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“We want to create a technology of feelings.”

This is what an Indigenous woman from the Cabécar community of the Caribbean Alto Pacuare region of Costa Rica told Kemly Camacho, the coordinator of the local development cooperative Sulá Batsú, during one of their conversations. This goal blew Kemly’s mind away. After having worked on technology-related issues her whole life and having founded the internationally recognized cooperative Sulá Batsú more than fifteen years ago, Kemly simply could not wrap her head around the implications of collaborating on the creation of “una tecnología del sentir.” This “technology of feelings” drastically differed from the profit-oriented neoliberal technologies and ideas of technology that Kemly had worked with her entire life. But, after reflecting on it for many months after my visit to Costa Rica in 2019, I perceived this moment as a culmination of Sulá Batsú’s work and organizational practices rooted in a politics of care and solidarity.

For the Indigenous Cabécar and Bribri women, whose communities are under the imminent arrival of internet connection, the meaning of codesigning a “technology of feelings” was grounded in practical results, such as creating a virtual application that could submerge users in their communities and cosmology or an application connected to sensors that

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could detect when deforestation trucks enter their lands. But their request surpassed the practical. A technology of feelings is also about celebrating their knowledges and ways of being. It is about collaboration, joy, and respect. It is about being seen, heard, felt, and seeing, hearing, and feeling. It is about following rhythms not determined by linearity, assessments, outcomes, and results. It is about connecting with what is difficult to articulate in our languages, about “connecting technology to the divine, a technology that is more intuitive” as co-op member Andrea told me. “And to be able to create a technology that feels, we also had to feel them,” Kemly told me. The Indigenous women told the co-op members that to be able to work together, they had to visit their communities, sleep in their houses, travel their lands, and participate in their ceremonies. And so they did. They crossed rivers and hiked mountains, under incessant rain, through flooding, and in paths of mud, to feel the communities they were going to start a project with. Kemly and Juan, a founding member of the co-op, took Bribri language classes to understand the community’s worldviews and knowledges.

Founded in 2005, local development cooperative Sulá Batsú, which means “creative spirit” in the Indigenous Costa Rican language Bribri, follows a cooperative model where income is shared among the staff and workers “control and own the means of production as owners and workers of the business.”¹ Sulá Batsú, housed in Casa Batsú, the beautiful community space *la coope* (the co-op) manages in the Barrio Escalante in San José, is funded through two main sources: their grassroots projects, which are funded through proposals and grants from state agencies and corporations, development institutions, and international nongovernmental organizations, and the *venta de servicios* (selling of services) that generates income through consultancies, workshops, evaluations, and trainings in the public and private sectors. The income generated from these sources is collectivized—that is, the person who acquires the contract receives a higher percentage of the cut, but the remaining salary is distributed among all the staff. Staff members are also included in different phases of the projects, even when their individual skills might be stronger in another area.

The co-op has approximately twenty associates and a core daily working staff of approximately ten people. The core staff is mostly women,

but there are currently some men. The core staff of *la coope* in 2021 included Kemly, Lila, Daniela, Marina, Andrea, Pabru, Samuel, Gabriel, and Juan.² Some of them are founding members of the co-op. Most of the seventeen activists I interviewed self-identified as middle-class, educated, mestiza (racially mixed), heterosexual women, although some identified as working class/poor and queer, and I interviewed four men. Costa Rica is considered to be socioeconomically privileged in the context of Central America.³ Some core staff live in the capital, San José, and some commute up to two hours to *la coope* from rural areas. Among the activists are anthropologists, sociologists, software engineers, graphic designers, artists, accountants, social workers, journalists, and car mechanics. Sulá Batsú has received funding for its grassroots projects from institutes of higher education, international development agencies, and technology corporations, including UN Women, UNESCO, Hivos, the Canadian International Development Research Center (IDRC), the University of Toronto, the University of Washington, and Google.

One of Sulá Batsú's main initiatives is to bring women and girls closer to digital technologies through associative technology-based entrepreneurship and supporting women in science and technology fields through trainings, workshops, and advocacy at the local, national, and transnational levels. Sulá Batsú has offered digital workshops to thousands of girls, young women, and their mothers, partnering with numerous municipal governments in Costa Rica and other countries in Central America. These workshops consist of training in basic internet skills and use, computer disassembly and reassembly, open-source code programming, application (app) design, and online security, as well as talks by leaders in science and technology fields on how to overcome stereotypes and gendered cultural norms.

Society and technology is only one of four of their main areas of work, the others being the free and open exchange of knowledge; art and culture; and creating a solidarity-based economy. Gender, the environment, intergenerational bonding, and fostering the commons are transversal axes of the co-op's projects. The activists of Sulá Batsú—whose slogan is “a society of shared knowledges”—mostly work in marginalized communities—rural, low-income, Indigenous—but also with universities, chambers of commerce, technology corporations, and local

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and national government agencies. They also participate in numerous international conferences on technology. La coope's advocacy is thus multiscalar, from the transnational and the state to the municipal level. But I argue that Sulá Batsú's most radical project is its micropolitical work that weaves a "politics of connections" based on solidarity and the defense of life both human and more-than-human. In Sulá Batsú, technologies are about and for life against violence. The Technological Woman is not uniquely a victim or an entrepreneur. She holds multitudes. I have come to know her—they—well since I started to conduct fieldwork with the co-op in 2015. This chapter traces the co-op's origins, trajectories, visions, and futures.

Technologies of Care

"Everyone, absolutely everyone, can design technologies," Kemly told me in one of our many conversations during a rainy afternoon in San José, Costa Rica. The coordinator of the cooperative Sulá Batsú made this seemingly innocuous comment in the midst of co-organizing a high-profile Latin American conference for women in the fields of STEM characterized as being corporate and business-oriented. A fifty-something woman with an overwhelming energy, Kemly is the heart of la coope. Her high-pitched voice can crack a mirror, and that, combined with her presence, makes it difficult not to notice her. Kemly was intent upon inviting Indigenous women from Costa Rica to open the conference with a discussion about Indigenous science and technologies. After weeks of difficult negotiations with the main organizers, the co-op made this possible. Kemly's message was clear: technologies must be understood within racialized, gendered, and colonial trajectories. The technological allure was thus decentered, and Indigenous women were centered as experts, makers, and knowers. The tactic—decided upon collectively by the activists of la coope and the Indigenous leaders—held both tremendous intellectual force and emotional intensity. It was a radical act of solidarity and a feminist vision of technology—and most important, of what has not been considered "technological."

