

**LIVING CAJA LUDICA;
RAISING THE VOICE OF UNHEARD GUATEMALA**



El Arte es lucha
El arte es sentir
El arte es amar
Y la alegría de
vivir

ART IS TO FIGHT, TO
FEEL, TO LOVE

AND THE HAPPINESS
TO LIVE

El arte es amar
El arte es sentir*

**Poem written collectively by young people
At an encounter organized by Caja Ludica*

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Siempre

Aunque los pasos toquen mil años este sitio,
no borrarán la sangre de los que aquí cayeron.

Y no se extinguirá la hora en que caísteis,
aunque miles de voces crucen este silencio.
La lluvia empapará las piedras de la plaza,
pero no apagará vuestros nombres de fuego.

Mil noches caerán con sus alas oscuras,
sin destruir el día que esperan estos muertos.

El día que esperamos a lo largo del mundo
tantos hombres, el día final del sufrimiento.

Un día de justicia conquistada en la lucha,
y vosotros, hermanos caídos, en silencio,
estaréis con nosotros en ese vasto día
de la lucha final, en ese día inmenso.

Altijd

De voeten mogen duizend jaar lang over deze plek gaan,
nog zullen ze het bloed van hen die vielen niet uitwissen.

En het uur waarop jullie gevallen zijn zal niet worden uitgewist,
door duizend stemmen die deze stilte vertroebelen.
De regen zal neervallen op de stenen van het plein,
maar hij zal jullie namen van vuur niet uitdoven.

Duizend nachten zullen vallen met hun zwarte vleugels,
zonder de dag te vernietigen waar deze doden op hopen.

De dag waar over de hele wereld
zovele mensen op hopen, de laatste dag van het lijden.

Een dag van gerechtigheid veroverd in de strijd,
En jullie, gevallen broeders, in stilte,
jullie zullen met ons zijn op die grote dag
van de eindstrijd, op die onmetelijke dag.

(Vert. Willy Spillebeen)

Preface

It was August 2012 when I arrived in Guatemala-City to spend a month at *Caja Ludica*. I went there to support theatre maker Anouk de Bruijn who would create a performance about Guatemala, and why young people from the Netherlands feel the need to go there. Her project was called *Hidden Wars*. Through filming and talking with the people of Caja Ludica I got to know their method of working. Still, Guatemala-City felt like a jail, where the sun sets at six in the afternoon and you couldn't leave the house afterwards. A city paralysed by fear where public spaces are a candy store for criminals. During the last four days of my trip, Doryan Bedoya, whose words you will find in this study, took me to see another part of Guatemala. Driving towards the Mayan Highlands, the land of volcanos and hot springs, he told me stories about Mayan Cosmvision, about writers like Eduardo Galeano and Pablo Neruda (the poems on page 3 and page 36 are his), and about the problems of Guatemalan society and the role Art and *Caja Lúdica* can play for a better society.

June 2013 *Hidden Wars* was performed in the Netherlands as part of the Community Arts Lab Festival and the *Waterlinie* Festival. Four young Guatemalan *ludicos* performed together with four young Dutch women directed by Catalina García and Anouk de Bruijn. For the occasion, Doryan Bedoya and Julia Escobar were here and I had the honor to show them around. Again there were long talks of the power of Community Arts and the differences between the Dutch and the Latin American context.

The difference between these two countries is the difference between two worlds. Still there is a possibility to understand each other, as long as we open up and show respect for different life styles or belief systems. I am very thankful I had the opportunity to be involved in this project and to write my thesis on a subject that fills me with enthusiasm. I think it's a story worth reading, for we might get a better understanding what the importance of art is in countries like Guatemala and for people like Plinio, Lisbeth, Dalila, Allan and all other friends of *Caja Lúdica*.

Table of Contents

<i>SIEMPRE</i>	2
<i>PREFACE</i>	3
<i>TABLE OF CONTENTS</i>	4
<i>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION</i>	5
<i>CHAPTER 2 THE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH</i>	7
EMBEDDING POSTCOLONIAL THOUGHT IN PERFORMANCE STUDIES	7
LITERARY RESEARCH AND FIELDWORK	8
TO BE OR NOT TO BE SUBJECTIVE	9
<i>CHAPTER 3 THE POST- OR DECOLONIAL CONTEXT</i>	10
MAYAN COSMOVISION	10
COLONIALISM THROUGH MODERNISM	12
LATIN AMERICAN THEORY	14
POSTCOLONIALISM OR DECOLONIALITY	16
CIVIL WAR AND ACTS OF GENOCIDE	17
CULTURAL IGNORANCE	18
<i>CHAPTER 4 THE THEATRE ROOTS OF CAJA LUDICA</i>	20
TEATRO POPULAR	20
BUENAVENTURA AND BOAL	21
FROM PEDAGOGY TO THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED	22
THE METHOD OF CREACION COLECTIVA	23
FOUNDING CAJA LÚDICA	24
<i>CHAPTER 5 THE PRACTICE OF CAJA LUDICA</i>	26
INTERNATIONAL DAY OF YOUTH	26
SENSITIZATION	29
EPRODEP	30
<i>CONCLUSION</i>	32
<i>BIBLIOGRAPHY</i>	34

Chapter 1 Introduction

Caja Lúdica is a theatre collective operating in the City of Guatemala. They work with youngsters in marginal urban areas around the capital and in poor rural communities. More than focusing on artistic production they organize workshops, gatherings and parades, so-called *comparsas*. When I asked Doryan Bedoya, one of the co-founders of the collective in 2001, about his motivation for doing this work, he replied that it were the recommendations done by the *Commission for Historical Clarification* in 1999 that convinced him something had to be done. For Guatemala, which had to overcome a civil war that endured more than three decades, these recommendations could be a guideline to recovery. Unfortunately, due to lack of political will the recommendations weren't put into practice. Yet *Caja Lúdica* took them to heart and started to promote human rights through Art.

The goal of this thesis is to explain the work that *Caja Lúdica* does in the context of a country where the youth and the indigenous population are still discriminated and marginalized. I argue that the work of *Caja Lúdica* can be regarded as cultural action against the loss of cultural identity due to repression and *coloniality*. Therefore, I draw on postcolonial discourse to analyse cultural action in Guatemala. My perspective is also informed by the cultural heritage of Guatemala, which is primarily derived from the Mayan cosmovision. I will argue that one of the prominent motives for the work of *Caja Lúdica* is to recover this heritage and recreate a historical narrative that is original rather than based on a forced eurocentristic history created through colonization. I will describe the practice of *Caja Lúdica* around the three key notions of identity, sensitization and multiplication of knowledge. These ideas find firm roots in Latin American political theory, pedagogy, theatre theory and Mayan cosmovision

This study hopefully contributes to a better understanding of how *Caja Lúdica* uses art and why they use it that way. It will also provide answers to the questions what their cultural roots are, what exactly their practice is and why they do it. The central question is: How can the cultural practice of *Caja Lúdica* in Guatemala be placed in the Latin American postcolonial context?

