawhoyamaxa* against Paraguay; or the *Saramaka* People in Surinam. The IACHR's statements not only refer to the right to territory, but also the connection between material and spiritual territory and relocation over time. Citing the *Awás Tingni* case of Nicaragua, the Secoya recognize that "Traditional land tenure is linked to historical continuity, but not necessarily to a single place and to a single social conformation throughout the centuries" (Nacionalidad Siekopai 2017: 140). Indeed, as the map in Figure 3 indicates, the Secoya once had extensive territory in what are now Ecuador, Colombia and Peru, where they developed their itinerant practices and rituals without their settlement being reduced to one place. The *Pë'këya* territory for which they make their legal request is only a tiny part of what they consider their ancestral territory.

3. The legal complaint in the context of the State's territory

The Siekopai nation filed a complaint for the award of *Pë'këya* ancestral territory within the legal framework of sections 77, 78, 79 and 80 of Ecuador's *Organic Act of Rural Lands and Ancestral Territories*. Section 80 indicates that the peoples and nationalities of Ecuador must present "historical, anthropological, socioeconomic, normative and cultural foundations" to support their petitions. The Siekopai nation also invokes the General Regulations for the Application of the *Organic Act of Rural Lands and Ancestral Territories* dated January 11, 2017, which recognizes that "immemorial" occupation of lands is an ancestral possession of communes, communities, peoples and nationalities on a property over a period of fifty years or more. There is a disjuncture between the conditions provided in the law and the realities of Secoya territory, because there is documentation showing Secoya presence on the land for over 300 years, and because of the requirements demanded by the State of Ecuador.

According to Section 3 of the *Organic Act*, land and territory under ancestral possession and property is "the physical space over which a community, commune, people or nationality of ancestral origin, has historically generated an identity from the social, cultural and spiritual construction, developing economic activities and their own forms of production in a current and uninterrupted way." Two aspects of these legal requirements are especially relevant: the productive notion of territory and the implicit idea of sedentarization. **First**, it would seem that fundamental premise of this land law is **productivity**, a one-dimensional reduction of territory that Raffestin (1980) denounced. Ecuadorian law conceives of land tenure in terms of "property." As Andrey (1968) and Malberg (1980) have suggested, the correlation between identity, territory and property is only one way to establish distinctions and understand human behavior. In Soja's words, "conventional Western perspectives on spatial organization are powerfully shaped by the concept of property, in which pieces of territory are viewed as 'commodities' capable of being bought, sold, or exchanged at the market place" (1971: 9). In the same sense, Hann denounces the confusion of "land itself with the specific legal designs of exclusive forms of ownership" (Hann 1998). Sarah Whatmore (2002) gives an account of the contentious and drawn-out Mabo case that established the legal principle of granting land sovereignty to Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in 1993, through the Native Title Act. The parliamentary debate raised by the Australian

process revealed territorial and kinship presuppositions that existed among political factions. Whatmore indicates that

...property can be seen to play a crucial part in governing the shifting coordinates of the 'inside' and 'outside' of political community, territorialized in the nation state and configuring who counts as a political (and proprietorial) subject, and of 'society' and 'nature' territorialized as distinct ontological domains, and configuring what constitutes an object of property right. (Whatmore 2002: 61)

In the Secoya's case there are certain legal provisions that make the State the subject of territoriality; that is, the instance that determines what is territory and how to articulate it with human life. This reduces the cultural, historical and social identity of a social group to its productive activity over a portion of physical space. The State continues to be the main agent of territorialization (since it grants property titles) and economic relationships are a fundamental criterion in this process. This reflects basic assumptions of the modern nation-state, for "one cannot conceive a State, a political institution, without its spatial definition, its territory" (Gottman 1951: 71). Allies echoes the argument that "territory always seems linked to possible definitions of the state; it gives it to a physical basis which seems to render it inevitable and eternal" (1980: 9). In the Australian case, the focus of the debate in the 1990s was precisely the relationship between property and sovereignty, revealing the extent to which the concepts go hand in hand. Under Ecuadorian law, the productive process shapes the organization of territory (Lefebvre 1991: 85), and the law does not contemplate other non-productive processes in relation to space.

In the Mabo case in Australia, one of the challenges was to provide evidence of "a continuous connection to the land" by the litigant, Eddie Mabo, that did not feature property or productivity as the main argument (Keon-Cohen 1993). Ecuadorian law does not seem to take into account the perception of territory from the agents' perspective, and the same can be said of the paradigm of aesthetic landscapes in conservation areas. This is so much the case that the alleged "cultural, social and spiritual construction" in section 3 is directly linked to "uninterrupted" economic production. This is repeated in section 77, according to which ancestral possession of the land consists "of a current and immemorial occupation of a territory, where its identity, culture, forms of production and the lives of several generations of members of communes, communities, peoples or nationalities that support its historical continuity is reproduced."