Sulá Batsú is reimagining technology and the digital society in ways that enable different forms of thinking and being, built upon radical

interconnectedness and solidarity. Arturo Escobar posits that there is currently a “political activation of relationality” in the context of increasing social and ecological devastation, and a need of repositioning design as “an ethical praxis of world making.”⁴ For the Cabécar women, relationality has been central to their ways of being and thinking for centuries. The Indigenous women’s knowledges centered at the conference focused on STEM embody a rupture and a vision of designing a world in which technologies are intimately tied to a politics of life. It symbolizes a moment in which we can appreciate Indigenous science and technology beyond being labeled as “traditional”—a situated act of technopolitical agency that is far from deterministic models. When care is centered, technology is also decentered. How is it possible to do work on technology and simultaneously decenter the technological? In her magnificent book *Dark Matters*, sociologist Simone Browne does precisely this.⁵ Browne’s work—which has been influential in the co-op’s evolution—excavates the history and the persistence of the surveillance of Blackness from transatlantic slavery to its afterlife. In other words, Browne decenters digital technologies, locating them as another iteration of the historical persistence of racism.

To be clear, this is not a debate about “newness,” if these technologies bring new problems or not. It is about reevaluating the preeminence of digital technologies. Kemly mentioned, for example, how she was reflecting on the increasing emphasis of technology activists and funders on “digital security.” “Focusing on digital security continues to represent a techno-fix to profound social problems,” she said. There has always been something about the insistence on digital security that has bothered Kemly. She understands that empowering individuals to protect their data and privacy and demanding ethical approaches from tech corporations are important. But these are liberal patches to problems that will not be alleviated with more digital security. Thus Sulá Batsú’s objective combines multiple knowledges, the technical and what is considered “nontechnical” to approach both social and individual forms of oppression. This point is crucial. The co-op has slowly undergone a transformation, distancing itself more and more from mere “inclusion” in the digital society. “This is the base of our project and of the transformation of the co-op,” Kemly explains. As an example of this shift that

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is critical of inclusion, Sulá Batsú has recently started to collaborate in a project—guided, designed, and directed by the Cabécar women—to create an internet community network in their lands with the goal of achieving “digital sovereignty,” a term that has become more and more common among digital activists in Latin America.⁶ The community network defies state and corporate agendas of digital inclusion and offers a terrain—both literal and metaphorical—of Indigenous assertion and contestation.

Sulá Batsú conducted a two-year project (2014–16) on digital security training for women who work at pineapple cultivations on the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica that provides insights into the dilemma of focusing on digital inclusion as a solution to social problems. Similar to Browne’s decentering, the *defensoras* against the pineapple corporations in Costa Rica both center and decenter the technological in their body-territory activism. This project—funded by the University of Toronto’s Citizen Lab—focused on research on the digital vulnerabilities of women environmental leaders at the *piñeras* (pineapple-producing corporations). A highly destructive monoculture in Costa Rica, pineapple cultivation has exhausted the land, undermining the possibilities of other forms of agriculture, allowed multinational corporations to privatize lands, contaminated surrounding bodies of water, and exploited the workers.⁷

Elena, one of the co-op activists who led the initiative, explained that although funding from the University of Toronto focused on digital security training, the co-op immediately realized through their conversations with these *defensoras* that their priorities were the defense of their lands and their bodies. Elena recalls how these women who led the environmental struggle against the pineapple multinationals had a political awakening that connected the land to their bodies and intimate lives: “We saw patterns in the stories of these women that showed that an internal struggle ensued when they began participating in the defense of their territories. They started to struggle within their families, defending their bodies. They would tell us, ‘Yes, when I started community organizing, I also started to go to school,’ or ‘That is when I left my husband.’ So we identified that pattern: the connection between the defense of the territory and the defense of their bodies.”

During our interview in 2019, Elena explained that the co-op had

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started the project with the sole idea of offering digital security training to these rural leaders. These women mostly use WhatsApp and Facebook⁸ on their cell phones to communicate with each other, which puts them at a greater risk of surveillance and harassment by their employers. But as community organizers and environmental leaders, their struggles transcended digital security:

When we started to discuss violence against activists in digital spaces, they were always bringing up the physical threats they receive in their territories. And then we went deeper and realized that there were three fronts of struggle: personal, territorial, and digital. In the manual we made together, we included the issue of digital security but also issues of safety in their communities. For instance, we pointed to the safest paths they could take to walk home, because basically their enemies [the employers] live one kilometer from them, and people started to find out that they were protesting, and this has also caused their neighbors (coworkers) to accuse them of trying to get them fired.

The body-territory assembly—theorized by various Indigenous feminist communitarian thinkers from Latin America such as Lorena Cabnal and Julieta Paredes—reveals three important and interrelated issues that defy the promise of digital inclusion: the digital is embodied, spatialized, and detached from the guise of abstraction; it demonstrates the ways in which violence is interconnected, crossing numerous realms from the intimate to the territorial; and technologies can be simultaneously centered and decentered (an issue I will return to soon).⁹

Elena recalled that part of the process was identifying the violence these women confronted because of being women. The community organizers had not realized that being women made them vulnerable in specific ways, such as threats against their children (mostly their daughters), sexual harassment, and feeling unsafe in their own communities and territories. Women became the target of sexist jokes in the workplace and communities, such as people telling their husbands to “control their women.” “Men would not be threatened in these ways,” Elena said. Sulá Batsú did conduct digital training sessions on privacy and data protection and codesigned a manual on digital security. But it was clear through their participatory methodologies with the community

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that these women's struggles were part of a much broader landscape of violence.

TIC-as

One of the co-op's most important projects is TIC-as, a three-year proposal initially funded by UN Women (2013–16), renewed for another two years by Google in 2017, and supported by the Inter-American Development Bank and UNESCO, to train, guide, and support young rural women and girls in the fields of science and technology. *TIC-as* is a play on words with *ticas*, the popular term for women from Costa Rica, and TICS, the acronym for Information and Communication Technologies in Spanish. The TIC-as project consists of eighteen initiatives including research on data, equity in STEM fields, online gender-based violence, technology cafés, Indigenous technologies, technology-based entrepreneurship, ecofeminism and technology, and biannual hackathons. In Costa Rica alone, by 2019, TIC-as had worked with twenty-five hundred participants. The TIC-as project offers workshops on computing, coding, and leadership for girls throughout their school years as well as support for young rural women, some of whom are studying in STEM fields.

Workshops for girls (ages 10–17) mostly consist of trainings in basic internet skills and use and computer disassembly and reassembly. Girls learn how to dismantle old computers that have been donated, reassemble them, and sometimes even make jewelry out of old parts. The idea is for them to understand that computers are not mysterious black boxes but legible and usable everyday objects.¹⁰ This is a deeply emotional experience for both Sulá Batsú activists and for workshop participants. Activists explained that girls “fall in love” with technology through many of these experiences. Although girls are usually not afraid of technology—Kemly argues that fear appears at a later age—the process of demystification, including the tinkering, meddling, and opening of that black box, makes the computers a part of their lives. Sulá Batsú staff invite girls to participate in public art projects in their communities, such as murals and graffiti, that contain messages and images that encourage girls to explore and engage with technology and science.