One of the principle ideas of Mayan Cosmvision, about which I write in more detail in Chapter 3, is a holistic view on the universe: everything is related to everything. Although forced underground due to Western Modernity and Christianity, these ideas can be found throughout the whole Latin American history. One of the writers who elaborated on the relation between heart and mind is Eduardo Galeano. He wrote:

*“Why does one write, if not to put one’s pieces together? From the moment we enter school or church, education chops us into pieces: it teaches us to divorce soul from body and mind from heart. The fishermen of the Colombian Coast must be learned doctors of ethics and morality, for they invented the word *sentipensante*, feeling-thinking, to define language that speaks the truth.”¹*

This discourse of harmony has been silenced by colonial violence and it’s one of the main aims of *Caja Lúdica* to restore and promote this philosophy.

¹ Galeano, E., *The Book of Embraces*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1992.

Chapter 2 The Methodological Approach

In this chapter I will motivate my methods of research. In addition, I place this study in the academic context of Performance Studies. *Caja Lúdica* focusses its work primarily on marginal groups within Guatemalan society, particularly young people from the periphery of the city and in poor rural regions. This focus draws us to the discourse of *Postcolonial Studies*, a field that has a lot in common with *Performance Studies*.

Embedding the Postcolonial in Performance Studies

How to explain the field of Performance Studies and its relation with *Postcolonial* thinking? In order to understand the multi-disciplinary character of this thesis, a good definition of the term *field of study* is necessary. A field of study is a dynamic collection of scholars and academic publications coming from different disciplines. In this study we find sources from disciplines such as History, Anthropology, Theatre Studies, Philosophy and Sociology. What ties them together is their object of study: performance or the context in which the performance takes place. An obvious connection between *Performance Studies* and *Postcolonial Studies* is the identification with marginalized groups. Richard Schechner explains it in his book *Performance Studies: An Introduction*: “What unites this diverse and even sometimes self-contradictory collection [gender, cultural, postcolonial, race and performance studies] is both an identification with the subaltern, the marginalized, and the discriminated against a desire to sabotage, if not directly overthrow, the existing order of things”² The term *subaltern* was coined by the Italian Marxist scholar Antonio Gramsci. By revealing the dialectical relation between the *cultural hegemony* and the *subaltern* he became one of the founding fathers of *Postcolonial Studies*. The *cultural hegemonic* groups in society are those who dominate society and the *subaltern* are those excluded from influence and are therefore marginalized.

² Schechner, R. *Performance Studies: An Introduction* Routledge, 2002, p 128

Literary Research and Fieldwork

The first method I used in my research was literary, and the third and fourth chapters are based on this method. The scholars named in the third chapter are also indebted to the theory of Gramsci. Most notably Fanon and Ngugi refer in clear dialectical terms to *oppressor-oppressed* and *colonizer-colonized*.³ The Latin American scholar Walter Mignolo introduced the useful term *coloniality*, which I will explore in Chapter 3. As the subject of study is a Latin American phenomenon, I prefer using academic discourses that originate in that continent. I will also discuss the problems related to defining Latin America in postcolonial terms and I will elaborate on the alternatives for a more fitting discourse. For this purpose, I draw on Daniel Matul, another Latin American scholar who I interviewed in August 2012. His views on Mayan Cosmvision (the concept I will use for the Mayan world view) and its position in the world form the bridge between *postcolonial* and *globalization* thinking on the one hand and the practice of *Caja Lúdica* on the other.

While the third chapter is focused on questioning *Postcolonial* discourse, the fourth chapter analyses the context of Latin American Theatre. Therefore, a historical approach is needed, analyzing the evolution of (popular) theatre throughout Latin America. An article of Kati Röttger provided a clear picture of the practice of popular theatre in Latin America. In this particular context popular means 'of/by the people' and in theatre this means collectively created radical community theatre. Here radical refers to the way this kind of theatre searches for horizontal relations, among the makers but also in the relation 'maker-audience'. In addition, it refers to the concerns of the working-class *latino* and *latina*, as opposed to theatre which is only accessible for the elite. Two theatre practioneers who proved very influential in this field are Augusto Boal and Enrique Buenaventura. From the sixties onwards they changed the theatre of their continent fundamentally. Boal's methods are inspired by the visions on education of Paolo Freire and they therefore have a

³ Read: Wa Thiong'o, N., *Decolonising the Mind* (1986) and Fanon, F., *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961)

very pedagogical point of departure. Buenaventura, by contrast, tried to explore the possibilities to create a fundamentally Latin American way of making theatre. One of his key concepts is *creación colectiva* (collective creation), which has been and still is influential in the theatre practice all over Latin America.

For Chapter 5, I conducted fieldwork in Guatemala. I studied the practice of *Caja Lúdica* for a month and visited different projects; three of them are described in the chapter to give an idea of their day-to-day practice. The fieldwork consisted of interviews (which I either filmed or documented in writing) and visiting and observing all activities by the artistic production group of *Caja Lúdica*. In addition to my field research, I filmed material that is used for a documentary about the methodology of *Caja Lúdica*. A dvd of this film can be found enclosed with this thesis.

To be or not to be subjective

To end this chapter on methodology I would like to answer the question what kind of knowledge this thesis will provide. In Humanities, often we align ourselves in the hermeneutic tradition, a perspective on science that is rooted in the idea of interpretation. Hans Georg Gadamer points out that the personal experiences and ideas of the interpreter will always have a formative effect on his or her interpretation. Gadamer calls this the *horizon* of the critic⁴. In the same way, I do not want to pretend I'm unbiased. The chapter in which I describe the practice of *Caja Lúdica* is based on my interpretation of their work. But I feel myself strengthened by the words of Richard Schechner who says, completely in line with Gadamer: "(...) *There is no such thing as neutral or unbiased. The challenge is to become as aware as possible of one's stances in relation to the position of others – and then take steps to maintain or change positions*"⁵ In this study 'my' truth will prevail, because these are my words. Still, I hope that I prove myself to be sufficiently aware of this fact.

⁴ Leezenberg, M. & De Vries, G. *Wetenschapsfilosofie voor de Geesteswetenschappen*, Amsterdam University Press, 2012, p 190

⁵ Schechner, R. *op. cit.*, p 2

Chapter 3 The Post- or Decolonial Context.