This brings us to the **second** key assumption of Ecuadorian law, **sedentarization**. Economic production is conceived as a result of the occupation of a physical space in an uninterrupted manner. That was precisely the goal of the Jesuit reductions: the permanent occupation of a physical space for economic production.⁷ The Secoya's ancestral territory was in the northern area of the former province of *Maynas*, administered by the Jesuits, who sought release of the Indians from the *encomenderos* controlled by the Spanish Crown (Gutiérrez 2000: 174). The missions had unified the work of Indians making their incorporation into *encomiendas* unnecessary. The salvation of souls was not granted without the work of bodies and this required their confinement in territories and temporal ordering. But, in the case of the Tukano's and other Amazonian peoples, it was not possible to speak of successful sedentarization or control. Their relationship to territory implied a mobility that clashed with productive systems of the missions. Meliá refers to the Guarani of Paraguay as "dynamic colonists" (1989: 294) with a relationship to the territory best considered in terms of "ecological horizons" (Bohn Martins 2000: 132). Like the Guarani, the Secoya's itinerant practices were not a chaotic and unplanned population dispersion, beset by the need, but rather a model of ecological relationships with the environment.

In its 2017 land petition, the Siekopai nation claimed almost four million hectares of extensive ancestral territory, referenced in the maps made by the missionaries (Nacionalidad Siekopai 2017: 3) (Figure 3). From

⁷ The Jesuit reductions (*reducciones*) gathered native populations into communities to organize and exploit their labor, while imparting Christianity. The aim was also to separate them from the Spanish presence, which generally supported enslavement and forced labor.

this vast territory, the Secoya have only obtained titles in Ecuador and Peru to about 142,000 hectares. How is it possible to speak of continued presence in such an extensive territory? What types of relationships do the Secoya have with the space?

With respect to the *Pë'këya* territory, the Secoya not only refer to their peoples' occupation but also to itinerant practices, particularly ancestral roads: *We'epi*, *Pë'këya - Anusilla*, *Wati So'koro*, *Okopetoya*. These roads connected river basins, enabling communication between Siekopai communities in order to share ritual experiences related to *yajé*. The community experiences around this sacred plant mean that their relationship to space not only takes place in non-productive terms, but in performative and symbolic terms as well. The Siekopai describe this as:

...an oral history through which we know and recognize our territory, the places corresponding to ancient villages, the mythological sites and ancestral roads that communicated our different communities. In our history, we have always recognized geographical axes, sites that, because of their strategic and logistical importance, were key places to trade and to perform family encounters. (Nacionalidad Siekopai 2017: 23)

We observe that in the Secoya's case, one cannot speak of uninterrupted forms of productive use of the land. However, the Secoya's connection to the territory is undeniable and must be formulated in their own terms of occupation. As the Australian case indicated, we must consider a much broader definition of occupation that takes into account territory "from the point of view of the members of the society [of users/claimants]" (ALR 1992: 486). In this sense, we discover that nature has never been an empty signifier to the Secoya. Indeed, the Siekopai Nation's request is based on Ecuadorian law, but also incorporates key elements from the Secoya's own worldview of the territory, such as mythical references, the spiritual dimension of plants and animals and the aforementioned itinerant practice of *yajé* rituals.

4. Ontologies and subjectivation processes

Current Ecuadorian law concerning territory arises from a formal ontology according to which "territory is a rendering of the emerging concept of 'space' as a political category: owned, distributed, mapped, calculated, bordered and controlled" (Elden 2007). Historically, territorial space could be calculated, drawn and regulated thanks to an abstraction to which the traditional physical cosmology of the West was subjected. Descartes redefined geography with analytic geometry in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which enabled the shift from an artistic confection of maps to their scientific development. Thus in France at the end of the eighteenth century territory "could not be assimilated into an administrative grid without being either transformed or reduced to a convenient, if partly fictional, shorthand" (Scott 1998: 24). At the same time, classical physical cosmology also supports a historicism based on "ideas of linearity and irreversibility" (Stewart 2016: 87). This union of historicism with a political use of space caused colonizers to consider indigenous people as living "in a state of nature." As McClintock states, "this secular myth was promulgated in political, legal and, later, scientific discourses which recalibrated spatial differences in the socio-material organization of life as temporal stages in a universal progression of 'mankind' such that the spaces encountered beyond Europe became comprehensible as spaces before Europe" (McClintock 1994, cited in Whatmore 2002: 64). This is at the core of the aesthetic ideals of a landscape in a state of nature, and the Siekopai were subject to such classifications through their inclusion in the Jesuit reduction program.

