

REFLECTIONS ON PRACTICE | PEER REVIEWED

“Voices of the Earth”:

Reflections on an Experience of Songwriting in an Indigenous Language with a Group, Community, and Intercultural Perspective to Honor the Territory

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Abstract

This article aims to convey, in a clear and simple manner, the different approaches that music therapists can take when working with indigenous communities. It is an approach to a methodology, outlined from empirical evidence, with successes and mistakes, that arises from different experiences in which I have participated for more than ten years and which is explored in depth, above all, in a special project called “Pecnetao Huanamina – The Song of Mother Earth.” As music therapists, when working with indigenous communities, we have two valuable and transformative resources: the use of the voice and songwriting. These are indispensable in our work, which focuses on accompanying the rediscovery of ancestral memory and indigenous identity and on making the indigenous presence in our territories visible.

Keywords: indigenous community; songwriting; identity; territory

Editorial Comment

How do we connect with the people and communities we want to care for? How do we relate to them, assuming our positions of privilege? What makes us equal and what sets us apart from them? For the author, being a music therapist requires us to be present, “with open, attentive, and deconstructed listening,” knowing that the mistrust perceived in the first encounters (after all, we are the others, the outsiders) can later be transformed into a space of mutual care. Indigenous identities are a distinctive part of Latin America. Often silenced, they find in songs a resource to revitalize their native languages.

Introduction

This article attempts to convey, as clearly and simply as possible, different approaches from which to position oneself as a music therapist—or any other person—working with indigenous communities. It is an approach to a methodology, outlined from an empirical perspective, with successes and mistakes, that arises from different experiences in which I have participated for more than ten years and which delves, above all, into a special project called “Pecnetao Huanamina – The Song of Mother Earth.”

I began this journey after completing my degree in music therapy, searching for “common ground” between the therapeutic uses of music and sound among indigenous peoples and in music therapy practices. I assumed that this topic had been studied before, since music—and all its possibilities—has been used since ancient times to promote the well-being of individuals and their communities. However, I found little written material on the subject and observed that some positions “romanticized” indigenous culture, while others, on the opposite side, denigrated it, underestimating everything that was not part of the hegemonic and Eurocentric culture. On both sides, I found the same logic that separates and judges.

Another motivation for writing this article is to offer bibliographic material for those who, in their daily professional work, interact with individuals and communities from different cultures and worldviews, including indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, migrants, and others. From my academic training as a music therapist, and even in my professional practice, little or nothing is explored, researched, taught, or studied about “indigenous issues,” and the subject is relegated only to those who show a special interest in it. However, considering that at least 60% of those who inhabit these lands have some kind of indigenous ancestry, I believe it is essential to address this field of issues, which not only has to do with understanding different worldviews, paradigms, and ways of being in the world, but also with recognizing the great inequality, persecution, and extermination—still suffered today—by indigenous peoples throughout Latin America. Therefore, it is an unavoidable professional obligation and responsibility to understand that “indigenusness” is present and alive, and that it must be approached through knowledge, work with the community, and constant respectful exchange.

In Argentina, the 2022 National Population, Household, and Housing Census, whose final results were published in March 2024, reports that a total of 1,306,730 people identify as indigenous or descendants of indigenous peoples. There are 35 different officially recognized indigenous peoples. They legally possess specific constitutional rights at the federal level and in several provincial states. In addition, Convention 169 (in its Article 1) of the International Labor Organization and other commitments aimed at the protection of universal human rights, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), are in force with constitutional status. Argentina voted in favor of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Approximately 6,700 languages are spoken worldwide, 40% of which are in danger of disappearing, and most of them are indigenous, putting at risk the cultures and knowledge systems to which their speakers belong.

The term **Indigenous Peoples** refers to a collective group with a territorial extension, which has its own guidelines, social, economic, and political practices, knowledge, and language. The position consistently maintained by Indigenous representatives before the various bodies of the United Nations is that it is up to the Indigenous people themselves, and the people as a whole, to decide who their members are. In this sense, they advocate for self-definition, while highlighting other elements such as ancestry, collective identity, acceptance by the group, historical ties to the land, and language (Baruj & Porta, 2006).