*“To understand the work we do, before you talk about Brecht, Freire or Boal, you need to talk about Guatemala. Our roots lie in Mayan culture, so read the Popul Vuh and you will understand our work better”.*⁶

It is important to note that there is a methodological challenge to study a Guatemalan phenomenon from the perspective of European academia. Speaking with the people from *Caja Lúdica*, I came to understand that while European thinkers can be useful for providing a theoretical perspective, it is crucial to begin with a Guatemalan and Latin American view on the matter. This chapter presents the post-colonial context to understand the concepts of *liberation* and *decolonization* the way influential Latin American thinkers understand it. In the following chapter the importance of these thinkers for the theatre practice will be made clear. As Diane Taylor points out in the introduction to her book *Theatre of crisis*: “Rather than squeeze this theatre into the so-called ‘Western’ tradition and continue to analyze it as an offshoot of the theatre of the absurd, or Brechtian epic theatre, or Artaud’s theatre of cruelty, it proves more productive to relate this discourse to other minority or marginal discourses inside and outside the West.”⁷ This is exactly what *Postcolonial Studies* aims to do.

Mayan Cosmvision

To understand the work and identity of *Caja Lúdica* it is necessary to look at the so-called *pre-Columbian* history of Guatemala. In the words of founders Julia Escobar and Doryan Bedoya, Guatemala lies in the heart of the Americas and has a very rich cultural heritage, most notably the Mayan Cosmvision, an original and ancestral perspective on the universe, life and

⁶ Interview with Doryan Bedoya, cofounder of Caja Ludica (23 Agust 2012)

⁷ Taylor, D. *Theatre of Crisis: Drama and Politics in Latin America* The University Press of Kentucky, 1991, p 8

nature.⁸ The essence of this cosmivision is written down in the *Popul Vuh*, the holy book of the Mayans. Daniel Matul describes it in this way: “*El todo es más que la suma de sus partes*” [*The sum total is more than its separate parts*].⁹ Everything starts to exist in relation to its context. That is to say, the starting point of this cosmivision is the organic relation between all things in the universe. This thinking results in great care when it comes to the treatment of nature and earth, for we exist by the gratitude of the fruits of nature. With European colonization came the idea of property, a notion that didn’t exist in the Mayan culture before the arrival of the Spanish. The idea is that you as a human being belong to the earth and not the other way around.¹⁰ The critique that Daniel Matul formulates on Western Modernity is that it mechanizes society in the same way as it mechanizes the universe: Individual parts that together form the clockwork of a watch. According to Mayan culture this is unaesthetic, for it explains the universe not as an unseparable whole but as the sum of individual solutions. Matul argues that through the revolution of Einstein’s quantum mechanics and the philosophies that developed from there, a more holistic discourse has gone underway, a way of thinking much more in line with the Mayan Cosmovision which is in its essence also holistic.¹¹

What is the importance of the Mayan Cosmovision for Guatemala? For several centuries the Mayan Culture flourished in the territorial area that is now known as Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Belize and Mexican Yucatan. It was a vivid, dynamic culture based on an extensive knowledge of Astronomy, Meteorology, Agriculture and Architecture. The first Mayan city

⁸ Presentation of Doryan Bedoya and Julia Escobar at the CAL-Festival in Utrecht, 20 June 2013

⁹ Interview with Daniel Matul. *La diversidad cultural en las relaciones culturales; Entrevista con Daniel*, Confluencia/Cuadernos de observación activa, 2008, CANEK, p 6

¹⁰ For more on Mayan Cosmovision I suggest reading Daniel Matul’s *La Cosmovision Maya*, Liga Maya, 2007 (Matul en Cabrera, *La Cosmovision Maya* 2007)

¹¹ Interview with Daniel Matul. *La diversidad cultural en las relaciones culturales; Entrevista con Daniel*, Confluencia/Cuadernos de observación activa, 2008, CANEK, p 6

states appeared around 250 B.C. in the valley that is today the metropolitan area of Guatemala City. The most powerful and civilized city-states arose more to the north in the Petén jungle after A.D. 200, the Mayan golden age which lasted until around A.D. 800.¹² In her article 'Scenes of Cognition,' Diane Taylor points out the importance of performance in the *Popul Vuh*, especially to the mimesis of animals and mythical figures¹³. The *comparsas* of *Caja Lúdica* honor this imaginary as I will discuss later. Taylor also mentions the Spanish need to suppress Mayan cultural expressions to increase their colonial control: they destroyed thousands of scroll books with knowledge of art and sciences as well as places of worship and cultural interest.¹⁴ Today, only a few ruins remain, most notably Tikal in the north, which one day was a center of commerce and spiritual and political importance.

Colonialism through Modernism

The Spanish process of colonization started at the beginning of the sixteenth century with the conquest by Pedro de Alvarado. Until today it has not ceased to determine the structure of Guatemalan society. The bloody conquest was preceded by European epidemics, traveling faster than men on horses. The Amerindian population was not resistant to such unknown diseases as measles, mumps, smallpox and the plague. The consequences were horrific as geographer W. George Lovell points out: "*Between 1520 and about 1680, the native population [of Guatemala] declined by more than 90 percent, falling from perhaps 260,000 to a nadir of about 16,000*"¹⁵ In addition to the devastating effects of these European diseases, Pedro de Alvarado benefited from the disputes between the different Mayan confederations (most prominently the K'iche', Kaqchikel, Mam and Tz'utujil). He allied himself pragmatically with first the Méxica (an Aztec people from Mexico) and then the Kaqchikel to conquer

¹² Grandin, G., Levenson, D. & Oglesby, E., eds., *The Guatemala Reader; History, Culture, Politics* Duke University Press, 2011, p 11

¹³ Taylor, D. *Scenes of Cognition: Performance and Conquest*, Theatre Journal 56, 2004, John Hopkins University Press. p 353-372

¹⁴ Grandin, G., Levenson, D. & Oglesby, E., eds., *op. cit.*, p 12

¹⁵ George Lovell, W. *Great Was the Stench of the Dead in: The Guatemala Reader; History, Culture, Politics* Duke University Press, 2011

Central America. From then onwards the Mayans were colonized and had to take their belief system or cosmovision underground, for they were forced to convert to Christianity. Under great pressure to pray to an unknown God, but with the cultural and spiritual heritage of an expansive civilization, a curious mixture of both emerged. Forced to believe in one God, the population incorporated many Mayan rituals and traditions into the new official religion. Mostly in the Western Highlands, around the city of Quetzaltenango, the ethnic identity remained mostly intact. There, the Mayan Cosmovision and traditional languages remained alive and well. Marginalized by State and Church, it was in those faraway rural communities that the original culture survived, notwithstanding that exactly these people were faced with poverty and very hard living conditions.