How does the ontology of the territory itself in the Secoya's worldview compare with the State's ontology in terms of subjectivation? Elden states that "the social, cultural, and affective elements [of territory] have been underplayed in order to emphasize the political in a broad sense" (Elden 2010: 811). This emphasis on politics takes place since the modern state performs the activities once proposed by Descartes for the subject of knowledge. This occurs in a double epistemic movement: physics becomes an instrumental science (in modern times) and Descartes transforms classical Aristotelian ontology into an epistemology of ego. That is to say,

since Descartes's work we cannot say that the world is there, but that the *ego* puts the world before the eyes of the State and of science.

Subject, object and mathematical reason

Mathematics and physics changed nature from an object of contemplation to something to be known and regulated. With Descartes' *Traité du monde* (1633), "physics becomes the main field of encounters and therefore of conflicts between different conceptions of Nature. The place from which the question is asked has moved, metaphysics no longer provides the horizon of intelligibility to theoretically exhausted questions" (Guenancia 1989: 51). As Husserl indicated, Descartes does nothing but push Galileo's position to the extreme, which makes nature become a "mathematical manifold" (Husserl 1970b: 23). This mathematization of reality caused the illusion of a universal matrix that would formally capture reality. Both Descartes in section IV of the *Regulae* (2016) and Leibniz tried to develop what is known as *Mathesis Universalis*: a "theory of quantities and proportions" in Descartes and a "universal calculus" for Leibniz (Mittelstrass 1979: 593). Physics changed into an instrument to "capture nature through formulas," which is why Husserl denounces *Mathesis Universalis* as a tool to "functionalize" nature (Husserl 1970b: 47).

The subject's ability to control physics was necessary in order to promote the mathematization of nature. Descartes kept the traditional ontological assertion inherited from Aristotle that the world is organized by substances, but assigned preeminence to a modern self: "the principles of my new physics opened my eyes to the possibility of gaining new knowledge which would be very useful in life [...] through my new physics we could know the power and action of fire, water, air, the stars, the heavens, and all the other bodies in our environment [...] and we could use this knowledge to make ourselves the lords and masters of nature" (Descartes 2016 6: 61-62). For Descartes the self became a substance that objectified others. James Scott (1998) indicated that modern states set in motion ambitious territorialization programs, imposing standards in order to read nature and control populations. This principle of "legibility" became the guide to dominate and possess what had until then been a "partially blind" spot (Scott 1998: 2), as modern states translated what could not otherwise have been read into a measurement system. This implied consolidating measures that provoked simplification and centralization of a property system (Scott 1998: 33). Indeed with their 2017 land petition, the Secoya submitted a cadastral map in which they provide Ecuadorian officials with a legible depiction of the territory that they request (Figure 2). However, these maps have been made in the context of the modern state, which arrogates power over territory and population according to the ontological structure of the Cartesian subject, with a principle of subjectivity that is alien to the notion of territory held by the Secoya.

Ontologies and non-Cartesian epistemologies

Cartesian subjectivation has been challenged as a theory by who have offered alternatives, among them anthropologists (Humphrey 2008; Strathern 1995, 1996; Wagner 2001). They postulate the destruction or dissolution of the subject (Foucault 1966). As Žižek explained, almost all academics in recent times now try to free themselves from a "spectrum of the Cartesian subject" (1999: 1). The notion of 'plurality' allows for a reevaluation of the problem of identities and the construction of subjectivity in numerous areas (Leff 2010). According to Miller (2005), the starting point is to bury the subject and build "a post-deconstructive theory of the subject" (Humphrey 2008: 359). Nevertheless, this posture treats the ontological source of the potential solution, not the phenomenological root of the problem. Holbraad's "metatheoretical argument", which distinguishes anthropologists from ethnologists, focuses on "the ways in which either of them may come to define what may count as a world, along with its various constituents, in the first place" (Holbraad 2013: 469-470). This author tries to explain the ontological course pursued by Viveiros de Castro (1998, 2012) with Amazonian peoples, and how the nature/culture distinction is articulated in anthropological debates. However his argument, which distinguishes 'being' from 'things' elaborated by the subject does not in itself allow us to state that we are outside the Cartesian framework. Holbraad argues that "For Amazonians and anthropologists alike, then, difference pertains to the ontological question of what things are or indeed could Be, rather than how they might be differentially 'represented', 'known' (or at least 'believed'), or 'constructed' for that matter"

(Holbraad 2013: 470). This separation between the being of things and their representation reproduces the modern logic between an external appearance, and an ontological structure that is internal to things.