Native peoples is a term that has emerged in recent years from claims of identity and

territoriality. These are peoples who speak their own languages, respect dialectal forms, practice certain religious rites, generally interpret a worldview that contrasts with the Western one, and preserve certain indigenous norms of life and customs (Espósito & Chapunov, 2007).

From the indigenous world, I will consider the concept of territory and its relationship with memory and identity; I will draw on the experience of the project “Pecnetao Huanamina – The Song of Mother Earth,” carried out in collaboration with the Huarpe audiovisual production company “Raíces Ancestrales,” in which we worked with Huarpe communities in Mendoza, Pilagá communities in Formosa, and Diaguíta communities in La Rioja. All of this will be articulated with music therapy, focusing on group, community, and intercultural approaches. The technique used is the use of voice and song composition in indigenous languages.

I will try to answer the following questions:

- What is the contribution of working with the voice and songs in working with indigenous communities?
- What does it mean to work from an intercultural perspective with indigenous peoples?
- Why is the group experience and the collective and communal creation of a song transformative?
- What are the challenges and what resources do we have, from our discipline, to work with indigenous communities?

History

My work with indigenous communities began in 2012, when I visited Grandmother Zuñilda Méndez in the Qom neighborhood of Resistencia, Chaco. From that day until now, more than ten years later, I have visited many communities and met many people who have generously opened up their world of knowledge, memories, and worldviews to me. Below, I will try to mention each of these experiences as succinctly as possible.

Between 2013 and 2016, I co-coordinated with Ana Medrano, chief of the Qom Daviaxaiqui community (Buenos Aires) in Presidente Derqui (Buenos Aires), a workshop on songs in the Qom language called “Qomi Qompi – We are children of the Tobas.” We recorded an album with the songs in 2017, released it, and presented it live in 2018. During 2021, 2022, and 2023, the project “Mujeres de Raíz” (Women of Roots) was carried out in the same community, a space dedicated to indigenous women and dissidents. This activity was co-coordinated with Vanesa Menéndez, also a music therapist. The project was supported by the Directorate of Sociocultural Programs of the Ministry of Culture of Argentina. In addition to being carried out in the Qom Daviaxaiqui community in Buenos Aires, it was also implemented in Maimará, in the province of Jujuy, with Kolla communities, within the framework of the monthly meeting of gender trainers organized by the Puna Network, which brings together women from more than fourteen indigenous communities in the territory every year. During 2022 and 2023, I directed and produced the interview series “Soy de la Tierra” (I am from the Earth), a series of interviews, poetry, and indigenous music, which featured various indigenous leaders from Argentina. Together with musician, composer, and music producer Diego Pérez (from Nación Ekeko and Tonolec), I interviewed Lecko Zamora (Wichí writer, poet, and musician), Claudia Herrera (musician, writer, and Omta of the Huarpe Guaytamari Community of Uspallata, Mendoza), Isabel Paredes (Qom intercultural teacher), and Víctor Vargas Filgueira (writer and researcher of the Yagán culture, to which he belongs).

From 2021 to the present, I have been directing and coordinating the audiovisual micro-program series “Pecnetao Huanamina – The Song of Mother Earth: Songs that honor

Nature,” a co-production between the Huarpe audiovisual production company Raíces Ancestrales, from Uspallata, and the Asociación Civil Proyecto Raíz, an organization that I founded and have presided over since 2018.

All these experiences were coordinated by me, always together with someone from the communities. This shared coordination was based on the concept of “participation,” which must always be based on dialogue and respect. The fundamental task at this point is to build an exchange where the other can express themselves with all their knowledge and, based on their social and interpretive frameworks, work together, ensuring that technical knowledge is at the service of community needs (Petit et al., 2017).