In addition to geopolitical (military) and economical colonization, it was particularly cultural colonization that effectively subdued local people by imposing language, religion and cultural traditions upon them. It left them no other possibility than to abandon their cultural identity and assimilate within a colonial identity. With minor local variations this picture applies to most Amerindians (the indigenous cultures in Latin America).

In Western tradition we are familiar with the narration of the *discovery* of America by Cristóbal Colón in 1492. What in fact happened when Colón set foot on the land he thought was India, was that he didn't discover anything. From a worldwide perspective he merely was the first person from the European continent to have seen the island that would later become part of the Bahamas. The Europeans who later named this land *America* had no idea how big it was, nor that it contained whole civilizations with millions and millions of inhabitants. The conclusion we should make according to Walter Mignolo is that the idea of (Latin) America is rather an invention than a discovery.¹⁶ Western Modernity constructed this invention as the truth, not only for Europe but for the whole globe. This

¹⁶ Mignolo, W. *La Idea de América Latina: La herida colonial y la opción decolonial*, Gedisa editorial, 2007, p 28

eurocentric historiography is a very important notion for understanding how European colonization epistemologically formed the Latin American continent.

Latin American Theory

From the conquest onwards Latin America has been oppressed by the colonial powers from Europe. According to some Latin American intellectuals (a.o. Paulo Freire and Pablo Neruda) this colonization didn't stop with the national liberation of the Latin American countries in the 19th century. Also afterwards people continued to be oppressed by a minority of wealthy *ladinos* (descendants from Spanish) and by Anglosaxon imperialism manifested in commercial enterprises such as *United Fruit Company* and the *Anaconda Mining Company*¹⁷. Mariátegui, an influential Marxist scholar about whom I will write below, puts it as follow: *“Liberation from European rule during the years 1811 to 1825 by no means meant that the general population was restored to liberty and able to exercise self-determination in any sense. These were bourgeois revolutions, carried out by criollos, white European settlers, as in the USA”*¹⁸. As Young describes in the introduction to his book on Postcolonialism, instead of improving, the situation for the people at the bottom of the system only got worse: *“Since then [independency] , the conditions of the peasantry, of local indigenous inhabitants, have if anything deteriorated with urbanization and social division; the agrarian problem of landlessness, and the deprivations of extreme poverty, have become increasingly acute”*¹⁹.

Mignolo regards this violence of colonialism as inherent to the progress of modernity: Although colonialism officially ended along time ago, Western modernity is still unchallenged and thus oppression and exploitation continue.²⁰ The genealogy of *Latin America* is a product of this modernity and an illustration of the (cultural) violence of colonialism. Since the Enlightenment many

¹⁷ Both poetically criticized in Neruda's *El Canto General* (1950)

¹⁸ Young, R.J.C., *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, Blackwell Publishing, 2001 p 194

¹⁹ Young, R.J.C., *op. cit.*, p 194

²⁰ Mignolo, W. *op. cit.*, p 33

European scholars argued that modernity had arrived to 'save the world,' thereby marginalizing or silencing any local oppositional discourse that might get in the way. However, Mignolo identifies three alternative intellectual discourses that developed within Latin America itself during the 20th century.

According to Mignolo, Peruvian José Carlos Mariátegui was the first to formulate postcolonial ideas in the 1920s. He wrote the *siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana (1927)* [Seven Essays for the Interpretation of Peruvian Reality] in which he discussed the problems of colonialism. He studied the cultural consequences of this system of exploitation and formulated what in his eyes was the key to a solution: revolutionary class consciousness. In his eyes, only a Marxist class struggle could take away the fundamental problem of Peru: the fact that the Indian population was excluded from landownership. He related this Marxism to the essence of Amerindian culture, not only because the Indians had always revolted against oppression and exploitation, but particularly because of the Incan philosophy of communal and co-operative living.²¹ For the Guatemalan situation this argument seems valid as well, as Matul writes about the (Mayan) value of the communal and the interconnectedness of everything.²² Also inspired by Gramsci was the connection Mariátegui made between the urban intellectuals and the rural peasantry based on the notion that each man is a philosopher that can create new modes of thought. These radical, marxist ideas later became known as *indigenismo*, the idea that the only future of Latin America should be a return to the pre-Colombian cultures. Therefore every aspect of the colonizer's identity should be erased, a dangerous essentialist vision perhaps, but certainly a sharp critique on colonialism.

The second phase of coloniality, as Mignolo labels it, took place in the 1970s when a number of Latin American scholars formulated a so-called Dependency Theory. They explained the relation between Latin America and Europe/US as one of dependency:

²¹ Young, R.J.C., *op. cit.* p 198

²² See *Mayan Cosmivision* at the first page of this chapter

natural resources didn't benefit the Latin American people but only multinationals and in order to maintain the status quo human rights were violated on a large scale. One of the most prominent scholars of this period was Eduardo Galeano from Uruguay. His *Las Venas Abiertas de America Latina* (1973) [Open Veins of Latin America] is now considered a classic. It sharply analyzes four centuries of Latin American colonialism. During the 1970s, more and more academics advocated an epistemological disengagement from western modernity. They called this breaking the *colonial matrix of power*, a term coined by Anibal Quijano and elaborated on by Walter D. Mignolo. This matrix is the power system that oppresses local Latin American culture in all its manifestations.

Postcolonialism or Decoloniality

In an article on the position of Latin America in the post-colonial debate, Fernando Coronil questions whether this term is appropriate for the context of Latin America²³. First of all, he argues, the Latin American countries became independent in the first half of the 19th century, whereas the countries of Africa and Asia had to wait until well into the 20th century. Secondly, most postcolonial publications are written for a highly educated Anglophone audience. Thirdly, Coronil believes that Latin American academics have been reluctant to join the postcolonial debate because they feel more comfortable with another type of discourse, exemplified by scholars like Mariátegui, Galeano and Mignolo.²⁴

In the introduction to his book *The Darker Side of Modernity* Mignolo argues that the postcolonialism and the decoloniality discourses could be complementary to one another. For decolonial thinkers the notion of *coloniality* is important because it has a different meaning than colonialism. Where colonialism is attached to certain historic periods and certain dominated places,

²³ Coronil, F., *Latin American postcolonial studies and global decolonization* in: *A Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies* Cambridge University Press, 2004, p 224

²⁴ Mignolo, W., *The Darker Side of Modernity: Global Features, Decolonial Options*, Duke University Press, 2011, p 15

coloniality is about the underlying structures that were installed by colonialism but did not automatically disappear when countries become independent. This hidden structure is the colonial matrix that Mignolo refers to.