Workshops for young women (ages 18–30) are mostly on open-source

code programming, application (app) design, and online security. Other offerings include talks by leaders in science and technology fields on how to overcome stereotypes and gendered cultural norms. TIC-as has already collaborated with thirteen hundred girls and young women in San Carlos, the northern rural city in Costa Rica on the border with Nicaragua that Kemly identifies as having the potential of becoming a “technological pole”—a center for technological production and development—because of the industries and technical universities headquartered there. The workshops with young women are more focused on busting myths about women and technology, designing collaborative strategies to overcome gender barriers in higher education and the workplace, and supporting the creation of local and regional networks of women in science and technology. They also offer young women more advanced training in programming, design, and technological entrepreneurship, train them to become mentors for girls, and invite them to international technology conferences.

In March 2017, Google donated \$400,000 to Sulá Batsú to expand the project to eighteen hundred rural girls and six hundred of their mothers in Costa Rica, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, and Panama. Initially funded by Google, the project became *La voz de las chicas del Centro de América* (The Voice of the Girls/Women from the Center of America). The project expanded from digital trainings on internet skills, data protection, app design, and coding to including workshops on audiovisual design and editing, musical composition, social media, and digital storytelling. In 2021 a group of young women from Nicaragua who had participated in the program created an impressive series of engravings depicting the ways in which technology harms the planet (see figure 1).

TIC-as, which has won numerous national and international awards, such as the 2019 UNESCO Prize for Girl’s and Women’s Education, has taken on a life of its own, becoming a network of young women throughout Costa Rica and Central America. It is now the heart of Sulá Batsú, because it has fostered relationships of care among participants, alumnae, and the co-op’s activists. Many of the young women who have participated in TIC-as have become leaders in subsequent workshops and have even become associates of *la coope*. TIC-as encapsulates one



FIGURE 1. “Wired Forest” by Nathy Guevara (a pseudonym) is an engraving (artist’s proof) made in one of the workshops of Sulá Batsú’s TIC-as project, “La voz de las chicas del Centro de América.” Reprinted with permission.

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of the co-op's main goals: to encourage women to appropriate technology to improve their lives and communities, beyond merely consuming corporative technology. In Costa Rica the technology sector is dominated by multinational corporations in urban areas, such as Amazon, Microsoft, Hewlett Packard, Intel, and IBM (both in manufacturing and research and development). Rita Laura Segato argues that "there is no major obstacle for the historic project of capital in its expansionist path other than local and community connections."¹¹ Fostering the possibility of remaining in your community is central to Sulá Batsú's technopolitics of care. Home and community can be sites of violence, precarity, and binding traditions, and leaving could be necessary and urgent. Sulá Batsú activists are well aware of this. This is why I stress that activists collaborate with women so they have the *possibility* of remaining in and transforming their communities instead of having to migrate to capital cities, or Europe and the United States, searching for futures that they could not have at home. Sulá Batsú nurtures a "politics of connections" that surpasses the supremacy of technology, while simultaneously integrating it.

In the summer of 2015, I attended a *Café Tecnológico* (technology coffee hour), one of the monthly meetings Sulá Batsú holds with the TIC-as participants at the local technical college in rural San Carlos. In a huge conference room, about thirty college-age women were visibly eager for the *tertulia* (conversation) to begin. Two tech experts invited by Sulá Batsú discussed their experiences in the private sector, and a visiting professor from Spain and I were also invited to offer talks. The experts' talks were focused on how to survive and thrive in the entrepreneurial and private sector worlds in ways that reproduced heteronormative notions of gender, such as advice on how to be both a good mother and a successful businesswoman.

But what captured my attention were the visible affective bonds between the young women and the Sulá Batsú activists. In my subsequent encounters and interviews with some of the young women—all of whom are studying scientific fields in college or are interested in one way or another in science and technology—many of them remarked that the relationships they had created with Sulá Batsú activists had been fundamental in helping them survive the male-dominated world of

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science and technology. One of the participants said, “I feel that TIC-as gives us security. They make us feel that as a woman you’re really doing valuable work. . . . I really like their attitude, how they motivate women. This has provoked a change in all of us. I have seen how we have grown.” Another remarked: “TIC-as gives you the courage to keep on going. I don’t know how to explain it. It gives you that thing, that *espinita* [gut feeling, inspiration] of growing, of being truly powerful, like they say.”

Beyond the affective bonds between them, the TIC-as participants also frequently commented on how the project had made them feel “powerful,” helping them gain respect in their families and communities. I interviewed a group of TIC-as participants during a stormy afternoon in rural San Carlos. We met at a local café, with couches and lounge seats, amid magnificent mountains lush with infinite shades of green. They were between eighteen and twenty-two years of age, studying software engineering at the local technical university, and from San Carlos (except one who was from the Caribbean coast of the country). They were eager to talk. We spent a whole afternoon together drinking coffee. One of the TIC-as participants told me: “You really feel powerful because with technology you create things, new things, and you feel ‘Wow, I did something different; I achieved something no one has done.’” Another young woman said: “Technology gives you both the power to believe in yourself and help others. It’s like a viral network, where one can share knowledge and do great things.”

And another participant observed: “To be in this field makes others take you more seriously, because people do not expect you to study careers in technology. They expect you to be a teacher or something. And when you say you are studying to become a software engineer, they say ‘What?!’ You start to be taken seriously.” When I asked them, “Why technology? Why become an entrepreneur?” one participant exclaimed: “I want to have superpowers! I want to be superpowerful. I want to think about doing something and be able to do it. I want to have the ability to say, ‘I will develop software that many men will use, and they will have to recognize that a woman made it.’ Because machismo often does not let men acknowledge that a woman actually made something.”

This sentiment dovetails with mainstream ideas of “empowerment”

and of becoming part of the exclusive STEM “boys club.” Technology, as expressed by these young women, is a magic bullet that endows them with power just because they are women in a male-dominated space. Their aspirations are geared toward inclusion, not necessarily transformation. These ideas about technology are pervasive. Yet Sulá Batsú provides a rhizomatic and collaborative model that inspires practices that contest these individualistic forms of empowerment. These superpowers include a commitment to their communities, to their *compañeras* (friends, colleagues), and to the activists of Sulá Batsú with whom they have continued to collaborate by becoming mentors to younger TIC-as cohorts even after becoming professionals. Affective bonds have shaped their relationships and visions of technology.

