

Gonzalo's machete sliced through a handful of vines that reached down to us from a Ceiba tree canopy 200 feet above. Our eyes met and his face lit up with a giant smile. "I will bring this home to my mom so that she can make us a new broom—we don't find these vines as easily anymore so she will be happy." Gonzalo passed the vines to me and went on to explain how these vines gave the river its name, Amacayacu, or *hammock river* in Quechua. For a moment I paused to think about the waves of colonization that have shaped the lands and way of life of Gonzalo and other Ticuna people in the region. The Inca barely reached their community in the southwestern corner of Colombia and just across the wide Amazon River from Northern Peru, yet the community still goes by their Quechua name. More recent waves of Spanish and religious colonialism have left an enduring impact on the local ecology and culture. While there are still some Tikuna communities that live more traditionally and much further up the river, Gonzalo, his neighbors, and family have Spanish names, have converted their land into crops, hunt animals using rifles and hunting dogs, and attend Spanish school.

Gonzalo grew up down river from where we located the vines in a Ticuna community called San Martin de Amacayacu. The community got its name from the Catholic priest who offered to build an elementary school and formalize the Indigenous community in the eyes of the colonial government approximately 50 years ago. In exchange for his support, he required a complete restructuring from their traditional *maloka* community structure. A maloka is a traditional Ticuna home that houses 20-30 families. The families lived together and worked in collaboration to steward their resources. San Martin demanded the removal of the maloka and the creation of nuclear family homes on a grid to more closely resemble that of Spanish culture. Many community members shared with me that this reconfiguration of their community was an attempt by the Catholic Church and colonial government to weaken the community so that they could be more easily managed. The new arrangement came with new ways of relating to the land. Many of the plant, trees, and animals in the area were over harvested and hunted. Today, children in the community travel long distances to attend school and are required to wear school uniforms. The costs of transportation, school fees, and clothing prices push Tikuna families toward income generating activities and away from subsistence livelihoods. Many community members shared with me that the younger generations are losing touch with their Tikuna traditions and knowledge of the more-than-human world around them.

Following the development of *Resguardos Indígenas*, or Colombian Indigenous territories, in the 1990's, many communities have shifted toward revitalizing their traditions and knowledges (SINCHI, 2022). San Martin de Amacayacu is not an exception. The community has rebuilt a maloka and the church built half a century ago by San Martin is empty and falling apart. The community now holds community meetings and events in the maloka and younger community members, like Gonzalo, work as guides for foreign guests, like myself, who want to learn more about Tikuna traditions and the land they belong to.

We followed the Amacayacu in a small boat to Gonzalo's family's home to deliver the vines to his mother, Julia. While they did not live in a traditional maloka, there were several extended

family members living there who slept in one giant room together. They were preparing *masota*, a fermented drink made from mashed yucca, for a *minga*, a community work session, that they would hold the following day. They were building a new roof for a community center and expected about 30 fellow community members to support them. In exchange, they would provide food, *masota*, and music. I sat with Julia while she mashed the yucca and we talked about plants that I learned about from Gonzalo on our walk that day. As I shared, Julia corrected some details that he got wrong, such as why certain plants were no longer easy to find, the Tikuna names for certain plants and trees, and traditional stories about how the plants came into being and how they have been used for spiritual practices. Gonzalo listened carefully and asked questions. His mother smiled and sang songs about the plants to remember their stories. She shared that through moments like these, is how plant stories live on in the younger generations. That this sharing is one way that a community stays in healthy relationship to the more-than-human world around them.

It was this intergenerational plant ecology knowledge and worldview sharing that brought me to the Amazon region. Through relationships with scientists and Indigenous community leaders in the region, I had learned that much of the traditional ecological knowledge that is sought out or romanticized by the conservation community is actually at risk of being lost as younger generations lose access to land. And while it is widely accepted that deforestation and ecological destruction in the Amazon rainforest should be halted and reversed, and that Indigenous people should be at the forefront of these efforts, still many Indigenous communities are left out of this work. Language barriers, land titles, lack of recognition, administrative hurdles, and lack of resources often exclude Indigenous communities from research, funding, and activism directed at supporting conservation and restoration. With the support of the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies and the Tinker Field Grant, I traveled to Colombia and Perú to meet with community leaders, Indigenous territorial governments, ethnobotanists, and conservation project leads to better understand the challenges faced by communities and funders who want to restore ecosystems and strengthen climate resilience. Through conversations with many incredible people like Gonzalo and Julia, I began to not only understand the challenges they face, but also the opportunities to highlight examples of alternative restoration or restoration otherwise (Barra, 2023) approaches that simultaneously revitalize traditional ways of relating to the more-than-human world and promote well-being.

Barra, M. P. (2024). Restoration otherwise: Towards alternative coastal ecologies. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 42(1), 147-165.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/02637758221146179>

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