Civil War and Acts of Genocide

Around the time dependency theory became prevalent in Latin America and Fanon and Thiong'o developed their own homebred theories on (post) colonialism with reference to the Caribbean and Africa, respectively, Latin America faced a time of widespread repression.²⁵ Dictatorships violated human rights in the entire continent, from Pinochet in Chile to Efraín Ríos Montt in Guatemala. Foreign Policy from the United States was only concerned with the threat of Communism and where they could they supported these undemocratic regimes to eliminate revolutionary uprisings. Their greatest fear was that other countries would follow Fidel Castro and Ché Guevara into a continental socialist revolution. For this reason, Augusto Pinochet was backed by the CIA in his coup d'état to overthrow the democratically elected socialist Salvador Allende. Much closer to the US-border, Guatemala became the first country to experience American anti-communist imperialism. The USA was directly involved in overthrowing the socialist government of Jacobo Arbenz. This led to a guerrilla insurgency in the rural areas and a civil war that would last until 1996, when a fragile peace agreement was finally signed.

During this civil war, the Mayan population, already severely marginalized since the Spanish conquest, was to endure even more hardship. The climax of the conflict occurred between 1981 and 1983 when General Efraín Ríos Montt launched a scorched earth campaign. This strategy was most emphatically implemented in the Western Highlands, where most Mayans lived. It meant the complete destruction of entire villages, often followed by massacres in which the population was killed. In the Ixil region, for example, between the 70 and 90 percent of all the

²⁵ Read: Wa Thiong'o, N., *Decolonising the Mind* (1986) and Fanon, F., *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961)

villages were razed.²⁶ According to the *Commission for Historical Clarification*, set up after the peace agreements, the violence of the army was extremely cruel and included the killing of children and the collective public rape of women. The most important conclusion of this commission was that the army violence amounted to genocide against the Mayan population in which an estimated 200,000 people had died or disappeared.²⁷

Cultural Ignorance

Since 1996 very slowly the rights of the Mayan population are now being recognized in the same way as those of the *ladino* civilians. Yet the full emancipation of *indigenous* rights in Guatemala is still far away, certainly compared to countries such as Bolivia and Ecuador. Discrimination prevails. As Daniel Matul puts it, there is ignorance of the real Guatemalan culture and instead widespread assimilation of US culture. Ngugi wa Thiong'o called this phenomenon, which he also saw in his native Kenya, *the Cultural Bomb*: "*The effect of the cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. [...] It makes them want to identify with that which is the furthest removed from themselves.*"²⁸ Although the Mayan culture survived the war, the K'iche, Kaqchikel, Mam, Tz'utujil and other Mayan people's remain marginalized and discriminated. They are exploited for touristic ends, but their true identity and belief system is not appreciated in the same way as western globalized identity. It is ironic to see that a country of which the population is 60 percent indigenous pollutes public space with advertisements showing blond, Caucasian people promoting consumerism. In the words of Daniel Matul:

"Éstos son los criterios fundamentados de la sutileza del racismo. Para el Estado este país es analfabeto, porque no puede escribir en castellano. Pero para los Pueblos Indígenas el

²⁶ Commission for Historical Clarification *Acts of Genocide in: The Guatemala Reader; History, Culture, Politics* Duke University Press, 2011, p 386

²⁷ Commission for Historical Clarification, *op. cit.*, p 389

²⁸ Thiong'o, N. *Decolonising the Mind* in: Schechner, R. *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, Routledge, 2002, p 231

Estado es el analfabeto porque no entiende nuestro idioma, nuestra cultura, nuestros valores, ni siquiera se relaciona con nosotros.”

“These are the fundamental characteristics of the subtlety of racism. For the State this country is illiterate, because she can’t write in Spanish. But for the indigenous people the State is illiterate because she doesn’t understand our language, our culture, our values, she doesn’t even relate to us”²⁹

Doryan Bedoya came from Colombia to Guatemala to found Caja Ludica in 2001. When I asked him if the situation of Colombia and of Guatemala were comparable, he answered:

“All countries of Latin America have been colonized by the same, by a forced religion, manners and rituals we were told to imitate, another language. In these countries lived Amerindians, here is evidence of cultures more than 10,000 years old, a historical and cultural heritage. The politicians of our countries are mentally poor; they pillage the whole country only to fill their own pockets”³⁰

In his words we hear echoes from the discourse of Fanon, Thiong’o and Mariátegui about colonial violence, which leaves a country as nothing more than an empty shell.

²⁹ Interview with Daniel Matul. *La diversidad cultural en las relaciones culturales; Entrevista con Daniel*, Confluencia/Cuadernos de observación activa, 2008, CANEK, p 7

³⁰ Interview with Doryan Bedoya (23 August 2012)

Chapter 4 The Theatre Roots of Caja Ludica.

“Many committed Latin American theatre practitioners, reacting on centuries of colonization, understandably took up theatre as an instrument of liberation”³¹

In this chapter I will focus on Latin American popular theatre. Like so many other popular theatre companies in Latin America the roots of *Caja Lúdica* lie in the streets, squares and neighborhoods of Guatemala City. To understand it, the work of two pioneering theatre practitioners need to be considered: Augusto Boal and Enrique Buenaventura. Boal, in turn, was influenced by the Brazilian educational philosopher Paulo Freire. Two of the four founders of *Caja Lúdica* are from Colombia, where they worked with the arts collective of *Barrio Comparsa* in Medellín. In order to understand the present activities of *Caja Lúdica* it is necessary to first take a brief look at the origins of Latin American popular theatre.

Teatro Popular

What is the origin of Popular Theatre? In the 1960s collectively organized theatre groups came up in the western world following the big students revolutions. Well known examples are *Theatre Du Soleil* in France, *Het Werkteater* in the Netherlands, and *Bread and Puppet Theatre* in the US.³² Inspired by these examples, a more popular approach to theatre combined with the notion of *creación colectiva* led to a new Latin American form of theatre. It offered an alternative to the Eurocentrist bourgeois theatre that was prevalent in Latin American capitals at the time. The most prominent representatives of this new trend came from Colombia: *Teatro Experimental de Cali (TEC)* and *La Candelaria* from Bogotá. They were led by two important theatre

³¹ Taylor, D., *Theatre of Crisis; Drama and Politics in Latin America*, University Press of Kentucky, 1991, p 17

³² Röttger, K., *Creación Colectiva in: Theater in Lateinamerika*, Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1991, p 109

practitioners who were to develop a theoretical framework for *creación colectiva*, Santiago García (*Candelaria*) and Enrique Buenaventura (*TEC*). They headed a group of artists who, as the *Encyclopedia of Latin American Theatre* describes it, “[...] lived through *La Violencia* [a violent period in Colombia’s Civil War] and felt the need to give testimony of this dramatic era. Within their works, they analyzed the causes and consequences of this brutality and protested the useless sacrifice of Colombian people”.³³ Their main intention was to create a form of theatre that could help recuperate the national identity, which was silenced through the colonization and *coloniality*.

