

Food Sovereignty: An Analysis of the Cañamomo Lomaprieta Indigenous Reservation, Local Resistances against Domination¹

Soberanía Alimentaria: Un Análisis de la Reserva Indígena Cañamomo Lomaprieta, Resistencias Locales contra la Dominación

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Artículo

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Abstract

In Colombia, the indigenous people are recognized as a special population and can establish self-governance regulations in their territories. Although this provision materialized with the Constitution of 1991, the spread of globalization and dynamics of domination around the world have created neocolonial challenges for native peoples. Such is the case of the indigenous reservations of Cañamomo Lomaprieta, which have experienced impositions when introducing their agricultural practices. These

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communities have organized resistance to consolidate food sovereignty respectful of their worldview. This research article aims to elucidate, based on decolonial and postcolonial approaches, the resistance processes undertaken by the Cañamomo Lomapieta reservation in the Riosucio municipality as examples of responses to the neocolonial dynamics prevalent in the agribusiness economy today; transnational companies have been developing this economy in the third food regime. Practices such as the conservation of native seeds to avoid bioengineering are described, in addition to presenting ancestral methods to ensure that food, sustainable crops, and knowledge survive for a long time.

Keywords: food sovereignty, colonialism, local resistance, indigenous reservations.

Resumen

En Colombia, la población indígena es reconocida como una población especial y puede establecer disposiciones normativas de autogobierno en sus territorios. Aunque esta provisión se materializó con la Constitución Política de 1991, la propagación de la globalización y las dinámicas de dominación en todo el mundo han creado desafíos neocoloniales para los pueblos originarios. Tal es el caso de los resguardos indígenas de Cañamomo Lomapieta, que han experimentado imposiciones al establecer sus prácticas agrícolas. En este sentido, estas comunidades han organizado la resistencia para consolidar la soberanía alimentaria que respeta su cosmovisión. Dada la situación expuesta, este artículo de investigación tiene como objetivo dilucidar, con base en enfoques decoloniales y poscoloniales, los procesos de resistencia emprendidos por el resguardo de Cañamomo Lomapieta en el municipio de Riosucio como ejemplos de respuestas a las dinámicas neocoloniales prevalentes en la economía del agronegocio hoy en día; las empresas transnacionales han estado desarrollando esta economía en el tercer régimen alimentario. Con este fin, se describen prácticas como la conservación de semillas nativas para evitar el uso de la biotecnología y se exponen métodos ancestrales para garantizar que los alimentos, los cultivos sostenibles y los conocimientos perduren por mucho tiempo.

Palabras clave: soberanía alimentaria, colonialismo, resistencia local, resguardos indígenas.

Introduction

Colombia has been cultivating genetically modified organisms (GMOs) since 2002. In 2021, the figures for these types of crops increased by 31 %; a total of 150,451 hectares were planted, corresponding to 142,975 hectares of corn, 7,464 hectares of cotton, and 12 hectares of blue flowers (Agro-Bio, 2021). The creation of GMOs aims to solve significant problems and needs in the agriculture sector of various states. Biotechnology applied to food aims to increase production, improve or modify functionality, and meet consumer demand (Beraldo dos Santos Silva et al., 2012). Several countries have recognized that biotechnology offers considerable opportunities for development.

In this advanced modern developmentalist model, capital accumulation is presented as an objective superior to other factors related to environmental protection as a guarantee of the subsistence of the species (Barry & Thompson-Fawcett, 2020). The use of biotechnology in agro-industrial processes has gained acceptance and reached several regions of the world through globalization dynamics. Consequently, communities that do not agree with the practice in question are subjected to it and, on certain occasions, forced to adopt or resist it.

In Colombia, biotechnology has been under development for approximately three decades. It has shown significant growth in forming and consolidating communities dedicated to research and the immersion of transnational companies, the most important of which are those involved in transgenic seed plant breeders' rights. This situation is typical of indigenous peoples in the country, who, despite being granted important recognitions in the 1991 Political Constitution, continue to face realities dictated by neocolonial relations of domination (Peña-Galindo & Toca-Camargo, 2021). Therefore, this article aims to answer the question about the practices of resistance emerging in the Cañamomo Lomapieta indigenous reservation in the Riosucio municipality, Caldas, in order to highlight the efforts of local communities that have managed to confront processes legitimized by the Western worldview on food sovereignty (FS). First, we will outline the decolonial and postcolonial approaches as a theoretical framework for the analysis, followed by a detailed account of the biocentric paradigm of FS. Then, we will document processes of resistance in favor of the FS of the Cañamomo Lomapieta reservation and draw our conclusions.