The debate requires a phenomenological examination, rather than making a choice between ethnographic work and anthropological analysis. A phenomenological approach, by dispensing with previous concepts, allows us to appreciate the non-disjunctive relationships between what appears and what is received (prior to the constitution of subject and object), that is, it allows us to approach the territory from the experience of human relations. Seen from a phenomenological perspective, a Secoya cannot draw *toyá* without previous experience of its connection with the territory, without having lived and traveled through lands in the unconscious. Moreover, the Secoya consider that each *toyá* is a gift that they receive in a state of expanded consciousness. As Simon Yaiguaje told us, his ritual crown is decorated with the *toyá* he received during the drinking of *yajé*. No Secoya produces or invents a *toyá* as a Cartesian subject. On the contrary, there is a pre-eminence of the *toyá* over the subject.

Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenology of the 'donation' (his translation in French of what in English best translates as 'givenness') allows us to better understand the Secoya subject in relation to territory. If we view the Secoya as "dynamic colonists" (Meliá 1989: 294), their relationship to the territory can be understood as an "ecological horizon." How we conceive this horizon is key to understanding Secoya ontology. In phenomenological terms, Marion criticized Husserl for having reduced intuition to the limits of the horizon: "Yet, second, this restriction can already be authorized by a *de jure* limitation: any intuition, in order to provide within certain factual 'bounds', must first be reported by right within the limit (*Grenze*) of a horizon." (Marion 2008: 22). Husserl had tried to dominate reality, making the "object" a formal ontological concept (formal ontology) applicable to the categories of concrete entities (substantive ontology). In this way, the object functions as a horizon – a limit of intuition. Husserl's formal ontology is aligned with an objectifying structure of a Cartesian subject and with the territorial logic of a modern state: the imposition of formal structures. Cecilia Wee affirms, commenting on Descartes:

...the thinker who recognizes herself as alienated from the mechanistic material world comes to objectify this material world and through such objectification, to see that instrument that she should effectively control her own traditional goals. (2006: 142).

In this sense, empty signifiers such as 'nature' or 'sustainability', act as justification for the control of measurable objectives, which are achieved by virtue of the subdivision of reality into controllable micro-spaces. This is how the agenda of international development used these signifiers to de-politicize local communities (Ferguson 1994).

We can also talk about the 'donation horizon.' Drinking *yajé* activates or makes visible territorial dynamics, which are real donations, or given features. Their graphic expression (*toyá*) is unveiled after the event. There is no prior formal imposition of them. The *toyá* is not planned. César Piaguaje, son of the shaman Cesáreo Piaguaje, told us that in the approximately 15 years that shamanic learning takes, only *yajé* drinking in which a significant discovery occurred, those in which something special has happened, are considered. We can think of the Secoya's relationship to the territory from the logic of Marion's 'event', which implies giving priority to a phenomenon that takes place, rather than the subject. Marion renounces the possible composition of objects and posits a donation of phenomena, in such a way that one can say that what happens "institutes the [subject] laden with gifts" (Marion 2001: 54). In this sense, Marion and Badiou (2006) agree on the primacy of the event over the subject: the event constitutes the subject. To Marion, the event is a "saturated phenomenon"; that is, a type of phenomenon in which intuition surpasses the concept. This is why Marion speaks of donation phenomenology: "[...] the donation not only invests entirely in the manifestation but surpasses it, modifying its common features" (Marion 2002: 225). A saturated phenomenon does not follow the Cartesian scheme of an object's construction. Primacy and initiative have converted from being the subject to being the phenomenon. For a phenomenological approach, there is no previous aesthetic ideal, such as the pure landscapes of the protected areas. Rather, the aesthetic experience is given by a donation of the phenomenon.

The donation-event of Marion's phenomenology forces us to make certain annotations. **First**, if the event constitutes a subject, we cannot agree with Humphrey who, when interpreting Badiou, understands the event as an act of the subject's "decision" (2008: 364). Donation prevents the subject from thinking in terms of intentionality. The Secoya do not attend the *yajé* ceremony with a formal intention but rather, with an attentional disposition (Ingold 2016) of those who are prepared to receive a gift. This difference seems fundamental to us. Faced with Cartesian intentionality, awareness enables prioritizing the event. We observe a convergence between Marion's phenomenology of donation and Ingold's correspondence theory. To start with, the principle of habit, rather than that of volition, acknowledges that awareness is always awareness *with* before it is ever awareness *of*. We can recognize a movement, and respond to it, before we ever set it in our sights. The operations of the attentional mind, in short, are not cognitive but "ecological" (Ingold 2016: 20). We understand that the Secoya are composed as subjects from the phenomenology of donation in *yajé* rituals. If a ritual is an authentic event, this can only be said after the fact. From the phenomenology of donation we understand that the socio-ecological relationships of the Secoya in territory find their cognitive correlates in the attentional mind and the aesthetic expression in *Toyá* experience.