When I asked these young women if they would identify as feminists during our interviews in 2015, they emphatically said no. Coming from Catholic rural families and dealing with their own emancipation while simultaneously abiding by cultural gendered norms, being a “feminist” was far too radical. For them, *feminism* still meant hating men and not wanting to get married or have kids, among other stereotypes. This had changed by the time of my trip in 2019. Actually, I noticed a political awakening among Sulá Batsú activists. “How could I not be a feminist during these times,” said Samuel, the co-op’s social media and communications manager and a talented artist. I had created a reputation in la coope of asking all of them if they were feminists. Lila told me that Samuel had been waiting for me to arrive so that he could amend his previous stance on feminism. In our interview in 2019, Samuel alluded to the extreme violence against women in Central America and affirmed the urgency of being a feminist in these times. One of the TIC-as participants I had interviewed in 2015—who in 2019 was working as a software engineer in her hometown San Carlos and had become a co-op associate—asked me: “Did I really tell you then that I was not a feminist?”

Firuzeh: Yes, you did! What has changed since then? Tell me.

TIC-as participant: Well, let me see, what has changed? I think that my process with TIC-as has led me to feel empowered because of the opportunities it has given me. Also, to be able to guide other

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girls and young women. I have seen the impact, let's see, of that chain of knowledges, the impact of understanding that we are sisters, be with them when something has happened . . . I am surprised, Firuzeh.

Firuzeh: Really? Yes, yes, you told me that! I follow you on social media, and throughout the years I have seen a transformation. And I told myself, I have to talk to her . . .

TIC-as participant: Yes, yes, I think you are right, I remember a tweet I wrote in which I said that we should not get confused with this elitist feminism that we are sold. That kind of feminism we see in the tech world. For instance, companies put a woman as the director, and it's like "women have it easy—all women have it easy." And it is not like that at all. It seems like the path to get up there is not that hard. Obviously, I appreciate all those testimonies from women, but I do not share that philosophy that those journeys are perfect. Because when you tell college women that those journeys are perfect, then when they arrive, they get frustrated and feel lied to. We have to tell them how things really are.

TIC-as continues to be one of the souls of *la coope*. And yet, it is also undergoing a profound transformation. When I started my research on Sulá Batsú in 2015, TIC-as was overwhelmingly geared toward supporting young women who wanted to study and work in STEM fields as well as fostering technologically based entrepreneurship. The entrepreneurship dimension has remained strong and thrived, but the STEM part has changed considerably. Through a painful realization, as well as a feminist political awakening of sorts, Sulá Batsú activists have discovered that incorporating women in STEM companies ultimately furthers corporate gains. Tech corporations co-opt many of these young women after hiring them because TIC-as has become such a renowned project. Companies parade the recruitment of these young women to signal progress, openness, inclusion, and equity.¹²

Speaking about the emphasis on inclusion—specifically of Black programmers—as a solution to inequality in the tech industry, sociologist Ruha Benjamin argues that by “focusing mainly on individuals’ identity

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and overlooking the norms and structures of the tech industry, many diversity initiatives offer little more than cosmetic change, demographic percentages on a company's pie chart, concealing rather than undoing the racist status quo."¹³ This does not mean there are no spaces for agency. For decades, feminist research has studied the ways in which women negotiate, navigate, and resist STEM-related and other corporate spaces. Kemly described the process of young rural TIC-as participants' integration and co-optation in STEM corporations: "I have realized that after TIC-as, when these young women enter the business world, they are immediately co-opted. They have tremendous organizational skills as well as training in collective action. Then these corporations hire them, co-opt them, and use these capacities to fulfill their own interests. Once these women are embedded in the business world, it is very difficult to take them out of there."

The co-op has realized that, at the end of the day, corporations are driven by maximizing profits and "innovation" under the guise of gender equity, inclusion, and diversity. Of course, this is not news, but after years of advocating for women's inclusion in corporate STEM, the results have made Sulá Batsú members interrogate their original objectives. Kemly says: "When we started to work on this topic, more women in technology, and we realized that we were piled together with big tech corporations and states, then I started to ask myself, But do we want the same things? Why is there so much interest in this? Why are they so interested in women? And I would tell myself, 'But no one cares about women!' . . . Then we realized that we were advocating in defense of the corporate and state agendas, and we said, 'But what is this?'"

The co-op is increasingly critical of other well-known strategies of inclusion, such as inviting women who have "made it" to serve as role models for young women. Sulá Batsú has realized that centering "role models" is a fundamentally cruel strategy, because most of the young women they work with—crossed by differences of class, race, and nationality—do not have access to the same opportunities many of these women had. The role model system is built upon ideas of meritocracy and self-reliance, on individual stories of success that completely disregard structural barriers. These stories obscure the hardships and pain

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these role models had to go through to become prominent figures in STEM. Thus the co-op is slowly moving toward a more rhizomatic model in which young women can organize as grassroots STEM collectives where women can support each other, foster intellectual and affective bonds, teach and collaborate with each other, and establish local tech enterprises. This is the future the co-op envisions.

Hackathons

The biannual “feminine hackathons” are part of the TIC-as umbrella project. The co-op has organized five hackathons since 2014 in Costa Rica, and one included young women from Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean. The hackathons have been held in the rural northern region, in the southern part of the country, in Limón on the Caribbean coast, and in the capital, San José, representing rural, Indigenous, Black, and coastal geographic social locations. Since 2014, 360 young women (sixteen to thirty years old) have participated. Under the slogan “This is not a competition, this is a community gathering,” the hackathons are thirty-six-hour nonstop events where groups of girls and young women design technological “prototypes”—apps, virtual maps, wearable technology, and so forth—with a social objective in mind.

Participants belong to a spectrum of technological dexterity; the co-op mixes young women who might be in STEM or are studying a STEM field with women who might not have access to a computer or the internet, for example. The intermingling of multiple knowledges is fundamental for the project. There are no winners, but rather projects are highlighted. Each hackathon—held after a three-month process of selection and participatory research in the communities and regions where the events will be held—has organized under a specific theme, such as green technologies, feminist coding, urban sustainability, or satellite technologies. Participants have designed apps to help teenage mothers find resources, an Amazon-style app for shopping in local stores, an app that identifies nearby public transportation options, and a glossary of words chosen and defined by girls so that the adults in their lives understand what they mean by concepts such as “stereotypes,” “conflict resolution,” and “communication.” The hackathons are designed according to seven principles:

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1. Everyone should know how to design technology because it is a way to have a voice in the digital society.
2. No one should be excluded from this process by a technological elite.
3. No one should be excluded from this process because of their economic, cultural, gender, or geographical contexts, conditions, or status.
4. The communities for whom technologies are developed are the only ones that can judge if these technologies are useful.
5. Technological proposals belong to the groups that produce them.
6. There should be exclusive spaces for women to develop technologies.
7. Plural and diverse conditions must be created to foster technological proposals.

