

Summary

The project with Pintag Amaru consisted of the creation of a play using theater, dance, and giant puppets with about 20 community members (adults, youth, and children) and its performance at the capital's cultural center, Parque Itchimbia. Alongside the play, we built a "*casita de los niños*," a community children's center, made of "*adobes*," pressed earth blocks, that will be a space for the children of the community to host workshops, create, and play.

Project Description

For my senior thesis, I worked with two Ecuadorian individuals over Zoom for a year and a half. We got to know each other well and they often talked about their work in the Pintag community through their collective, Movimiento Pintag Amaru. The collective is made up of various families of the Pintag community, including children and youth, who work together on various projects from resisting mining to cultivating seed banks. I was fascinated by the community work the organization was engaged in, as well as their use of art and intergenerational collaborations. My values and passions strongly aligned with theirs and we decided to work together, regardless of the grant. The work I did for my thesis and the relationship I was able to develop and flourish with these two adults, paved the way for this project. As Movimiento Pintag Amaru is also affiliated with the organization Pachaysana, based in Ecuador, we were able to get the support of some international volunteers as well.

As they have not been able to finance many projects in the past couple of years, we began a discussion on possible project ideas that the Davis Projects for Peace Award could fund. Many ideas surfaced at this point, such as a functional kitchen for their community space, English workshops, a children's "*casita*," and theater workshops, amongst others. My positionality as an outsider was always on my mind so I made sure to take a step back during these conversations as this was not my community. However, they often asked for my opinion, and made sure the project included themes that interested me and that my skills would be utilized. We all decided on the *casita de los niños* because the current community space they had was not big enough for everyone; this space would be somewhere the children could play, create, and have their own workshops. As the collective often does community work that uses art and storytelling, we also decided on creating a play that would utilize puppets, dance, and theater that we would present in Pintag and neighboring towns. We created a construction and design team as well as a workshop team, who would meet individually to talk more in detail about their part of the project. For the workshops, we (the children, young adults, and adults of the organization) met every Tuesday and Thursday from 8:00 pm to 9:30 pm. The group had already done theater in the past, but we took the first 3 weeks to do an introduction to dance, theater, and puppetry. We had a rough plan of the methods that we were going to use but not so much content. For weeks we discussed possible themes to explore by reading indigenous stories and talking about protests by indigenous groups (see below) and their importance. We wanted to create something with a powerful and moving message that would also reflect what was going on in the country. The children would be engaged in more artistic activities most of the time, which still had to do with the themes, but were also included in all the conversations. Two recurring themes that we noticed in our conversations were mining and oil drilling, which began with the arrival of the Spanish and Americans, respectively. We decided to focus on this, and the importance and destruction of the "*Pachamama*," Mother Nature, as it was an integral part of their culture.

We had a general plan before I arrived on site, however, due to many factors, conversations about changing the project slightly surfaced when I got there. First, the weather was not what we had hoped for, and we worried that our planned structure would not be able to resist the rain during construction as the blocks would not be able to dry. Due to this, there was a discussion on doing something else completely or changing the methods of construction. As the weather steadied, we decided to continue with the *casita* using "*adobes*" – a pressed earth method to create bricks that many organization members wanted to learn as it was a practice that was getting lost with the older generation. A week after my arrival, protests led by indigenous groups also began in the capital city, Quito, that would go on to last three weeks. The indigenous groups were demanding things such as better living wages, lower fuel prices, and economic relief. These were issues that affected not only indigenous peoples but also farming communities and lower-income Ecuadorians, including many in Pintag. Roads were completely blocked not only in the capital but also in Pintag, creating a backlog of fuel, food, and other goods. Pintag Amaru members often went into Quito to show their support and during our workshops, it was unavoidable to talk about the topic at hand, as these were systemic issues that the country has faced for centuries. This did cause us to put our project on pause at the beginning, as transportation was not available, materials could not get delivered, and all members

were preoccupied with the state of the nation. However, when the protests stopped, we resumed all our work, but decided to make the play more political and address these issues more directly.