Considering the link between the *yajé* experience and lived-in territory, we understand it to be a "saturated phenomenon" because it is always more than a subject. **Second**, the fact of becoming a gifted subject does not mean that this takes place outside of cultural codes. The *toyá's* design, regardless of the fact that its interpretation has a subjective dimension, is not a product of a conscious imagination, of an individual's creativity, instead, it is granted by a vision of the unconscious without any action on its part. A subjective design cannot be imposed on the lived-in territory (as the state does by imposing a map) or on the *yajé* ritual. *Toyá* is a gift which is given to the subject during the experience.

The distance and asymmetry between the two ontologies

Regarding territory, the ontology of the state and that of indigenous people belong to "radically different worlds" (Povinelli 2001). While the state is enriched by Descartes' objectifying ontology, the Secoya live in the phenomenology of donation. These incommensurable ontologies are, however, asymmetric in their power dynamics. The State of Ecuador's exercise of power is a reflection of a "commensuration" practice (Povinelli 2001: 325) and a synoptic vision of territory. In Scott's words: "In place of a welter of incommensurable small communities, familiar to their inhabitants but mystifying to outsiders, there would be a single national society perfectly readable from the center" (1989: 32).

Justino Piaguaje, president of the Secoya Nationality, is aware that these are asymmetric ontologies. The Ecuadorian State has not yet responded to the 2017 petition of the Secoya, arguing that the instructions for the process of legalization of lands in protected areas are not ready yet. On August 21 2018, the MAE indicated that the minister was "updating the applicable regulations." A few months later, in February 2019, the MAE signed a co-management plan with the A'i Cofán de Zábalo, affecting 2,400 ha of the territory that the Secoya had requested in 2017. The Secoya have reached a verbal agreement with the A'i Cofán for "use and management" of the affected territory. They share a similar territorial ontology. According to Justino Piaguaje, "we have had historical relationships, spiritual relationships, intermarriage relations ... we use the same *yajé*, *yocó* ... all that wisdom is shared with the Cofan." However, with the State things are different. In spite of not having an answer, Justino said "if we have to sign a co-management plan, we will sign it." With this, he implied that the State will not consider the territory demanded by the Secoya and their phenomenological ecology, but rather by the variables that correspond to the conservation regime, to which the Secoya are determined to adapt strategically.

Di Giminiani points in the same direction, when denouncing the state's hermeneutic incapacity regarding the Chilean Mapuche nation's sacred places. The state attempts to "make [a] commensurable difference with the existing technologies of governability" (2016: 538). As revealed by Espeland and Stevens (1998), a commensuration process consists of transforming qualities into quantities and with a difference in magnitude. In order to do this, the main instrument used is an establishment of transformation that arises from the state's bureaucratic apparatus, by which "different social phenomena are fitted into a common legal framework" (Di Giminiani 2016: 538). Nadasdy (2008) points out that, in the Canadian case, the state imposes the rules of

negotiation, and this is also true for Ecuador. The task of commensuration is the visible face of a post-political consensual order (Swyngedouw 2011). Local communities have to accommodate bureaucracy and technification criteria in order to achieve territorial recognition. The Secoya in the Cuyabeno Wildlife Production Reserve have to divide their socio-ecological relationships into four protection areas: a "strategic protection area, maximum protection area, permanent protection area and conservation area" (Nationality Siekopai 2017: 47).

Within the framework of liberal constitutionalism, territorial negotiations do not take into account different subjectivation processes as described in this article because the state has established standards of ethnic identity (Scholtz 2006; Sutton 2003). In its Constitution, the State of Ecuador recognizes that "individuals, communities, peoples, nationalities and collectives are subjects of law [...]" (Section 10). The Secoya are one of the 14 nations of the plurinational State of Ecuador. However, in spite of this recognition, the State of Ecuador continues to try to standardize its citizens from a territorial perspective by resorting to enlightened ideas on which the modern state is based. Although the Ecuadorian State has not yet responded to the request for territory, the Secoya are already performing ritual ceremonies there through which they experience an intimate relationship with the environment that makes them recognize themselves as subjects. There may be no productive use or a stable settlement, but we can recognize the Secoya's intimate relationship with their territory, which has been inhabited, lived in, traveled, dreamed and defined in ritual terms.

5. Conclusions

When submitting their request for legalization of an ancestral territory under the State of Ecuador's framework, the Secoya (*Siekopai*) were forced to use categories of the Ecuadoran Ministry of the Environment that are rooted in a territorial ontology of the modern state. This formal ontology relies on measurability, and comes from the Cartesian conception that subjects (humans) build objects (territories). But while the Secoya delegation couched its proposal to the Ministry of Environment in the formal ontological terms of territory, Simón's *cushma* or Roque's face paint, make us think of territory as a bundle of lines, a concept rooted in a relational ontology. These *toyá* are the very benchmarks of the *Siekopai* territory.