Postcolonialism and the Decolonial Turn: Similar Positions against Domination

Postcolonial denunciations have a long history; their origins remain disputed, leading to a supposed discrepancy in the decolonial approach, which will be discussed later. In the second half of the twentieth century, decolonization processes in Africa and Asia are often deemed a starting point for various postcolonial contributions (Hassan, 2002; Steinmetz, 2014). It is argued that such processes have not been entirely successful in removing colonial dominance directly (United Nations, 2020) or indirectly (Peña-Galindo & Reyes Silva, 2019). Within this framework, it is worth highlighting the questions raised by authors such as Aimé Césaire (1972), who understands the phenomena of the proletariat and colonialist as two of the great calamities of the modern world, or Frantz Fanon (1983), who criticizes racial distinctions for, among other things, reproducing the dynamics of colonization.

Simultaneously, Edward Said (1977, 2008) revealed the colonialist logic with which the West has constructed the identity of a homogeneous and inferior East. Gayatri

Chakravorty Spivak (1988, 1994, 2000) has written against the hegemonic structures that are reproduced immaterially. Homi Bhabha (1994), in line with Fanon (1983), has outlined the psychological damage that colonial relations produce. In short, postcolonial critiques are directed at processes that transcend the political sphere to reveal neocolonial relations of subjugation, which are more difficult to detect and, therefore, to eradicate from various areas of knowledge.

Under the pretext of revising the current domination relations, a school has been built parallel to postcolonialism, conceived as decolonial. Some of its representatives (Castro-Gómez & Grosfoguel, 2007, pp. 14–15) argue that this decolonial school is more concerned with emancipation from colonial ties than postcolonialism. However, the differences between these schools are minor and can be framed in temporal and geographical matters. While postcolonialism, as previously mentioned, finds its roots in the dynamics of decolonization in Asia and Africa after World War II, the so-called decolonial turn extends the phenomenon observed up to the discovery of America, in which certain Europeans approached the Native Americans from a position of superiority (Inayatullah & Blaney, 2004; Mignolo, 2000; Quijano, 2000).

In line with the above, Tzvetan Todorov (2014) describes various types of otherness and exemplifies some of them with the distant perspective with which Christopher Columbus, Hernán Cortés, and Bartolomé De Las Casas understood the Native Americans. For Columbus, they were part of the inhospitable wilderness he had found; for Cortés, savages to be eradicated for the sake of conquest; for De Las Casas, inferior beings to be enlightened. In all cases, the other—American in this example—is an inferior being over whom domination becomes natural, but it can manifest in different ways. This is typical of decolonial denunciations when speaking of the coloniality of knowledge (Lander, 2003; Palermo, 2010), of being (Maldonado-Torres, 2007), and of power (Quijano, 2000).

Further, the fact that the decolonial approach has a Marxist spirit—this is not entirely alien to postcolonialism as some of its thinkers are Marxists—which enhances the economic aspect in its arguments, the difference between decolonialism and postcolonialism is not significant. Both approaches are concerned with the same issue: the domination of one over the other via tangible and intangible means. To demonstrate the abovementioned concordance, Sara de Jong (2022) compares Spivak's postcolonial approach and Boaventura de Souza Santos's decolonial approach with human rights, arguing that both approaches are committed to go beyond the Western universalism on which they are built and sustained. Thus, beyond the variations between postcolonialism and the decolonial turn, both schools insist on studies with revisionist views on the existing relations of domination; thus, FS can be analyzed based on their postulates.

Biocentric Paradigm in FS

FS was raised and disseminated for the first time in 1996 by La Vía Campesina (LVC) organization at the FAO World Food Summit in Rome. The concept of FS has evolved rapidly and has become a reference in the discourse on food issues, biodiversity conservation, and respect for natural resources, particularly in the new social movements of the world, peasant organizations, indigenous peoples, small and medium-sized producers, NGOs, civil society organizations, and academia. The peasant movement LVC defines FS as people's right to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods and to define their own food and agriculture systems. This is shown by the non-use of genetically modified or transgenic seeds.⁴

The transition from traditional to industrial agriculture changed the conception of how food is produced. The industrial paradigm, with intensive farming, science and technology, and globalization of markets, has an anthropocentric approach because it conceives the food system in relation to the exacerbated needs of production and population and does not consider all aspects of the agricultural ecosystem. The current food system is developed by multinational companies that are deconstructing agriculture, degrading the environment with monocultures and agrochemicals, and generating losses in food biodiversity (Shiva, 2020). Unlike agribusiness, social movements on FS have emerged and have proposed changes in food production.