Sulá Batsú's hackathons are different from other mainstream, more competitive events. Although the main event is thirty-six-hours nonstop, the processes before and after are the most important parts of the hackathon for the co-op. Before each hackathon and during at least two to three months in meetings both online and in-person, the co-op offers workshops in leadership, capacity building, and technological skills. The formation consists of understanding the needs of the geographic region where the hackathon will be held. Kemly explained that for the hackathon in the Caribbean city of Limón, which has a major Black population, we “informed the young women in the history of the Black people of the region, and the problems they confront.”

The participants define what they are looking for in technology based on the problems and the needs of the people of the region. One of the most important elements of the hackathons is that juries are composed of both experts in STEM—from academia and the private and public sectors—and members of community-based organizations. In the hackathon in Limón, surrounded by various Indigenous communities, Indigenous and Black organizations formed part of the jury. “This encounter between the tech community and the community is one of the most im-

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portant aspects of the hackathons,” Kemly said. The hackathon might officially “end” after the thirty-six-hour event, but the process extends throughout the network of women who continue to work in their communities, with each other, and with the co-op and offer continuity by participating as “godmothers” in future hackathons.

In the 2018 hackathon, held in the Caribbean town of Limón, two prototypes were highlighted: the digital application *Okama Süei* (translated as “White man’s technology” in the Indigenous language Cabécar) and *Cybertrash*, a satellite technology that would survey the sea-devouring microplastics, one of the main contaminants of the ocean. It was in this hackathon that Sulá Batsú started working with Indigenous Cabécar and Bribri women from the Alto Pacuare semiautonomous region in the Caribbean coast. The app the women designed aims to counteract the potential extractivism and erasure of Indigenous knowledges in the face of imminent internet connection in their region. Through *Okama Süei*, Indigenous women intend for non-Indigenous people to “feel” their language, traditions, ceremonies, knowledges, and ways of being and thinking. They appropriate the way in which their knowledges travel through and beyond the internet in another iteration of the ways in which relationships both lie within and surpass technologies. One of the goals of the virtual map—which integrates videos, audios, images, and maps in the Cabécar language and Spanish—is to create awareness of the lives and richness of the Cabécar and Bribri communities in developing advocacy campaigns and a “course of action” generating policies and procedures to protect Indigenous knowledges in Costa Rica.

The relationship between Sulá Batsú and these Indigenous leaders has extended beyond the hackathon, and *Okama Süei*—which has been funded by the Embassy of Canada in Costa Rica, UNESCO, the Frida Program, and the College of Information and Computation Professionals of Costa Rica (CPIC in Spanish)—has now become a central project for Sulá Batsú and has transformed its visions for technology. In the launch of the *Okama Süei* application in July 2021, which I attended via Zoom, the women from Alto Pacuare presented their project and talked about codesigning the icons with one of Sulá Batsú’s activists. The platform has twelve icons that represent themes that are important for their community, such as agriculture, food, the home, art, the economy, knowledges,

medicine, women, and sound. One of the members of the Association of Women of Alto Pacuare said: “Sound is very important because everything comes in the form of oral transmission.” The codesigner from Sulá Batsú mentioned that during the process of design, she had learned a lot and her perspectives “as a Western woman” had been constantly challenged, for instance, when the Indigenous women told her that the icon for the “economy” had to be represented by women holding hands. “It is very, very important to state that these women’s knowledges can never, never be contained in a technological device. Their knowledges are built in everyday life,” Kemly said during the event, emphasizing the limits of technologies and the ways in which life overflows the technological. This is the direction that Sulá Batsú is taking after sixteen years of work centered on digital technologies.

Finally, my conversation with Kemly veered toward the polemic issue of “entrepreneurship.” An important objective of the hackathons, as well as of the co-op in general, is to foster women-led and collective enterprises that design technologies that attend to local needs. Kemly and the co-op have been emphatic on the importance of women being able to “make money” and thrive in their communities. She insists that *entrepreneurship* should not be a “bad word” within feminist or progressive politics and that women have the right to live with dignity by generating their own capital. The co-op’s activists believe that by designing technologies “with a purpose” and participating in the construction of the data society, women can transform the political and socioeconomic conditions of their communities. They are not interested in filling multinational technology companies with women—although this has certainly been a consequence of their work with young women—but rather they hope to encourage women to manage their resources and design technologies through localized entrepreneurship.

Technology has a very particular place in this puzzle. The activists believe that through community-designed collaborative and ecologically friendly technologies, justice is possible. The key is not the technology per se but the relationships that are created: relationships with oneself, each other, the community, and the planet. Technology opens the possibilities of collaboration. Sulá Batsú’s vision of entrepreneurship both complies and is in tension with national and transnational plans for the

Third World Technological Woman. In Costa Rica state policies employ an individualistic and entrepreneurial perspective that is important to understand because the co-op is constantly negotiating with state policies and discourses.

Costa Rica: Women and Technology

Costa Rica is categorized as an “upper-middle-income economy,” according to the World Bank, and within the context of Central America it is considered to be socioeconomically privileged.¹⁴ This classification limits the country’s access to development aid, although numerous forms of inequality persist and have worsened due to the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁵ The IMF and World Bank structural adjustment programs (SAPs) in the 1980s that demanded governments slash social spending and adopt austerity measures, deregulation, export promotion, and privatization as means of economic development impacted the country. Although poverty and inequality increased after the implementation of SAPs, Costa Rica continued to be the most stable and prosperous country in Central America (the military had been abolished in 1948 after a civil war).¹⁶ Costa Rica has been labeled a “mixed economy” with a combination of market and state-led economic approaches.¹⁷ It has important social welfare provisions in universal health care, education, and telecommunications, and a mix of national, foreign, and corporate investment in eco-tourism, agriculture, and technology. Costa Rica also has a long and vigorous history of cooperatives, especially in the agricultural sector.¹⁸

Fostering entrepreneurship through micro-, small, and medium-sized enterprises is a priority, with the Ministerio de Economía, Industria y Comercio (MEIC) at the helm of establishing public policy in this area since 1977. In 2017, 98 percent of the country’s national enterprises (a 7 percent increase since 2012) were micro-, small, and medium-sized enterprises with fewer than one hundred employees, 64 percent in the service sector, contributing to 35 percent of jobs and 36 percent of the GDP.¹⁹ In the ICT sector, micro-, small, and medium-sized enterprises depended mostly on national capital, while large enterprises (more than one hundred employees) depended mostly on foreign capital.²⁰ The ICT

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sector has thrived, both nationally and globally, mostly in software development.²¹ One of the driving principles of the 2030 National Enterprise Policy, established by the MEIC in 2020, is gender inclusivity.²² This national plan states that one of the main challenges in the creation of micro-, small, and medium-sized enterprises in the country is the gap in adopting new technologies.²³ Starting in the 1990s, foreign big-tech companies such as Intel (which closed its manufacturing facility in 2014), Microsoft, IBM, Google, Amazon, Akamai, and Hewlett-Packard opened operations in Costa Rica, making electronics and software development prime industries (medical equipment is also an important sector of the broader technology industry).