An important issue that appears problematic, and which deserves a separate chapter, is closely related to a macho attitude present in communities. Although it is women who carry out community activities, when it comes to knowledge, men often express a marked need to be heard, imposing themselves and generating discomfort in the group in general, since this attitude often interferes with the task and group creation. Thinking about the gender perspective from an indigenous point of view, and taking into account the reflections of the Indigenous Women’s Movement for Good Living¹, we could think that this machismo responds to Western penetration into indigenous communities.

Methodology

We worked mainly with the techniques of songwriting and collective singing. Each experience, in each community, was organized into three parts and/or stages:

1. Pre-production: Initial contact with the community, gathering information about it, identifying the key person with whom the workshop will be coordinated.
2. Production: This is the core of the experience. This stage encompasses four moments:
 - a. *Review of the musical and sound heritage of each group-community*: soundscapes, songs, stories, legends, etc.
 - b. *Singing round, individually and in groups*, to explore the vocal and expressive possibilities of each member, organize roles, and give instructions for the main task.
 - c. *Creation of the song*: if the group is large, it is organized into smaller groups, which compose a paragraph of the song; then, from the pooling of ideas, the verses are selected and translated into the original language. At this stage, the central resource used is the recording of each part of the song and subsequent listening; the group corrects and adjusts details based on attentive listening.
 - d. *Collective performance of the song and professional musical recording of it*.
3. Post-production: musical post-production, sound adjustment, selection of the final track, etc. This stage is carried out once the experience in the community has been completed. Once completed, the final version is sent to the community to be listened to.

Pecnetao Huanamina – The Song of Mother Earth². Songs that honor Nature

“The Song of Mother Earth” is a project that, through a song workshop with different indigenous communities in our country and encounters with local indigenous musicians, attempts to reconnect with “that” song that speaks of the Earth, of Pachamama, of the sun, of the rivers, the hills, and the mountains; that song that reflects a way of life that, in some places, is still preserved by indigenous peoples, in harmony with natural resources and respectful of the territory they inhabit.

The main function of music therapy is to accompany processes of identity rediscovery,

language revitalization, and reconnection with the territory. The role of the professional music therapist is to contain and provide a healthy outlet for the emotions that arise from the experience: painful memories, taboo subjects, the “unspoken,” the erased, and the denied. For music therapists, the value of aesthetic productions is not only determined by the final product but, above all, by the constructive process (Pellizzari, 2011). Music therapy is at the service of a community and collective proposal that goes beyond the musical experience and aesthetic achievement, becoming a witness to a turning point that is often transformative and mobilizing.

“The Song of Mother Earth” arises from the urgent need to address the damage being done to the Earth as a result of extractive practices such as mega-mining, deforestation, fracking, spills, water pollution, etc. It acts as a trigger for reflection on how, through damage to Nature, the rights of the communities that inhabit the territories are violated, generating a material and spiritual imbalance that often leads to the forced displacement of their inhabitants, separating them from their families, their customs, their language, their culture, and, in some cases, their worldview, causing damage to their identity that is often irreversible.

The project has the support of the Fomeca Fund of the Argentine government’s National Communications Agency for audiovisual productions, and in its development, we worked with the Huarpe Guaytamari communities of Uspallata; Polonio González Pastequiu, and the Xumec Sixto Jofré community (the latter two in Las Heras, Mendoza); with the Wichí Qompi community of Pozo del Tigre, Formosa; and with the Diaguita communities of Chumbita, Sigampas, and Saganasta, in La Rioja.

Once the song has been composed collectively by the workshop participants, it is professionally recorded so that it can be preserved and made available to the community. A documentary series is made of each workshop with each community, which is shown at various indigenous film festivals, in schools, and at meetings. It serves to highlight the indigenous presence in our country, the native language, the environmental problems that capitalism causes in the territories, and the current situation of the communities we work with.

Another important aspect of the project is the Communication with Identity workshop led by members of the production company, where previously produced audiovisual works are screened and the importance of creating and sustaining independent media outlets is discussed. Through audiovisual resources, in this case, the indigenous narrative is shown in the first person, as it is the indigenous people themselves who tell their stories. This possibility arose from Media Law No. 26522, passed in Argentina in 2015. This law promoted the creation of radio stations and various independent media outlets throughout the country. It is significant that the protagonists are indigenous people, since social representations are usually made outside their realities. Furthermore, they are the ones who are strongly committed to the struggles and who promote Communication with Identity.