The collaboration with Parque Itchimbia allowed us to perform the play twice at their events and Pintag Amaru was given a small grant that was awarded to various community engagement organizations in Quito and its surroundings. We also received \$500 from Providence College from a summer Zoom course taught by Daniel Bryan, whose organization, Pachaysana, is affiliated with Pintag Amaru, and whom I assisted weekly in the course. We also had international volunteers who came to help with the construction of the *casita* and donated money towards the project.

I am looking to keep doing this work after I graduate from my Community Development and Planning Master's program as I found myself becoming extremely passionate about creating with others, discussing, learning, and sharing our work in creative spaces. I am already planning on going back to Pintag next summer to see the *casita* when it will be finished and am looking for ways to stay involved in Pintag Amaru's work. In the meantime, as I finish my Master's degree, I hope I will continue developing the skills I put into practice with this project and build more related skills.

Reflection

For me, peace is not only the absence of physical violence and war but also the continuous process of rethinking the way we live. It is freedom from oppression and the structural barriers that are in place as well as rethinking how we all live together: humans, land, and other beings. It is a continuous praxis that takes community and collaboration.

Creating a *casita de los niños* has been a goal of the collective for a couple of years that is working towards the creation of an independent eco-village run by Pintag Amaru members. Their long-term goal of becoming an eco-village is a way to reach a way of self-sustained peaceful living and detach themselves from relying on the government and its policies, which have a long history of being harmful to its people and land. The *casita* will allow Pintag Amaru to have a space to bring in specialists specifically for children and youth development, which will contribute to their goals of passing on ancestral and traditional knowledge. The play we created tackled important issues and themes that mestizo and indigenous people of Ecuador have been faced with for a very long time. The play made us, and the audiences, reflect and feel deeply about the issues we discussed, which included oil drilling, mining, and related issues that often separate the nation. The play allowed me and Pintag Amaru members to reflect on the history of the nation, its current state, and the type of future we would like to see unfold. These discussions contribute to peace because they sparked meaningful conversations on imagining a future for their nation and community, a future where their community can live equitably, keeping their culture and traditions alive.

As I previously mentioned, the nature of our work included talking about the challenges that their community faces. The protests that took place while I was there fueled these conversations even further. Most of the issues are structural and are tied to environmental issues such as mining and oil drilling. For example, a couple of miles from the *casita* is a mine that has displaced many people from their homes in the last fifteen years and continues to pollute the air and water. Seeing their challenges firsthand and hearing them directly from the people who are living this reality was moving but angering as these issues are embedded in the fabric of their government and history. Most of these issues, if not all, have political ties that began when Spanish colonizers arrived on their land. However, the amount of community collectives that are actively fighting this *lucha*¹ and promoting community organizing for social change demonstrates that there is a large and loud resistance movement.

The project has inspired and changed me in various ways. I was moved by the passion and agency that fuels the community members, who even after a full day of work, would attend the workshops at 8:00 at night with their children. On Saturday mornings, they would be there at 7:00 am, ready to continue the *casita*. Movimiento Pintag Amaru is not just an organization, it is truly a way of being, a way to live, and that has inspired and empowered me like nothing ever before. The commitment it takes to do the work they do is truly admirable, and I feel immensely lucky they accepted me into their family with open arms right from the beginning. I learned about their land and its history, and I reconnected with the *Pachaymama* in a way I had not experienced since I was a child in my own homeland of Italy. Their stories moved me and pushed me to become more conscious and sustainable but also share their *lucha*, their fight, with the audience I can reach.

¹ "Lucha" directly translates to "fight." It is a word used to talk about their "fight" resisting against the system.

Pintag Amaru: Reconnecting Youth with Indigenous Stories through Arts-based Pedagogies
Ecuador
Clark University
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Personal Statement

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