Costa Rica boasts comprehensive digital policy frameworks. The country has one of the highest mobile broadband penetration rates in Latin America, with one of the most affordable costs of broadband access in the region, although gender and urban/rural divides persist.²⁴ As of 2019, statistics show that the internet penetration in Costa Rica is 85.9 percent (the highest in Central America).²⁵ The Ministerio de Ciencia, Innovación, Tecnología y Telecomunicaciones (MICITT) is the state agency charged with designing and implementing ICT policy. The MICITT has created important national ICT policies, such as the National Science, Technology, and Innovation Plan 2015–2021, the 2017 National Policy for a Society and Economy Based on Knowledge, and the National Telecommunications Development Plan (PNDT). The PNDT, first ratified in 2009, with a second phase comprising 2015–2021, and a third phase covering 2022–2027, is aimed at amplifying national competitiveness through digital inclusion, transparent electronic government, and the digital economy, closing the digital divide, developing universal access, building infrastructure, and improving broadband services. It includes the development of a Digital Solidarity Agenda focused on access for “vulnerable” communities, such as people with disabilities, Indigenous populations, the elderly, children and youth, women head of households, and “micro-entrepreneurial women.”²⁶ The MICITT has also designed strategies to support national policies, such as the 2018 Strategy for Digital Transformation Towards the Bicentenary of Costa Rica 4.0, focused on inserting the country into the “Fourth Industrial Revolution.”²⁷

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The need to include women in STEM fields is a definite priority for the country, where women occupy the 30 percent to 40 percent of jobs in these fields.²⁸ In 2017 the MCITT launched the National Policy for Equality between Women and Men in Training, Employment and the Enjoyment of the Products of Science, Technology, Telecommunications and Innovation 2018–2027 (Política Nacional para la Igualdad entre Mujeres y Hombres en la Formación, el Empleo y el Disfrute de los Productos de la Ciencia, la Tecnología, las Telecomunicaciones y la Innovación, PICTTI) —a multisectorial effort with numerous state agencies, the private sector, and civil society organizations, including Sulá Batsú. With support from the National Institute of Women (Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres, INAMU), the PICTTI’s objective is to include more women in STEM education and jobs and “equalize the number of women and men attracted to training, skill development, quality employment, permanency, and research in the different fields of science, technology and innovation.”²⁹ The five “strategic pillars” of the policy are (1) attracting women into science, technology, and innovation; (2) training and retention of women in careers in science, technology, and innovation; (3) promotion of women’s research and employment in science, technology, and innovation; (4) social ownership of science with a gender perspective; and (5) sustainability and follow-up. The policy mandated the creation of a high-level commission and an interagency commission in charge of overview and implementation.

These policies often combine women, ICTs/STEM, entrepreneurship, and the importance of formal economic inclusion; thus the Third World Technological Woman is also made through state policy and discourse. In 2021 the MICITT added *Innovation* to its official name and created the Costa Rican Promoter of Innovation and Investigation (previously the Consejo Nacional para Investigaciones Científicas y Tecnológicas, CONICIT) in charge of implementing policies and providing funding for innovation, capacitation, and investigation in the technology sector.³⁰ The incorporation of the word *innovation* signals a fundamental shift toward entrepreneurialism. The CONICIT launched the first national-level project in 2021, CONSTELAR, which will be steered by the business incubator Impact Hub San José, part of a global network

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centered on the “construction of entrepreneurial communities to create high impact,” according to its website.³¹

Developed by the Costa Rica United States Foundation for Cooperation (CRUSA) and the CONICIT and supported by the Spyre Group, an entrepreneurial organization from Israel, CONSTELAR is focused on training and supporting women’s entrepreneurship in STEM. The project includes an incubation program (which in its first phase in 2021 selected twelve women for twelve weeks); clubs for students, researchers, and professors in STEM in universities across the country; mentoring in areas of education and financing; a national STEM event (the first one was celebrated in September 2021); and a platform to interact and exchange ideas. The goal of CONSTELAR is to “formalize ventures to be able to opt for venture capital funds so that women can take the first step in creating companies, and that at some point they can sell or produce large profits, find partners who help them expand, and provide jobs.”³²

One of the focus areas of the National Institute of Women (Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres, INAMU)—which had a vital part in the elaboration of the PICTTI—is science, technology, and gender, in addition to other issues concerning gender-based violence, economic autonomy, civic participation, and health and education. Although entrepreneurship is an area of focus of this state agency, the priority is to provide women with the educational and financial opportunities to thrive in STEM academic fields and the workplace. There is a pervasive sense that the digital society is running away and women are being left behind, more so due to COVID-19. INAMU offers grants and training for women’s entrepreneurial projects, although not necessarily centered on entrepreneurship in ICTs but rather on ICTs as tools to develop ventures such as the Fund to Foster Productive Activities and of Organization for Women (Fondo de Fomento para Actividades Productivas y de Organización de las Mujeres—FOMUJERES) and Proyecto Emprende. INAMU also focuses on cooperatives, employment, and unpaid domestic work issues under the economic autonomy program.

INAMU’s incursion in areas of science and technology—mostly based on the Santo Domingo Consensus of 2013, the agreement of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean’s Twelfth

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Regional Conference on Women from Latin America and the Caribbean, dedicated that year to ICTs and STEM—was reinforced in 2016 with the work of Mauren Navarro Castillo, a specialist in public policy at the Institute. In our interview in 2019 she noted that with the looming advance of automation, “institutions have started to run, like the MICITT, who has seen the need for labor in which women must play an important role, and obviously this has to do with women, so the INAMU has had to remain relevant regarding this issue.” Navarro Castillo has a holistic perspective on digital technologies that follows “humanistic” (a term she prefers to “feminist”) principles based on ecological awareness and solidarity. She is fiercely opposed to the US-based capitalist models of technological design, distribution, and adoption. I asked Navarro Castillo what it meant for her to incorporate women in STEM:

Firuzeh: But when we think that we want women in the field of science and technology, what do we want women to do? What do we want women to contribute?