The project is organized into two main groups of concepts that are in constant dialogue: on the one hand, the indigenous world, shaped by the concept of *territory and its relationship with memory and identity*; and on the other hand, music therapy, *the voice, and the collective composition of songs in indigenous languages; all of this from a community, intercultural, and group approach*. These concepts will interact in a kind of dance, sometimes more harmonious and sometimes more tense.

The Indigenous World: Territory and its Relationship with Memory and Identity

To develop the concept of *territory*, I will be guided by the stories of loved ones and close

friends from indigenous communities who have once again generously shared with me what territory means to the indigenous world and its relationship with memory and identity. I believe that these three axes support and guide both the perspective and the actions and positioning from which to work with communities, given that they organize the indigenous world of thought on which the construction of realities and subjectivities is based.

Enrique Mamani, a member of the Kolla people and president of the Organization of Indigenous Peoples, was emphatic in expressing, in a conversation we had a few years ago, the vital relationship that exists between the concepts of *territory, memory, and identity*.

The territoriality, identity, and memory of peoples are completely intertwined. The issue of territoriality and territory refers, in a way, to our philosophy; and our culture shapes our identity, according to the spaces where we live, where we develop as peoples, as indigenous nations. We undoubtedly need large areas of land to be able to generate respect for our Mother Earth, our Pachamama. That is what territoriality and identity are: territory gives identity to peoples.

Memory is undoubtedly something that we as a people always respect. Memory is the past of peoples, what our ancestors passed on to us throughout our lives, and that, undoubtedly, has been violated over the course of these 530 years. But we are here resisting that and seeing if we can bring about change and reaffirm our culture and our philosophy more and more every day. (E. Mamani, personal communication)

“Pecneyen – Madrecita” A Song in the Millcayac Language³

In January 2021, in the first workshop of “The Song of Mother Earth,” we composed the first song in the Huarpe Guaytamari community of Uspallata, Mendoza province. It was a group and community process in which the participants organized themselves, bringing words, remembering stories and knowledge. All these images, in the form of words, were poured into a notebook, some of them were selected and then transcribed onto the blackboard to begin singing. We shared an experience that lasted two days, in the “Utu” (sacred house) of the community, between the Cordillera and the foothills of the Andes. Huarpe communities from other parts of Mendoza attended, and it was the first time they had gathered to sing in their language. The Huarpes are in the process of revitalizing their language, which is why the project was mainly promoted by the Huarpe audiovisual production company “Raíces Ancestrales.”

“Pecneyen”

Pecnetao (Mother Earth)

Auhayan (grandmother)

Mutuani (thank you)

Taitequique (you ask for freedom)

Caye x 4 (from the heart)

Tacterenta (hope)

Pecneyen (little mother)

mutuani mutuani (thank you, thank you, and much more)

pecneyen (little mother)

The Huarpe people thank Pecneyen—Madrecita—in their own language, Millcayac. This gratitude is what inspired the creation of the song. The gratitude that came from their hearts was deeply felt as they marked the beat with their feet, imitating the beating of the heart. The composition of “Pecneyen” was born from the voices of the women participating in the workshop; the words and ideas flowed with enthusiasm and energy, as if they had been waiting there to be said for centuries.

The voice, which at first sounded timid and faint, increased in intensity, signaling that great emotion was at stake. The final expression reflects the excitement of singing in their native language and doing so among sisters, surrounded by the mountains, in the “utu,” that sacred space of gathering, reflection, and learning. The women accompanied themselves by striking stones they had collected from the land, a traditional Huarpe musical instrument, with which they marked a steady and even beat, accompanied by the box drum. The younger children joined in, accompanying their mothers and grandmothers with their voices.