Buenaventura and Boal

During the seventies Buenaventura’s ideas on collective creation in theatre became popular around Latin America, together with Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Whereas Boal placed the political function of theatre above its aesthetic value and the context over the text, Buenaventura’s aim was to develop a true Latin American theatre aesthetic based on the method of *creación colectiva*. In his opinion, this approach could offer a solution to the lack of structural artistic production in Latin American countries. Searching for the intersection of Art and Politics, Buenaventura’s goal was to reach a perfect balance between avant-gardistic aesthetic quality and a didactic, political content. His main concern was to prevent the theatre from being abused as a political instrument and losing its intellectual independence.

Despite their differences, both Boal and Buenaventura believed that theatre could help the marginalized and to empower them to shape their own history. Boal’s vision is best illustrated by the next two quotations: “*Theatre is a rehearsal for the revolution*” and “*The theatre is a weapon, and it’s the people who should wield it.*”³⁴ Particularly in his early years, he foresaw a revolutionary struggle for the Latin American people in which the

³³ Colombia chapter in: *Encyclopedia of Latin American Theater*, Greenwood Press, 2003, p 139

³⁴ Boal, A., *Theatre of the Oppressed* in: *The Applied Theatre Reader*, Routledge, 2009, p 131

theatre could be used as an instrument for social action. Buenaventura was less radical and emphasized the analytical power of theatre “[...] to question historians [...]”³⁵.

From Pedagogy to Theatre of the Oppressed

Theatre of the Oppressed became known all over the world as a form of theatre which made people conscious of their place in society. The point of departure is that there is no division between actors and spectators. Through the facilitation of a so-called *joker* everyone can intervene in the theatrical situation. Instead of the concept of a finished play that is presented to passive spectators, it has the form of a workshop in which *spect-actors* play a scene from their daily life. Actors will first play a scene that the audience will recognize from their own lives and at one point the *joker* will stop the scene and ask if anyone in the audience can describe what is to happen next. Then he or she is invited to come enact their vision on stage. In that way, all the actors get replaced by activated spectators who will reflect on their own life by showing different ways the situation could develop (from desirable solutions to deteriorating consequences). Boal called this interactive approach to theatre *Forum Theatre* which like “other forms of a people’s theatre, instead of taking something away from the spectator, evoke in him a desire to practice in reality the act he has rehearsed in the theater”.³⁶

Boal’s educational vision on the power of theatre can be traced back to the theories of another Brazilian, Paulo Freire. His theory on *conscientization* contains the idea that true education should make people conscious of the power relations in one’s life. By developing a political and cultural consciousness people will start to value their identity and learn to recognize the forces that are repressing it. Hence, an individual can take cultural action to support or to oppose the social structures around him or her. According to Freire the way to do this is to create an education based on a horizontal teacher-student relation, where teaching is

³⁵ Da Costa, E., *Collaborative Latin American Theatre*, Peter Lang, 1992, p 65

³⁶ Boal, A., *Theatre of the Oppressed in: The Applied Theatre Reader*, Routledge, 2009, p 137

no longer based on the mindless reproduction of information but instead on the ability to question. According to Freire teaching shouldn't be a one-way monologue: "*The only method [of education] is dialogue*".³⁷

Freire's ideas are clearly visible in Boal's vision on theatre, which he regarded as "*the most appropriate vehicle to open mental spaces which have been restricted by an ambience of repression*".³⁸ This opening of mental spaces occurs when *spect-actors* become conscious of the social structures in which they operate and rehearse the cultural action that can be undertaken to transform a situation of oppression.

The method of Creación Colectiva

Buenaventura's ideas on collective creation have also influenced the work of *Caja Lúdica*. The intentions of his theatre were much less revolutionary or instrumental. He saw the role of theatre as criticizing or creating historical narratives. He wanted to make theatre that is '*in accord with the needs of the times and of the people*', as opposed to the Eurocentric, conservative theatre that could not communicate with the normal *latino* or *latina*.³⁹

In contrast to Boal, TEC and the other Latin American popular theatre collectives primarily produced plays, pieces of theatre that were based on extensive research into a social theme that the audience recognized as urgent. The intended audience thus became the direct subject of research in a first phase of the artistic process. Later, this material was turned into a unique imaginary through improvisation.⁴⁰ In that way, the stories of the marginalized are told in an aesthetic manner to criticize the cultural hegemonic discourse. A collectively created Latin American popular theatre production was therefore never finished. Because the subject was directly related to the living context of the audience, afterwards a discussion would always be

³⁷ Freire, P., ... (Freire, 1970: 52)

³⁸ Da Costa, E., *op. cit.*, p 95

³⁹ Da Costa, E., *op. cit.*, p 1

⁴⁰ Röttger, K., *Creación Colectiva* in: *Theater in Lateinamerika*, Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1991, p 112

staged so that makers and audience could share their experience. The makers frequently changed the play as a result of these reactions. In this way: *“Emphasis is on theatre as open communication between the spectator as active participant and the theatre troupe as communication facilitator”*⁴¹

Founding Caja Lúdica

Both Boal and Buenaventura have been influential on Latin America artists who dedicate themselves to popular theatre or community art. Julia Escobar described them as *“the mentors of our mentors, whose ideas are pillars under the present-day Colombian theatre”*. In October 2000, four artists met and joined forces to give workshops and make presentations with a group of youngsters at the Festival *Octubre Azul* in Guatemala City. This was a community arts festival during which performing artists took the squares and streets of the inner-city and claimed them for art’s sake. Two of these artists were a Colombian couple, theatre maker and teacher Julia Escobar and poet and cultural organizer Doryan Bedoya. At the festival they met Guatemalan theatre maker Julio Osorio and musician Renato Maselli. Together they began offering workshops to young people to teach them to walk on stilts, play drums, dance and other skills necessary for creating a *comparsa*, a street parade of life and joy. The festival and the collaboration were a success, so the four artists founded *Caja Ludica* in 2001. They started to work with a core group of young people they had worked with in their first workshops and soon expanded their activities into other neighborhoods of Guatemala City.