Mauren Navarro Castillo: Of course, yes, yes, their abilities obviously, in the development of a country, I would say, this . . . responsibly, responsibly, right? And that implies understanding that I can develop something that has a positive impact on my society and in my country and that implies talking about the environment, about projects and products that do not affect childhood, putting them more like zombies or affecting their emotional part of cognitive development. . . . With products that positively impact the abilities of women. We are talking about health, medicine, and others, and obviously I see them producing, being recognized for their scope, for their capabilities. Not simply because it is fashionable.

Navarro Castillo’s perspective offers a glimpse into the contradictory nature of the state. There is not a homogeneous policy or discourse on women, ICTs, and STEM. This opens multiple possibilities, although the major focus is financial inclusion.

In an interview in 2015, for instance, Alejandra Mora, the head of the National Institute of Women at the time, commented that in today’s world, women had to learn digital skills to become “competitive” in the corporate world, as microentrepreneurs, and in the political sphere.

Mora emphasized the need for more education, training, and financing to support women in STEM at all levels. She commented that the funds disbursed through the FOMUJERES program were aimed at securing public investment in fostering an understanding that if women “have an aggregated value, their product will be better, their competitiveness will be better, which places them in a different [economic] sector.” These entrepreneurial and inclusionary policies and discourses are overwhelmingly individually based and focus on women “making it” in state, national, and global private sector spheres. In the context of prevalent state and transnational emphasis on making women into neoliberal, technologically savvy figures to advance economic development, in what ways is it possible to reimagine the Third World Technological Woman?

Decolonial and Feminist Entrepreneurship?

“Decolonization also crosses through entrepreneurship,” Kemly told me during one of our many conversations about Sulá Batsú’s focus on entrepreneurship. In Sulá Batsú, “entrepreneurship” is something of a hybrid, encapsulating a blend of market-based and feminist strategies. Activists envision entrepreneurship as a form of cooperative politics that will offer possibilities of solidarity among women. The organization believes in feminist interventions in technological production, community building, and political participation, as well as local economic development. This is not simply paying lip service to developmental discourses that use practically the same language and concepts. Kemly has imprinted on *la coope* her converging beliefs in feminist principles of horizontality, economic justice, and community making with an entrepreneurial philosophy because “we are a business; that’s clear.” She explained her vision of feminist entrepreneurship this way:

We promote that women should be associative, networked, it may be with men, no one is saying the contrary, but led by women. We have realized that neither men nor women are prepared for entrepreneurship after college, much less prepared to develop projects that address social problems. This is all part of our feminist approach. Working together in association, to solve social problems, but also generate wealth—women also have to eat. They have no power to resist the

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draw of these large companies that will offer five times more money, but if they succumb, they will not be the owners of their own companies.

This sentiment resonates with official state, United Nations, and corporate discourse on digital technologies and women. Sulá Batsú reproduces the technological entrepreneurial model, with the woman as technological producer who will have a multiplier effect on her family, community, and society.

But I find that the co-op's everyday praxis is about much more. In their analysis of what they consider oversimplified feminist critiques of co-optation and selling out, Catherine Eschle and Bice Maiguashca insist that "a movement cannot earn the title of progressive if its agents and agenda are worthy, but its practices unjustifiable."³³ As feminist scholars, we must examine the ways in which feminist endeavors are entangled with power. We must also look at organizational process and implementation to understand numerous forms of political agency.³⁴ It is important for Sulá Batsú activists to support women to be financially independent and make money but also to foster principles based on solidarity and social justice. Outcomes are important, but their projects focus on process. They must comply with the reporting requirements of funders and offer tangible evidence of change through hard numbers; quantification remains a requirement. But for the activists, this is mostly an administrative transaction. The process of collectivization is central to both their structure as a cooperative as well as their working philosophy, evidenced, as I have described, through their collective salaries, shared tasks, and joint conceptualization and implementation of projects.

Marcela, a former long-term staff member of *la coope*, told me about one isolated fishing community in the south of Costa Rica, where she offered a series of workshops on how to use computers. They used a solar battery to power one computer. The fishers wanted to learn how to use technology for selling their products in local markets. The workshop was done in the community. Marcela hoped the workshop would have long-term social effects beyond helping them with their emerging business. She hoped that the skills learned and the collective use of the only computer in the village could strengthen community ties and solidarity.

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Marcela told participants that their pencils, pens, and papers were also technologies, just like the computer and the internet, in terms of being tools and spaces that could help them. Establishing this sense of closeness, familiarity, and demystification of technology is one of Sulá Batsú's strategies in working on entrepreneurship. Technology is envisioned as an affective process through which women and other oppressed communities can achieve both individual and collective transformation. Technology thus opens the possibilities of collaboration and creation.

Sulá Batsú's use and promotion of free and open-source software and free copyright also contests corporate forms of hierarchical and proprietary knowledge production in what could be interpreted as a manifestation of a feminist politics of the commons.³⁵ Beyond the ways in which the technical system functions, free software also reflects a set of political, ethical, and moral norms, values, and commitments that embody Sulá Batsú's organizational philosophy and work.³⁶ Late anthropologist Jeffrey Juris described it as "a powerful model for (re)organizing society based on horizontal collaboration, participatory democracy, and coordination through autonomy and diversity."³⁷

The concept of the commons, central in the literature on the internet, has been theorized as mainly a "space" in which communities share and exchange goods and labor and affect subverting capitalist market-based relations.³⁸ Silvia Federici argues that international development institutions have appropriated the language of the commons and "put it at the service of privatization."³⁹ Development institutions have found that the market can sustain itself efficiently only through the circulation of nonmonetary relationships in the form of trust and confidence (and, yes, care). But the boundaries between collective forms of organization and capitalist market-based relations may sometimes be tenuous. Sulá Batsú is a case in point. In an email conversation I had with Kemly about the objectives of the co-op, she pointed out repeatedly that Sulá Batsú was "disruptive" because it proposes the disruption of traditional cultural norms and socioeconomic approaches that maintain women's inequality in science and technology. It is focused on creating a feminist commons of cooperation, knowledge, and skills. Kemly explained: "The basis are the networks of mutual support; we must build technology that is sustained in the encounter, in mutual support that confronts technologi-

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cal development based on the competition of the best, in the pursuit of success understood as the entrepreneur who has a startup and sells it to make money. Our approach to the construction of technology is based on the encounter of multiplicities. Exchange and collective construction will create the technological solutions that the world requires.”

At the same time, Kemly insists that “entrepreneurship is not a bad word.” The co-op has been reimagining what a feminist model of entrepreneurship could look like. “To be able to be independent,” she says, “we women have to create and build businesses that are different from tech businesses. There is another rupture here that I am emphasizing: What does it mean to build a feminist tech-based business? What does it mean that it be headed by women? What makes it different? How is it organized differently? What is its market? What services does it offer? Above all, Firu, what is its business model? Is it impossible to build a business model that does not practice data surveillance and violates people’s privacy?”