The Role of Voice and Song

The voice is a powerful tool that we have at our disposal—in most cases—from the moment we utter our first words. This fact is no small matter when working with vulnerable communities, where deprivation is extreme and “not having” often defines “not being.” In the experience described above, the voice is possessed, and therefore “one is,” and with this being “one expresses oneself,” makes oneself heard and sounds; but it does not sound alone, it sounds with others, who sustain while being sustained; voices that reflect sounds and words of native languages, forgotten, silenced, and in a state of revitalization. The voice is possessed, shared, sustained, and sustained; it reactivates the memory, identity, and territory of the one who expresses it. It is the “clay” for the creation of a song, which inaugurates the group, collective, and community instance, but this time in one’s own language. Within the experience of singing, intonation provides participants with a musical encounter in the here and now that is physical, emotional, and spiritual; it can also induce an altered state of consciousness and mediate the contents of the individual and collective unconscious to consciousness (Austin, 1999).

The Permanence that Enables Songwriting

Composing a song, communally and collectively, offers the possibility of recovering something that is absent, lost, or taken away. It offers the possibility of returning to something that is now concrete and born, which did not exist before. Doing so communally and collectively gives it the power of the group, the creation of a whole that surpasses each of its parts.

In my experience with the three indigenous peoples I worked with to compose “La canción de la Madre Tierra” (The Song of Mother Earth), there is a common denominator: it was the first time that members of the communities had come together to sing in their own language. The transformative power of this event lays the foundation for future community efforts and processes, which are necessary in any group of people to resolve conflicts and improve social well-being. In turn, it leaves a mark of “possibility” for creation, for the ability to use the native language again, to sing with those different, unique, and valuable sounds. These are the sounds that make up the words of indigenous languages, words that often cannot be translated into Spanish and thus leave behind a whole universe of reality that cannot be told, expressed, or shared.

This possibility of “permanence” that songs provide, even if they have not been recorded,

is one of the fundamental reasons why I consider songs indispensable in working with indigenous peoples. When we get together to sing, in a group, in a circle, and the participants once again utter the words in their native language, there is no immediacy that can erase the subjective transformation that has just taken place.

Leaving this song available to the community, as a reminder of possibility, resilience, and resistance, breaks through all the walls of the immediate banality of screens and reminds us that this is where we need to return: to that communal action, to that sound in presence and permanence.

“N’oona lek’oqote – Children of Nature” – A Song in the Pilagá Language⁴

In March 2022, we held the workshop in the Pilagá Qompi community, in Pozo del Tigre, Formosa province. On that occasion, after two long days of group work, under the little shade provided by the trees at that time of year and in that part of the world, the members of the community composed the following song, which gives a clear example of the intrinsic and structuring value that Nature has for them.

The process of composing the song was marked by different points of view on how certain words could be translated, given that there are different types of Pilagá language. Faced with this situation, I decided that the group should resolve the conflict. Once resolved, we wrote down all the words on a piece of paper and selected those that would be used in the song; after that, they were organized into parts. The harmony emerged at the same time as the lyrics, accompanied by a guitar played by one of the members.

“N’oona lek’oqote – Children of Nature”

Our song is echo, memory, and hope.

We are a people with culture.

The forest provides us with fruit that we harvest.

Our stream is a source of life that feeds us with its fish and water.

Thank you because the sun rises for everyone equally,

for the rain and the wind, for the moon and the stars that dance in the sky,

for the trees that provide us with shade and fruit.

At home, our children bring us joy and happiness.

We must take care of our nature, the birds, and the forest.

Group, Community, and Intercultural Approach

Working with indigenous communities is conceived, carried out, and reflected upon from a group, community, and intercultural approach. It is not possible for me to develop each of these concepts in depth in this article; however, I will try to explain why it is valuable and enriching, in the attempt to encounter the indigenous world, to let ourselves be guided by the light that these beacons offer us.

Group dynamics offer the possibility of seeing ourselves in others, of supporting and being

supported; they multiply the scenes and become a prism that reflects infinite colors. This enriches our own experience with the gaze, hearing, feelings, reactions, and words of others (Fridlewsky et al., 2007). When we work in groups with indigenous communities, we always, or in most cases, do so in a circle, and each member is able to offer suggestions, contribute knowledge, and generate questions.