These two ontologies imply relationships with territory that follow divergent paths. The State has an intentional approach, which involves measurement, ordering and productive management (a political geography), while the approach is attentional for the Secoya, given that the intellectual phenomenon is 'donated' to the person in heightened states of consciousness that are linked to *yajé* ceremonies. In a Cartesian ontology, nature as a measurable object is at the very core of nature as an empty signifier, which, in the case of protected areas, was associated with the aesthetic ideal of a pure, uncontaminated and uninhabited landscape. This is inconceivable in the phenomenological position of the Secoya, for whom nature is an aesthetic ideal understood from socio-ecological relationships. However, despite this divergence, the Secoya are willing to accept a co-management plan with the Ministry of Environment, in what is a strategic adaptation.

The Secoya's attentional ontology in relation to the territory is manifested by these ritual experiences and expressed visually with graphics (*Toyá*) that are common in certain cases to other Tukano groups (which belong to a western, cultural and linguistic branch). We interpret this Secoya ontology from Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenological concept of donation, which we bridge with Ingold's theory of correspondence. Perception occurs *in* the environment (as Ingold says), not in its margins or above them. The environment is not an object, there is no imposition on reality; instead, it is an agent of donation to the person (as Marion argues), who becomes a 'gifted subject' by virtue of 'saturated' phenomena that go beyond intellectual capacity.

From this perspective of phenomenological ecology, we can see that the Secoya are aware of the asymmetry of these ontologies of territory, and so deploy their strategy on two planes. On the one hand, they are willing to sign a legal agreement with the Ministry of the Environment, accepting on paper the measurable ontology of the State. On the other hand, the Secoya maintain their relational ontology through the rituals of *yajé* and the verbal agreement with the A'í Cofán, and in this way resist the subjectivation of the state. From their phenomenological position, the Secoya people become "gifted" subjects in a manner that is different from the subjectivation process of the State's political geography. Therefore we reject the argument the presentation of a management plan for the protected area in the Secoya petition is an internalization of the State's rule. This

would go against their own subjectivation process. Rather, we believe that this inclusion is a product of the Secoya's political strategy, who act as political subjects when needed in order to preserve their ecological and phenomenological relationships with the environment, but reach verbal agreements with those who have a similar ontology of territory.

References

- Aikhenvald, A.Y. 2012. *The languages of the Amazon*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Allies, P. 1980. *L'invention du territoire*. Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble.
- (ALR) Australian Law Reports. 1992. Mabo v. Queensland. *Australian Law Journal* 66: 408–499.
- Ardrey, R. 1967. *The territorial imperative: a personal inquiry into the animal origins of property and nations*. London: Collins.
- Badiou, A. 2006. *Being and event*. London: Continuum.
- Blühdorn, I. 2006. Billich will ich – post-demokratische wende und simulative demokratie. *Forschungsjournal* 19(4): 72–83.
- Bohn Martins, M.C. 2000. Tempo, festa e espaço na redução dos guarani. In Negro, S. and M.M. Marzal (eds.). [Un reino en la frontera. Las misiones jesuitas en la América colonial](#). Quito: Abya-Yala. Pp. 131–138.
- Bonnemaïson J. 1981. [Voyage autour du territoire](#). *Espace Géographique* 10(4): 249–262.
- Bonnemaïson, J. 1992. [Le territoire enchanté. Croyances et territorialités en Mélanésie](#). *Géographie et cultures* 3: 71–88.
- Bryant, R.L. 2002. Non-governmental organizations and governmentality: 'consuming' biodiversity and indigenous people in the Philippines. *Political Studies* 50(2): 268–292.
- Chaves-Agudelo, M., S.P.J. Batterbury and R. Beilin. 2015. ['We live from Mother Nature': neoliberal globalization, commodification, the "War on Drugs," and biodiversity in Colombia since the 1990s](#). *SAGE Open* Jul-Sept: 1–15.
- Crouch, C. 2004. *Post-democracy*. Cambridge: Polity Press
- Dean, M. 1999. *Governmentality: power and rule in modern society*. London: Sage.
- Descartes, R. 2004 [1637-1664]. *The world and other writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Descartes, R. 2016 [1618–1657]. *Œuvres complètes, I*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Descola, P. 2013. *Beyond nature and culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Di Giminiani, P. 2013. The contested rewe: sacred sites, misunderstandings, and ontological pluralism in Mapuche land negotiations. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19: 527–544.
- Elden, S. 2007. [Governmentality, calculation, territory](#). *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 25: 562–80.
- Elden, S. 2010. [Land, terrain, territory](#). *Progress in Human Geography* 34: 799–817.
- Escobar, A. 2015. [Territorios de diferencia: la ontología política de los "derechos al territorio"](#). *Cuadernos de Antropología Social* 41: 25-38.
- Espeland W.N. and M.L. Stevens. 1998. Commensuration as a social process. *Annual Review of Sociology* 24: 313–43.
- Ferguson J. 1994. *The anti-politics machine: development, depoliticization, and bureaucratic power in Lesotho*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Foucault, M. 1966. *Les mots et les choses*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Gottmann, J. 1951. *La politique des états et leur géographie*. Paris: Armand Colin.
- Graeber D. 2015. [Radical alterity is just another way of saying 'reality'](#). *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5(2): 1–41.
- Guenancia, P. 1983. *Descartes et l'ordre politique*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Gutiérrez, R. 2000. Propuestas urbanísticas de los sistemas misionales jesuitas. In Negro, S. and M. Marzal