The social movements on FS have demanded comprehensive governmental policies to develop rural areas. In this sense, FS has become “an agglutinating demand, a kind of umbrella where several demands and social actors fit” (Bringel, 2015, p. 4). These social movements are organized both within States and at the international level through NGOs and civil society. The social movements on FS constitute new forms of mobilization and citizen participation and raise disruptive discourses when dealing with neoliberal policies.

Recent social movements in Latin America and the rest of the world have mobilized against the neoliberal hegemony of transnational food corporations in monopolizing land and dominating and appropriating nature, seeds, water, and soil. Food is managed by powerful food corporations, leading to unsustainable conditions and focus on consumption factors. Thus, communities that demand rethinking a new structure for food systems have been consolidating. (Rey Lema, 2022, p. 204)

⁴ There are differences between GMOs and transgenic foods. GMOs have their DNA artificially altered, whereas transgenic foods are implanted with DNA that does not belong to the original species.

One of the most representative movements of the FS is LVC,⁵ composed of women and men peasants, indigenous, Afro-descendants, and small and medium-sized producers from all over the world. LVC, from the 1990s to the present, has consolidated reflections to build social and theoretical spaces for FS with a biocentric approach that recognizes the right of people to define their food and establish the production model concerning environmental, cultural, social, and economic aspects (La Vía Campesina, 2003). In this regard, FS has a political dimension that recognizes autonomy and food security.

As mentioned, FS constitutes an instrument of resistance to neoliberal macroeconomic policies. Such resistance occurs because the economic model of growth within the commodity consensus institutes international prices of raw materials and consumer goods, inducing neo-extractivism (Gudynas, 2013) and export of natural resources, as in the case of mining, agribusiness, and large-scale food exports. A monoproduction model is adopted to achieve this goal, resulting in reduced wild areas, loss of biodiversity, and land grabbing.

FS proposes a paradigm shift to rural well-being, food governance, and agriculture. The general guidelines of FS are based on food as a fundamental right; agrarian reforms that solve the access, tenure, and quality issues of agricultural land and recognize the peasant and producer as political subjects of rurality; environmental sustainability in agricultural processes and, therefore, agroecology as a bioethical principle of ecosystem protection; food autonomy in the social, cultural, and political dimensions; and the participation of women in peasant organizations and as protectors of seeds and biodiversity.

FS is further grounded on the following:

A sustainable peasant production model that favors communities and their environment and places the aspirations, needs, and ways of life of those who produce, distribute, and consume food at the center of food systems and food policies before the demands of markets and companies. (Ordóñez Gómez, 2010, p. 208)

⁵ LVC originated in 1992 with farmer and rancher leaders from North and Central America and Europe who expressed concern about the world's agrifood system. It is an independent and transnational social movement that adopts its decisions through international conferences. LVC has been working on the theoretical framework of FS and agrarian policies, linking agroecology to the dialogue of knowledge.

Resistance of FS against Domination in the Cañamomo Lomaprieta Reservation

Riosucio is a municipality located in the Caldas department, Colombia. Figures from the *Municipios de Colombia* (2023) portal reveal a territorial extension of 422 square kilometers and a population of 35,843 inhabitants. The National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE, 2005) shows that for 2005, 48.5 % of its inhabitants were men and 51.5 % were women, with a population density concentrated in ages between 5 and 19 years and between 40 and 49 years. In economic terms, the majority (60.4 %) of the establishments are engaged in the commerce sector, followed by services (27.6 %), industry (10.8 %), and other activities (1.1 %). Only 1.5 % of the establishments employ more than ten people, indicating the prevalence of family and small economic activities.

The economy of Riosucio was previously centered on gold mining. This metal is still exploited today, although in a purely artisanal manner. Currently, the main productive activity is agriculture. Coffee, sugar cane, beans, bananas, cassava, citrus, various fruits, vegetables, and legumes have established themselves as the mainstays of Riosucio's economy. Although to a lesser extent, the municipality has a significant livestock industry based on cattle, pigs, and horses. Similarly, economic activities focus on poultry and fish farming (Alcaldía de Riosucio, 2023).