The role of the professional socio-cultural animator is fundamental here. The animator acts as a catalyst (motivating, raising awareness, and encouraging people to participate actively) and as a technical assistant (providing the technical elements so that the group itself is able to carry out the activities) (Ander-Egg, 2006).

The community aspect has been present since the project's inception, as it was the members of the indigenous production company Raíces Ancestrales, from the Huarpe Guaytamari community, who contacted me to carry out this project. In other words, it was the community that identified the problem: the need to recover their native language; it is the community that is finding alternatives to solve the problem: holding a workshop on songwriting in the indigenous language; and it is the community that is organizing itself and making decisions to develop the project.

My role here was to support, propose, accompany, listen, learn, and try to intervene as little as possible: a difficult balance to strike, but not impossible. Claudia Herrera, leader of the Guaytamari community, selected the communities we worked with, with the main objective of accompanying the processes of revitalizing the languages of the most invisible peoples. Once in the territory, we worked with the methodology described above: the community chose the person who coordinated the workspaces with me and the communities they invited. My task, as a music therapist, was to enable that space of intimacy, trust, and openness, not only so that they would attend and sustain the activity, but also so that the sounds that were part of the original words, perhaps never before uttered, could emerge:

What does a word sound like when it is named for the first time?

How does it sound when it is received by its indigenous brothers and sisters?

How do many words sound when they come together to form a song?

How does that song sound when sung by everyone?

My task was to contain everything that emerged from there: often it was pain, often it was anger, often it was rejection; many other times it was emotion, joy, strength, and enthusiasm.

The intercultural perspective takes as its raw material or "clay," as I mentioned above, for the creation of the song, that special "something" that one's own culture contributes, in this case, indigenous culture. All of its knowledge, worldview, language, memory, and identity. It is from there that creation springs forth.

This interculturality also understands that it is impossible not to be affected by the other and not to affect the other, even though we must intervene as little as possible. We should not only emphasize shortcomings or needs, but also highlight strengths, virtues, and what each person has to teach and transmit to the world (Herazo, 2015).

Our mere presence is changing the environment, and it is essential to bear this in mind and build a caring, meticulous, uncertain, intuitive, but above all respectful space. There is often a great need to listen, and it is important to make time to be attentive and receptive; everything nourishes the experience, and in any case, it will be the group that decides how much time is allocated to each meeting. In this sense, it is essential to build trust and communication with the person in the community with whom we coordinate, as they will

be the one making decisions regarding their community.

“Rani Koó – Calling the Water” – A song in the Kakán language

In March 2025, we held a workshop with the Diaguita people, with the Chumbita, Sanagasta, and Sigampa communities of La Rioja. These communities do not speak the Kakán language, because Quechua was imposed more strongly and still persists today; however, since research has been done on the language, we were able to use that information to compose the song.

On the last day of the workshop, at Los Sauces Dam, the participants (members of the different Diaguita communities) recorded this song, which had been composed collectively beforehand.

Rani Koó – Calling the Water

*Etiej (Great Spirit) Kié (Spirit of the creator gods and vital energy) Rani (falls) koó (water) (e)
iham (on our faces)*

*Etiej (Great Spirit) Kié (Spirit of the creator gods and vital energy) Múppa (from the clouds) ani
(in the sky)*

Telkara (to our Mother Earth) telkara (to our Mother Earth)

*Etiej (Great Spirit) Kié (Spirit of the creator gods and vital energy) Uklié (in our hands) sinalpi
(from the sky)*

Singi (the little seed) kalsik kas (which begins the sowing) Wailá (like a woman's cloak)

The Diaguita people sing to water and revere its presence, but this time in their own Kakán language. There are legends about the “harvest of water” and others about the birth of water in these territories. There are pucarás where the elders perform rituals and chants to make it rain, especially in times of drought, since the territory of La Rioja is usually arid and quite dry, with long periods without rain.