When they began to work in Guatemala, Bedoya’s and Escobar’s methodology was still heavily influenced by the company they had worked with in Medellín, Colombia, *Barrio Comparsa*. This arts collective originated in a time when Medellín was one of the most violent cities in the world due to the *war on drugs*. Through their colourful parades and other activities, *Barrio Comparsa* succeeded in freeing public space from drug violence. Even hardened criminals tolerated the presence of artists in the

⁴¹ Da Costa, E., *op. cit.*, p 74

neighborhoods. *Barrio Comparsa* mostly worked with kids and youngsters to make Community Art, celebrate carnival and make parties to break the vicious circle of violence.⁴²

⁴² Interview with Doryan Bedoya (23 August 2012)

Chapter 5 The Practice of Caja Ludica

When walking around the building of *Caja Lúdica* the first thing a visitor notices is that nobody sits still. Like an anthill in which every ant knows exactly what to do, in *Caja Lúdica* everyone runs around from one meeting to the other. Actually an anthill is a good image to describe a first impression of Guatemala in general: a chaos in which a multitude of people move around, busses honk and street vendors sell everything imaginable, from obscure medicines to tortillas with fried chicken. But the chaos inside *Caja Lúdica*, I soon found out, clearly has a direction. After a few days I began to detect a structure. In the courtyard of the building young people constantly come and go. They are adolescents participating in the educational program or are otherwise involved in the cultural activities of *Caja Lúdica*. The aim of the organization is to train adolescents to help weave the social fabric for a new Guatemalan society. This is done through workshops of *creative expression*, two degree programs for *cultural animation* and *cultural management* (in alliance with the only public university of Guatemala) and performances and parades. In addition to their own activities, the collective also plays an important role in the infrastructure of the small cultural field of Guatemala. It coordinates the Guatemalan Community Arts network, advises the young team of the international poetry festival *Metafora*, and it is actively involved in regional and continental community art networks.

International Day of Youth

Describing *Caja Lúdica's* work on the international day of youth might illustrate the special position of this organization in Guatemala. It is a chilly friday morning in August 2012 when little by little the young participants arrive for a day full of activities. They come from such Guatemalan cities as Zacapa and Rabinal, from rural areas around Huehuetenango, and from the underdeveloped slums of Guatemala City like Perronia and Ciudad Quetzal.

Before everybody prepares for the parade which will be the climax of the day, one of the more experienced members of *Caja Lúdica* gives a presentation about the youth policy in Guatemala. He talks about the institutions which have been established especially to promote the rights of youth and afterwards he facilitates a discussion about how these rights could be further developed. Some youngsters from Huehuetenango, one of the poorest regions in Guatemala with a substantial indigenous population, share their positive experiences working together with their local town council. Because of their initiatives some of the playgrounds in their town now have lights so that they can play football in the evening.

The positive example from Huehuetenango is countered by more negative experiences of youth stigmatization. The discussion also reveals the activist side to *Caja Lúdica*. Samuel Ochoa, a musician who has been with the group since its very beginning, explains: “*We are political from the moment that we decide to defend life*”⁴³. His words fit seamlessly with the discourse of Freire and Boal, for *Caja Lúdica* defends life by making *comparsas* and theatre, by engaging in *cultural action*, by using art to open mental spaces in a context of repression.

After the discussion in which everyone is encouraged to participate it's time to prepare the carnival parade or *comparsa*. Most participants have brought costumes with them and for those who haven't the extensive costume collection of *Caja Ludica* has enough to offer. Everyone who will participate in the parade is making themselves up or helping friends to paint their faces. At the same time, in the courtyard the band is rehearsing, those who are already dressed and made up are juggling, stiltwalking or dancing, and body paint and mirrors go from hand to hand for a finishing touch. Then the motley mass moves outside and organizes itself: The dancers go first, followed by the percussionists. The stiltwalkers come last, rising above everyone else. Other than in European cities, there are no permits

⁴³ Samuel Ochoa in a central discussion (12 august 2012)

necessary in Guatemala (or impossible to get) and the patience of the drivers in the historic centre of the city is tested by these unexpected competitors in the traffic. But with their contagious happiness the clowns and acrobats convince the cars to join in a musical cacophony of car horns and thus the carnival gets under way. The route is simple. On Sixth Avenue it's only four blocks to reach the capital's central square, where, in front of the presidential palace, there is enough space for the professionals of *Caja Lúdica* to perform a short acrobatic show. On their way, the 40 persons in the parade attract the attention of the general public. Kids point their parents to the brightly colored spectacle and urge them to follow the happy celebration. In the square the artists organize the 300-plus crowd into a circle, providing space for the stiltwalkers of *Caja Lúdica* to show their skills. At the end, Catalina García, artistic director of *Caja Ludica*, takes the stage and recites: "We are here because we believe that with art we can achieve a world that is more equal, more humane, more sensitive and more sharing. Viva la vida!"⁴⁴. This is the motto and message of *Caja Lúdica*: to create art for a better world.

During this one day different aspects of *Caja Ludica's* methodology become visible. The discussion on youth policy in the morning revealed a more reflective, political and educational aspect of its work. The parade in the afternoon showed a more exuberant, colorful, public side of the company's work, when it claimed a stage for alternative, joyful, playful sounds and sights to oppose the paradigm of violence and repression.

An important element in the aesthetics of the afternoon parade was the attention that is paid to Mayan cultural identity. It contained sacred rituals with colored candles, incense and flowers, but also traditional clothing, and most conspicuously, the use of stilts. In their ancient pre-Colombian performances which sometimes lasted for several days, stiltwalkers played a prominent role to impersonate giants. The holy book of the Mayans, the *Popul Vuh*, contains an image of such a giant (see the cover page of this thesis). For *Caja Lúdica* referring to this rich

⁴⁴ Address to the public during the parade by Catalina García

cultural heritage is one of the pillars under their methodology: Revitalizing the pre-Colombian identity of Guatemala. It also echoes the ideas of Latin American popular theatre movement that art should show the people that history can be shaped by themselves and that it's a social construction that can be questioned and transformed.

Sensitization

In her statement at the central square, Garcia also talked about the role of art to make the world more sensitive. Anouk de Bruijn, a Dutch theatre maker who has been working with *Caja Lúdica* in an intensive international exchange project, agrees this idea is central to the company: *“For me sensitization (making people more sensitive) is the most important ingredient of Caja Lúdica, raising awareness of one's self. (...) The next important thing in their work is to actively engage young people in their social-political context”*⁴⁵.