DANE (2005) also found that 75.4 % of Riosucio's resident population is self-recognized as indigenous. The municipality has four indigenous reservations: Nuestra Señora Candelaria de la Montaña in El Salado; San Lorenzo in the town center; Escopetera Pirza in Bonafont; and Cañamomo Lomaprieta in La Iberia. This population group has been responsible for promoting the defense of FS in the territory and achieving important advances in this field. To this end, networks of organizations with objectives aimed at FS have been established, which have been the cornerstone of the achievements attained (Gutiérrez Escobar, 2015).

The Cañamomo Lomaprieta indigenous reservation territories are declared free of transgenics through Resolution 018/2009, Customary Law, and Uses and Customs. This provision restricts the development of public policies, projects, or programs for food security that use genetically modified seeds resulting from plant biotechnology, as these affect ancestral knowledge, traditional seeds, and the worldview of agriculture.

Seeds and knowledge within indigenous territories are a collective heritage, according to the Uses and Customs of the indigenous people ; therefore, no intellectual property

applies to them, akin to allowing life privatization. Considering the principles that govern our Customary Law, the organizational policies of our Cabildos [indigenous councils] based on the comprehensive defense of the territory as a collective right, and the understanding that our agriculture and food are of public property and essential, it is expressly provided that Traditional Authorities will regulate the use, management, and planning thereof within our territories. (Resolution 018/ 2009).

The declaration of GMO-free territories was implemented by local collectives for the recognition of an autonomous agri-food system, ensuring the protection of agricultural and wild biodiversity, roots of the countryside, and recognition of the farmers' ability to produce the food they need. In 2023, the reservation was included in the database of ICCAs (areas conserved by indigenous peoples and local communities) or territories of life due to the conservation of the territory, seeds, and ethnic identity. The transgenic-free zone comprises areas cultivated with native and local seeds so that they are not contaminated with genetically modified ones. They also use agroecology and abstain from agrotoxins to consolidate FS.

The collectives of the Cañamomo Lomaprieta indigenous reservation acknowledge that seeds are the property of humanity; therefore, they must assume responsibilities that require action in essential aspects of life such as protection and care of the environment, deployment of solidarity, and permanent transformation of free and ecologically conscious citizens for the common good. Humanity urgently needs to increase awareness of the importance of the environment and foster a collective spirit that consolidates measures to protect nature from harmful effects. Humans are not aware of the importance of their environment: The Earth can live without humans, but humans cannot live without the Earth. Contemporary societies deal with enormous environmental problems due to privileging the interests of transnational corporations and their agribusinesses.

The Cañamomo Lomaprieta indigenous reservation recognizes FS and opposes Latin American territories' and countries' corporate food regimes for food production. The opposition is against the neoliberal paradigm that leads to market liberalization and, therefore, to implementing large-scale industrial agriculture policies and liberalized trade in agricultural products; this opposition has commercially disadvantaged multinationals and small and medium-sized entrepreneurs. Civil society has risen against the concentration of power, individual business interests, and capital accumulation.

The development of FS in the Cañamomo Lomaprieta indigenous reservation prioritizes local food production and consumption. It creates guidelines for the territories to protect their local producers from cheap imports, control production, and guarantee the rights of use and management of land, territories, water, traditional seeds, livestock, and

biodiversity so that they are in the hands of those who produce food and not corporations (La Vía Campesina, 2017). FS is strongly linked to concerns about the sustainability of the agri-food system. The cause of sustainability of the agri-food system has gained strength owing to issues such as climate change, global warming, depletion of natural resources, and biodiversity. The paradigm of industrial agriculture has given rise environmental deterioration due to agrochemical use, agricultural intensification, GMO monocultures, and the indiscriminate use of technology for economic purposes, making the energy balance unsustainable.

In this regard, FS has become the only alternative in the Cañamomo Lomaprieta territory to promote local production-consumption networks and organized actions to achieve access to land, water, or agro-biodiversity—essential resources that rural communities must control in order to produce food with agroecological methods (Altieri & Nicholls, 2000). FS is associated with food and nutritional security and is part of the right to food, which involves rethinking how the agri-food system is developed and how technological advances can benefit or harm the relationship of human beings with nature and their way of conceiving food consumption, its meanings, emotions, ecology, and culture.

Humans and states have favored harmful practices that endanger the healthy environment and, therefore, affect the rights of current and future generations. The states of South America, including Colombia, cannot allow the consolidation of the liberal extractivist model and the export of natural resources that plunder the region's wealth because this undermines the achievements and struggles of new social movements for securing peoples' rights. Agriculture has food, environmental, and economic dimensions, and seeds are the basis of agriculture.