We recorded the song at the Los Sauces Dam and interviewed Doña Gladis, an elderly Diaguita woman from the community of Sanagasta, on the banks of the river of the same name. The rain accompanied us during the workshop days, but it waited for us so that we could record the song under the trees. Without a doubt, water was present.

Conclusions

Working with *the voice and songwriting* as a music therapy resource creates a bridge of “encounter” with indigenous communities. Since the voice is a resource that is “possible” and available to everyone—in most cases—it places it in an accessible place: it is something that communities possess, something that belongs to them, not a resource provided by an outside professional. In this sense, returning to the primordial sound through the voice and bringing it to the forefront restores a value that had been lost after so many years of silencing indigenous speech.

The use of voice, combined with their *native language* (in most cases almost lost and in the process of revitalization), enhances the experience and gives even more value to what is theirs, to what they do have and can do.

Achieving *the collective and communal composition of a song*, bringing together all these words in their native language, selected by everyone, in a process that, although short, is no less intense, to tell “the world” who they are and what their connection to Nature is. The experience has an extremely transformative power, setting a precedent and sowing the seeds for future collective creations, in their own language and conveyed through their own resources. It is this *group and community dynamic* that could be revisited in conflict resolution and in different situations they may face.

Working from an *intercultural perspective* highlights indigenous knowledge, identity, and ancestral memory; it proposes a starting point from a position of power occupied by the members of the communities themselves. The intercultural approach should not lose sight of the impact of our presence as health professionals, who are not only outsiders to the community but also outsiders to this indigenous identity. For this reason, *shared coordination* with leaders from the communities themselves is essential: they guide us in carrying out interventions and making decisions.

The community perspective draws on something that has originally been the organization of many indigenous peoples, and still is today in many communities. We carry out a process that goes from diagnosis to treatment. It is the community that expresses a particular concern—in this case, the need to recover their native language—and it is also they who request our presence, as trained professionals, to carry out the treatment: the song workshop and all the experiences that arise from it. It is the community that must take ownership of this space, make the necessary decisions, and participate actively and responsibly at all times.

In this artisanal, professional, but above all human and empathetic work, **challenges** arise that have to do with previous problems, which often exceed the scope of our profession; however, addressing these emerging issues remains essential so that the task we are attempting to carry out can sow the seeds of transformation mentioned above.

Another challenge we face has to do with our own identity and reflecting on where “we” end and “they” begin: drawing an invisible line that does not divide, but also does not lose sight of the fact that we are the unwitting bearers of privileges that, in most cases, the people we work with do not have; and that these privileges make us responsible for a task that requires presence, open, attentive, and deconstructed listening, where we can avoid feeling personally affected by being—often—the target of questions and mistrust.

Throughout all these years working with indigenous communities, I have observed that this resistance, somewhat paradoxical with the request for participation and presence in their communities, generally occurs in the first encounters and that, if we manage to understand that these are not personal issues and convey understanding and respect, we can create a space of true care, mutual trust, and reciprocity.

This space will be the primary and indispensable resource for enabling an experience that contributes to our goal as professionals: to accompany the process of rediscovering indigenous identity, ancestral memory, and the visibility of the indigenous presence in the territories through two very valuable resources that we have as music therapists: the voice and the creation of songs.

About the Author

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¹ Indigenous Women for Good Living is composed of members from thirty-six indigenous nations living in Argentina (Mapuche, Wichí, Qom, and Guaraní). It was founded in 2013 and grew throughout that year. Moira Millán, who is Mapuche, is one of the movement’s most important representatives and organizers, and was the driving force behind its creation.

² Link to the entire documentary series:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6miDyJMtV3c&list=PLnQY3zUyfm0Wwx-X6ixP_czw8EoOw5gAp

³ Link to the episode: <https://youtu.be/3gNDORinwRc?si=Feyg8o-gNXC-LVre>

⁴ Link to the episode: https://youtu.be/-ui7CaiTCYQ?si=ssZ1seo_q2Z12kfT