- (eds.). [Un reino en la frontera. Las misiones jesuitas en la América colonial](#). Quito: Abya-Yala. Pp. 173-184.
- Haesbaert, R. 2014. *Viver no limite*. Río de Janeiro: Bertrand Brasil.
- Hann C. (ed.). 1998. *Property relations: renewing the anthropological tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Holbraad, M. 2012. *Truth in motion: the recursive anthropology of Cuban divination*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Holbraad, M. 2013. [Turning a corner: preamble for 'the relative native' by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro](#). *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 3: 469–470.
- Husserl, E. 1970a. *Logical investigations*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Husserl E. 1970b. *The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Humphrey, C. 2008. Reassembling individual subjects: events and decisions in troubled times. *Anthropological Theory* 8: 357–380.
- Ingold, T. 1986. *The appropriation of nature: essays on human ecology and social relations*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Ingold, T. 1995. Building, dwelling, living: how animals and people make themselves at home in the world. In Strathern, M. (ed.). *Shifting contexts: transformations in anthropological knowledge*. London: Routledge. Pp. 57–80.
- Ingold, T. 2016. On human correspondence. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (N.S.)* 23: 9–27.
- Inter-American Commission of Human Rights. 2009. *Indigenous and Tribal Peoples' rights over their ancestral lands and natural resources. Norms and jurisprudence of the inter-American human rights system*. OEA/Ser.L/V/II. Doc. 56/09. 30 December.
- Piaguaje P.R., E. Piaguaje, O.E. Johnson and M. Johnson. 1992. *Vocabulario Secoya*. Quito: ILV.
- Jörke, D. 2005. Auf dem weg zur postdemokratie. *Leviathan* 33(4): 482–491.
- Keon-Cohen, B. 1993. Some problems of proof: the admissibility of traditional evidence. In Stephenson, M. and S. Ratnapala (eds.). *Mabo: a judicial revolution: the Aboriginal land rights decision and its impact on Australian law*. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press.
- Killick E. 2014. [Whose truth is it anyway?](#) *Anthropology of this Century* 9.
- Langdon, E.J. 2015. Oír y ver los espíritus: las performances chamánicas y los sentidos entre los indígenas siona del Putumayo, Colombia. In B. Brabec de Mori, M. Lewy and M.A. García (eds.). [Sudamérica y sus mundos audibles](#). Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag. Pp. 39–51.
- Latour, B. 2005. *Reassembling the social*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lefebvre, H. 1991. *The production of space*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Leff, E. 2010. [El desvanecimiento del sujeto y la reinención de las identidades colectivas en la era de la complejidad ambiental](#). *Polis* 27.
- Malmberg, T. 1980. *Human territoriality: survey of behavioural territories in man with preliminary analysis and discussion of meaning*. The Hague: Mouton Publishers.
- Marion, J.-L. 2002. *Being given: toward a phenomenology of givenness*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Marion, J.-L. 2008. *The visible and the revealed*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Marion, J.-L. 2001. *De surcroît, études sur les phénomènes saturés*. Paris: PUF.
- Marion, J.-L. 2010. *Certitudes négatives*. Paris: Grasset.
- Massey D. 1999. Spaces of politics. In Massey D., J. Allen and P. Sarre (eds.). *Human geography today*. Oxford: Polity Press. Pp. 279–294.
- Meliá, B. 1989. A experiênciã religiosa guarani. In Marzal, M. (ed.). *O rosto indio de Deus*. São Paulo: Vozes. Pp. 293–357.