The aims of the reservation have materialized since its efforts in 2012 to declare its territory free of transgenics (Grupo Semillas, 2012); these efforts have been leveraged in forums with other populations that have similar goals. The population of Cañamomo Lomaprieta has been part of the National Encounter of the Red de Semillas Libres (Network of Free Seeds, or RSL). They even hosted the second meeting of the RSL between June 25 and 27, 2015, in which—according to the non-governmental organization Grupo Semillas (2015)—five objectives were achieved. First, strategies were defined for coordinating regional work toward strengthening local actions to recover and exchange native seeds and advocacy actions to defend seeds. Second, knowledge and experiences regarding techniques for producing, managing, selecting, and conserving seeds were exchanged. This exchange included presentations on initiatives to build seed houses and tools to address transgenic crops' legal and operational dynamics. The main topics discussed were ancestral seed production methods, best practices for treating seeds according to altitude zones, establishing seed exchange networks, and social actions for

addressing current seed laws. Third, working groups were formed to focus on regional and national actions. Fourth, agroecological experiences were facilitated via visits to farms of indigenous farmers of Cañamomo Lomaprieta to understand the management of FS and biodiversity. Finally, a seed, knowledge, and flavors barter fair was organized in the park of Riosucio, which encompassed the following:

[...] the enormous wealth and diversity of seeds that they conserve and cultivate in their regions was shared among the participating organizations from all over the country and the region's inhabitants. Further, of several native foods, flavors, processed products, medicines, handicrafts, and many other local initiatives by farmers, communities, and associations were exhibited to strengthen their food sovereignty and autonomy. Numerous cultural expressions, dances, musical performances, stories, and testimonies of farmers accompanied this barter fair. More than 130 organizations from 22 departments of Colombia participated in the barter. Moreover, 235 producers from the four reservations in Riosucio participated: San Lorenzo, La Montaña, Cañamomo, and Escopetera.

The seed houses, mentioned within the objectives achieved in the second meeting of the RSL, are another crucial materialization of the social movements for the sake of FS. Melissa Hincapié Ochoa (2019) argues that its origin in Riosucio can be temporarily located in the 1990s, with the consolidation of the “La Granja Agroecológica” project, a community school focused on collectivity and solidarity in work around FS to acquire practices that would guarantee the survival of their culture. However, given the Colombian internal conflict that adversely impacted the indigenous communities of Riosucio (Cifuentes, 2009), the school disappeared.

The gap left behind has been filled by

[...] the Network of Seed Custodians of San Lorenzo and the Community Seed House, which promote the association for the conservation and recovery of native species and seed varieties; small farmers who guard them in the daily work of their farms and solidify their understanding of the importance of ecological agricultural diversity for cultural resistance in the relationship of the community with nature and food, as stated by the community members who have continued to strengthen these practices. In this way, Riosucio has remained one of the municipalities with the region's greatest cultural and gastronomic diversity. Culinary preparations such as *ogagatos*, corn wraps, and a variation between *chiquichoques* and *nalgadeangel*; the inhabitants' possibility to consume fresh meat and milk from the region; and the sale of homemade food produced and prepared without toxic agrochemical inputs are drivers of food autonomy and sovereignty for the materialization of the self-government of a culture that resists the interference of external economic factors in the appropriation and defense of their specific ways of life. (Hincapié Ochoa, 2019, p. 64)