The idea of seinsitization is further illiustrated by Plinio, a *Caja Lúdica* artist who comes from a poor migrant family. When I asked him what the collective has meant for him in his personal development, he said: *“It has been very important for me, because it made me look inside, how I feel, how I position myself towards other people, how I see other people. Throwing away all the stereotypes, all the systems, all the problems, I discovered who I am and who the other people are. But without too many outside influences and much more from the idea that everyone discovers and shares with other people. [Being with Caja Lúdica] has been very nourishing in many ways: Intellectually, physically and artistically. It has meant a big change for me. As a person I'm much less violent. I don't use that many bad words or bad expressions anymore. So in that way I am more in control, because I understand myself better, how I see myself, and how others see me. Sometimes someone is so unconscious that when he says things he doesn't notice he's offending people, so in that way looking at oneself helps you to understand your environment.”*⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Interview with Anouk de Bruijn (22 October 2012)

⁴⁶ Interview with Plinio Lepe (28 August 2012)

In terms of Freire's philosophy, *sensitization* functions as the preparation for *conscientization*. First, young people learn to look at themselves and then how to relate themselves to the people around them. This process is necessary before structural problems in society can be tackled. His involvement in *Caja Lúdica* has increased Plinio's self-awareness and self-control. He is much less aggressive than before and he argues that the process of sensitization has made him into a more sensitive and hence more *fully human* being.

EPRODEP

The educational and humanist principles of *Caja Lúdica* become even more clear in its collaboration with EPRODEP, an alternative school in Ciudad Quetzal. In an interview, Pablo Silva, one of the founders of EPRODEP, explains the motivation for founding the school: *"We wanted a democratic education based on participation, decision-making and a search for the student's personality. The normal Guatemalan school, on the other hand, is a closed place that neglects these processes and above all participation. (...) After the doors of the schools are closed, the people stay outside, the community stays outside. Most schools are organized as closed spaces; they even try to isolate them as much as possible from their environment, especially in neighborhoods like ours where there is a lot of violence, limited freedom, poverty and discrimination. Schools try to cover up this reality, these problems, to have a place that seems to be clean. We were convinced that we had to change things, change the relation between teachers and students, change the atmosphere, and the relation between learning in the school and life in the community. There was a strong motivation to improve the quality of life in the community."*⁴⁷

In EPRODEP we can detect the Freirean concept of 'dialogue' as the preferred method of teaching. The school has facilitators instead of teachers. They are more like '*a good friend of the students*' as Catalina García put it. Freire recommends a more

⁴⁷ Interview with Pablo Silva (28 August 2012)

horizontal relation in which teachers become the facilitators of the personal development of their students, something that is also characteristic of the methods of EPRODEP. However, according to Pablo Silva opening up the community is even more important as a solution for violence. Silva points out that traditional education is based on subordination, discipline and memorization. He and Doryan Bedoya of *Caja Lúdica* believe this leads to the violence, repression and inequality in Guatemalan society.

EPRODEP recognized a kindred spirit in *Caja Lúdica* and for ten years now they have been working together on implementing *sensitization* and *creative expression* as part of the curriculum. Students are educated not to memorize but to become productive, creative members of the community and the larger environment. The coordinator of *Caja Lúdica's* education department, Mariela Aguirre, describes this process as follows:

“First the community thought of EPRODEP as a place where adolescents simply go to waste their time, because their methodology is popular. For example, students don't have to wear uniforms and get personal attention. They offer classes in personal development that you won't find in any other institute. Over the years, EPRODEP has become a huge referent for the community. Now former students are becoming active in the community, students from EPRODEP. I'm talking about adolescents of 13 years old who give workshops in other spaces and schools. These are the students, mind you, not the teachers. So there are now adolescents training other adolescents.”

Peer-to-peer education is, then, the third ingredient of the methodology of *Caja Lúdica*, together with the focus on the neglected indigenous identity of Guatemala and raising self-awareness through *sensitization*.

Conclusion

La Muerte

*Quiero estar en la muerte con los pobres
que no tuvieron tiempo de estudiarla,
mientras los apaleaban los que tienen
el cielo dividido y arreglado.*

How can we place the cultural practice of *Caja Lúdica* in the Latin American Postcolonial context? Given the different situation in the Latin American continent compared to most Asian and African countries the term *coloniality* (oppressing social structures due to a colonial legacy) might be more useful, following the theory outlined by Mignolo.

Due to the process of colonialism and afterwards *coloniality*, the process that established cultural hegemony in Latin America has always been *eurocentric*. Western Modernity including Christianity pushed indigenous historical narratives to the margin. Indigenous visions became oppressed, or, in Gramscian terms became subaltern. Independence didn't lead to liberty or self-determination for the indigenous. Instead they had to deal with landlessness and extreme poverty. This could be called the violence of colonialism and *coloniality*. Various scholars and activists argue for a recovery of indigenous values as more communal and co-operative social structures and thus for an epistemological disengagement from Western Modernity. They see this modernity as similar to the colonialism that destroyed the history and identity of the original inhabitants. After the genocide of the Mayan population in the 1980s, since the Peace Agreements of 1996 the Maya culture has been slowly recovering. According to Matul, Guatemala continues to be illiterate because it is an illiterate state that doesn't recognize the value of its own cultural heritage.

Caja Lúdica uses art as an instrument to open the mental space of young people and the public space of communities through their methodology *Action, Participation, Transformation*. Through a variety of cultural and artistic activities it invites young people to participate and in the process it helps them to transform themselves and through them their communities. It does so by exposing them to basic values like love, empathy and compassion.

This method rests on the three pillars identity, *sensitization* and the multiplication of the method by the youngsters themselves. The vision of *Caja Lúdica* is based firmly in the values of the Mayan Cosmovision and it therefore actively promotes the revitalisation of this ancestral culture. This opens the door to a better understanding of one's own culture and the suppressed indigenous elements within it. *Sensitization* is both related to the Mayan Cosmovision and Freirean pedagogy. Both pay attention to the way people function in relation to other humans, social structures and other elements around them. The example of Plinio clearly shows how becoming more self-conscious leads to increased sensitivity and humanity. After this *sensitization*, which occurs on the individual level, a process of *conscientization* can start in which one becomes more politically aware of the social structures in society. The last component in the *Caja Lúdica* method is largely educational, setting the stage for a horizontal sharing of knowledge where adolescents train other adolescents in a peer-to-peer process. Also when more experienced people from within *Caja Lúdica* gives workshops or classes there is always an intention towards a freirean *dialogue* in which learning is a collaborative process and not a one-way top-down delivery.

The evolution of *Caja Lúdica* as an organization also shows this horizontal structure. In addition to the four founders, most of the other 36 people working in the company today were once youngsters involved in the workshops and classes themselves. And although the activities may vary from poetry festivals to performances with stiltwalkers and from classes on youth politics to joyous *comparsas*, everything without exception is created collectively.

In all this, *Caja Lúdica* is firmly rooted in Latin American popular theatre, in the ideas of progressive Latin American thinkers, and in indigenous local culture, in which it sees more potential for the future than in the paradigm of western modernity that those in power continue to embrace.

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