- Miller, D. (ed.). 2005. *Materiality*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Mittelstrass J. 1979. The philosopher's conception of *Mathesis Universalis* from Descartes to Leibniz. *Annals of Science* 36(6): 593–610.
- Nacionalidad Siekopai. 2017. *Solicitud de adjudicación de 44.882,03 hectáreas de territorio ancestral Pë'këya, a favor de la nacionalidad Siekopai (Secoya) del Ecuador* (Nov. 29, 2017).
- Nadasdy, P. 2008. The antithesis of restitution? A note on the dynamics of land negotiations in the Yukon, Canada. In Fay, D. and D. James (eds.). *The rights and wrongs of land restitution: restoring what was ours*. London: Routledge. Pp. 85-97.
- Ouzouf-Marignier, M.-V. 1989. *La formation des départements: le représentation du territoire français à la fin du XVIIIe siècle*. Paris: Editions de l'Ecole Pratiques de Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales.
- Povinelli, E. 2001. [Radical worlds: the anthropology of incommensurability and inconceivability](#). *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30(1): 319–334.
- Povinelli, E. 2013. *Geontologies: a requiem to late liberalism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Raffestin, C. 1980. *Pour une géographie du pouvoir*. Paris: Libraires Techniques.
- Reichel-Dolmatoff, G. 1978. *Beyond the Milky Way*. Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications.
- Reichel-Dolmatoff, G. 1986. *Desana. Simbolismo de los indios tukano del Vaupés*. Bogotá: Procultura.
- Reichel-Dolmatoff, G. 1997. *Chamanes de la selva pluvial*. London: Themis.
- República del Ecuador. *Constitución de 20 de octubre de 2008*.
- República del Ecuador. *Ley Orgánica de Tierras Rurales y Territorios Ancestrales*. Oficio no. san-2016- 0398 Quito (Mar 7, 2016).
- Robbins, P. 2012. *Political ecology: a critical introduction*. Chichester: Wiley.
- Schechner, R. 2003 *Performance theory*. London: Routledge.
- Scholtz, C. 2006. *Negotiating claims: the emergence of indigenous land claim negotiation policies in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States*. New York: Routledge.
- Scott, J. 1998. *Seeing like a state: how certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Soja, E.W. 1971. *The political organization of space*. Commission on College Geography Resource Paper 8. Washington, DC: Association of American Geographers.
- Soja, E.W. 1989. *Postmodern geographies: the reassertion of space in critical social theory*. London: Verso.
- Stewart, C. 2016. Historicity and anthropology. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 45: 79–94.
- Strathern, M. 1995. Disembodied choice. In Rosen, L. (ed.). *Other intentions: cultural contexts and the attribution of inner states*. Santa Fé: School of American Research. Pp. 69–90.
- Strathern, M. 1996. Cutting the network. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2(3): 517–535.
- Sutton, P. 2003. *Native title in Australia: an ethnographic perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Swyngedouw, E. 2009. Civil society, governmentality and the contradictions of governance-beyond-the-state. In Hillier, J., F. Moulaert and S. Vicari (eds.). *Social innovation and territorial development*. Farnham: Ashgate. Pp. 63-80.
- Swyngedouw, E. 2011. [¡La naturaleza no existe! La sostenibilidad como síntoma de una planificación despolitizada / Nature does not exist! Sustainability as symptom of a depoliticized planning](#). *Urban* 1: 41–66.
- Toporov, V.N., V.V. Ivanov and E.M. Meletinski. 2002. *Árbol del mundo, diccionario de imágenes, símbolos y términos mitológicos*. La Habana: Casa de las Américas.
- Turner, T. 2003. [The beautiful and the common: inequalities of value and revolving hierarchy among the Kayapó](#). *Tipitií: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America* 1(1): Article 2.
- Turner, V. 1992. *The anthropology of performance*. New York: PAJ Books.

- Vivas, S. (ed.). 2016. *Jagáigai. Hilo y aliento de los ancestros*. Medellín: GELCIL.
- Viveiros de Castro, E. 1998. Cosmological deixis and Amerindian perspectivism. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (N.S.)* 4(3): 469–488.
- Viveiros de Castro, E. 2012. [*Cosmological perspectivism in Amazonia and elsewhere: four lectures given in the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge, February–March 1998*](#). London: HAU Books.
- Wagner, R. 2001. *An anthropology of the subject*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wagner, R. 2010. *Coyote anthropology*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Wee, C. 2006. *Material falsity and error in Descartes' Meditations*. London: Routledge.
- Whatmore, S. 2002. *Hybrid geographies: natures, cultures and spaces*. London: Sage.
- Wheeler, A. 1987. *Gantëya Bain. El pueblo siona del río Putumayo Colombia Tomo II*. Bogotá: Editorial Townsend Lomalinda.
- Žižek, S. 1999. *The ticklish subject*. London: Verso.
- Žižek, S. 2002. *Revolution at the gates – Žižek on Lenin - The 1917 writings*. London: Verso.

Interviews

- Cesáreo Piaguaje. 04/03/2015. Siekoya Remolino. Sucumbíos. Ecuador
- César Piaguaje. 26/05/2016. Siekoya Remolino. Sucumbíos. Ecuador
- Simón Yaiguaje. 17/02/2017. San Pablo de Katetsiaya. Sucumbíos. Ecuador
- Irma Criollo. 18/02/2017. San Pablo de Katetsiaya. Sucumbíos. Ecuador
- Justino Piaguaje. 18/03/2019. Pichincha. Ecuador.