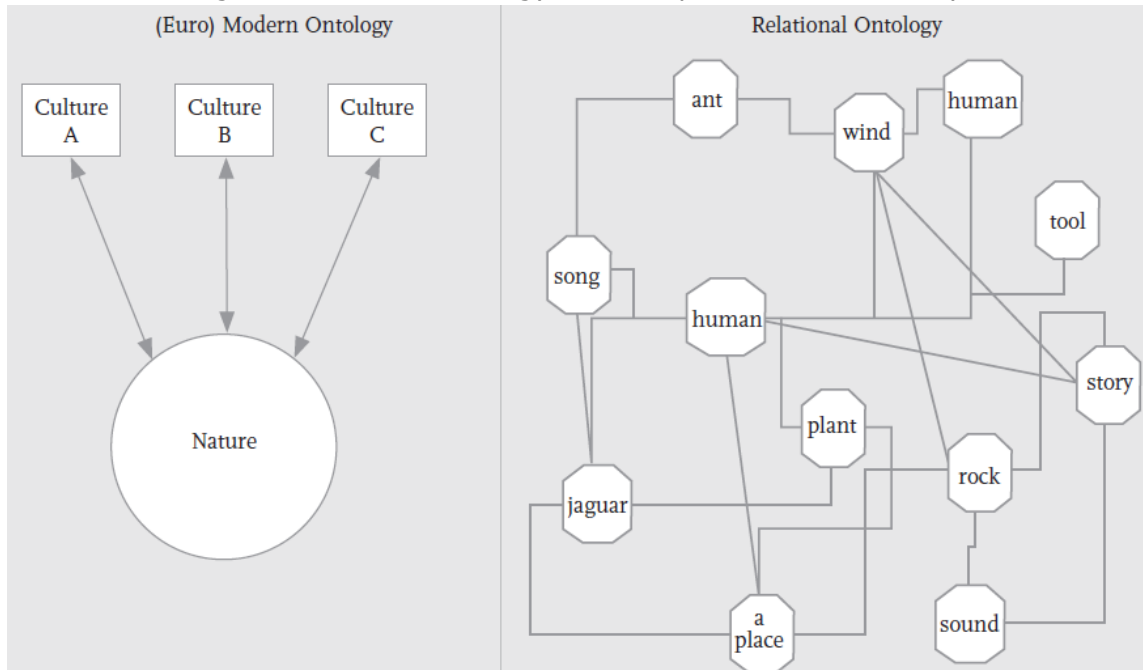
In this regard, social movements have established themselves as a standard in the protection and reproduction of FS in Riosucio, for which, among other things, the conservation of traditional seeds has been a frequent struggle. Currently, this resistance is ongoing in the face of the anthropocentrism of the Western worldview, which has caused phenomena such as climate change (Argent, 2022; Arsel, 2023; Chakrabarty, 2012), the prioritization of coffee monocultures through colonization processes in the region (Corrales Roa, 2011), and the absence of policies in defense of FS designed by indigenous communities and not by the conventional administrative apparatus (Otagri et al., 2008). However, the defense of the seed as a way of life in their territory (López Arboleda et al., 2022) has suffered repercussions of an institutional political order.

Conclusions

The social resistances for FS coincide, given their denunciations against imposed models of production (Castillo & Vargas, 2021), with decolonial and postcolonial postulates aimed at reformulating models that benefit more powerful agents but neglect the minorities that oppose the current Western food system, which mainly uses plant biotechnology as the primary source of modern global markets (Turnbull et al., 2021). Therefore, the ownership of seeds and their private use is ethically unacceptable for the practices defended by the Cañamomo Lomaprieta reservation. The aforementioned indigenous community's claim to obtain FS has been a dynamic that can be read through post- or decolonial lenses in its contesting spirit against the relationship with the environment imposed by influential stakeholders with lucrative interests.

The indigenous community of the Cañamomo Lomaprieta reservation has a relational vision, which is common in communities that resist Western power as an anticolonial and biocentric practice (Muller et al., 2019), in which all elements of the ecosystem are part of the territory and mother Earth and are recognized as having a moral and intrinsic value in themselves (Rey Lema, 2019). The local view considers that practices of food production and the relations with the ecosystem adopted by the Western world are harmful. The divergence between the Western view that divides nature and culture (modern ethics) with other types of relational views (relational ethics; see Figure 1) lies in the fact that for the latter, agents exist in a given network of relationships (Blaser, 2013). Thus, food production is not a process that responds to specific activities but is part of a complex dynamic of relationships between various agents that make up the whole.

Figure 1. Modern Ontology and Comparative Relationality



Source: Taken from Blaser (2013).

The Cañamomo Lomapieta reservation has been resisting the Western food production system, which has been imposed via rapid globalization, thus leading to limitations on local cosmic worldviews. Therefore, these territories have established mechanisms for developing a particular indigenous jurisdiction for the custody of seeds, protecting the environment, defending the territory, and recognizing ancestral practices and cultures (Resolution 018/2009). This is framed within the post- and decolonial denunciations insofar as actions are organized to provide spaces for other ways of inhabiting the world that converse horizontally with practices of the dominant view, restricting the latter's field of action in food production and consumption activities and granting peasants and indigenous peoples recognition as fundamental stakeholders in the right to FS.

Notably, resistance practices in the Cañamomo Lomapieta reservations are organized within the structure created by the dominant position, i.e., the Western one, in the third food regime. Therefore, the resistance exercised is even more valuable. The activities aimed at protecting traditional processes that guarantee food security and the social movements that promote a paradigm shift away from plant biotechnology and GMOs are necessary to confront the current relations of domination in the territories.

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