Sulá Batsú embraces entrepreneurship as a form of success and does not engage in radical feminist and anticapitalist politics, yet its commitment to collectivization and solidarity also challenges neoliberal rationalities based on self-reliance and personal responsibility. Would international development institutions approve of its work? They would, and they have. The co-op reproduces ideas on the importance of entrepreneurship for women’s and communities’ well-being and success. These discourses obscure the historical and contemporary political and economic structures that have produced the inequalities that the Technological Woman is supposed to overcome. And yet, although the co-op defines itself fundamentally as a “development organization,” I contend that it is also immersed in postdevelopmental imaginaries and practices, as J. K. Gibson-Graham astutely argues: “The aim of post-development theorizing about local and regional development does not preclude involvement of people and places with capitalist enterprise, wage labor, formal markets or mainstream financial institutions.”⁴⁰

Sulá Batsú instills principles of horizontality, solidarity, collective struggle, and economic redistribution—through love, trust, and deep affective bonds—that are a far cry from individualistic neoliberal politics. Is this a form of overt and planned resistance? Perhaps not. Yet Sulá

Batsú's collective politics contrast with the basis of neoliberal development discourse.

Living the World You Imagine

It would be impossible to understand Sulá Batsú's work without understanding its relationships.⁴¹ Its members' bonds, income and knowledge collectivization, horizontality, and solidarity are deeply connected with their work on technology. They enact a form of prefigurative politics, which means that they practice the world they envision: nonhierarchical, horizontal, collective, and affectionate.⁴² The office in Barrio Escalante is organized as an open space, full of natural light, where everyone can look at each other. Every day at 3:00 p.m. we had coffee together, an almost sacred daily bonding ritual. They work, talk, and laugh, and also move through conflicts regarding differences in approaches, styles, and objectives. They have arguments on issues that range from funding sources to religion and sexuality. Marcela told me that it had taken her a while to understand the horizontal structure of la coope, but "that is the idea of la coope. With Kemly we can sit down to talk about different aspects of la coope, and we can also have very strong discussions. With a lot of love and respect, we also fight. With respect and love, we can also say *mae*, I am sorry."

These affective bonds as coworkers, friends, and entrepreneurs extend to the communities they work with. Lila explained that this work was about more than teaching individuals how to use technologies: "The organization has given me a vision of thinking that if these things [the relationships we have at la coope] happen, I must replicate them with the people we work with. When we work in a community, we go with some specific goal: to offer information, knowledge, the use of technologies. Although this is our mission, there is always space to talk to them. . . . the possibility of transmitting all the knowledge I have gained not in a classroom, but over the years of working in this organization."

When I arrived at Sulá Batsú back in the summer of 2015, there was something happening that I could not articulate at first. Since the beginning of my fieldwork, I was already trying to understand the meanings of solidarity for the co-op's organizational rhythm and relationships among its members and others. There was a rhythm that did not follow

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a linear, progressive development. They move organically, collectively, with unstructured schedules. Sometimes they document their projects, but other times there is no paper trail—some initiatives are impossible to articulate in sentences with commas and periods. Other times, they simply do not have the time or resources. Their projects in communities do have to abide by specific procedures of grants and funders, with clear objectives, assessments, reports, statistics, and lists of outcomes. And yet there is also an emphasis on process, on experimentation, on learning from mistakes that goes beyond “collecting data.”

Its members’ most treasured goal is to sustain relationships of care among themselves and with the communities they work with. There continues to be an emphasis on joy, dreaming the impossible, and returning to the drawing board as many times as necessary. They make space to start over, reflect, and regret. They make time for long conversations on work-related and personal problems and hopes. Thus their vision is precisely about creating and imagining “technologies of feeling,” as imagined by the Indigenous Cabécar and Bribri women. Andrea told me: “Here, we are allowed to be and to make, which is different from many other businesses. Here we can all grow together.” And Samuel remarked: “I do not exactly see my job at la coope as a job, but as what I can contribute to la coope. I can be working the entire morning at la coope, stop at 2:00 p.m., do a personal errand, and then continue working at la coope. A lot of us do that here, but we all know that our priority is what we can contribute. It is another rhythm of work.”

None of this means that work is not being done; the key is to understand who defines what work looks like. The Sulá Batsú collective work when loving, caring for each other, and sharing coffee with *natilla*, guava jam, and fresh bread every day. They work when they talk about their lives, heartbreaks, mistakes, and regrets. They work during those long conversations in the van traveling around Costa Rica, while Juan drives from north to south, from the Caribbean to the Pacific coast, and back. They are also working when they interrupt everything to help a coworker who is depressed. This is all part of the everyday labor at la coope. Emotions and reason are imbricated, seamlessly woven into each other, against modernist dualist ways of thinking and being.

In her quest to disengage from modern/colonial epistemologies and

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ways of producing knowledge, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson says that at first she did not fully appreciate how the Nishnaabeg—her own community in Canada—produced theory through practice. She writes: “It became clear to me that *how* we live, *how* we organize, *how* we engage in the world—the process—not only frames the outcome, it is the transformation. *How* molds and then gives birth. The *how* changes us. *How* is the theoretical intervention.”⁴³ It has been precisely Sulá Batsú’s *how* that alerted me to the meanings of a feminist technopolitics of care. A politics of solidarity that is expansive but not without conflicts, heart-breaks, and negotiations.

During my early days of fieldwork, I noticed that much of what made this project feminist was an everyday praxis based on solidarity. This manifests in numerous ways: in how the activists feel about each other, in how they feel about their work and mission, and in the experiences of workshop and training participants. “I cannot imagine not being part of this organization,” longtime associate Lila said. “I do not see it as part of my job. I see it as an extension of my life.” And Marcela described the motor of their work: “It’s part of the learning process that we realized at some point that passion is what drives the loyalty of our associates and ourselves with the *cooperativa*. For me, this is key. If there is no passion and love for the *cooperativa*, people leave because it is exhausting for people and it requires an investment of the heart, of time and life that must be very strong.” During my fieldwork I often heard phrases such as “This place is my life,” “We love each other,” “We support each other.”

Kemly explained how their vision of entrepreneurship is connected to experimentation and accepting that they will make mistakes:

For us the pleasure of going to work should be part of business management; love, affection among your *compañeros* should be part of entrepreneurship. When you analyze business theory, this is never discussed or considered. They speak of profitability, marketing, commercialization. The main bastion of our work is passion. For us, passion is part of entrepreneurship, fun, laughter. And the other thing that we always consider as part of our work is the ability of *meter las patas* [to make mistakes], without malicious intent obviously. This is also part of entrepreneurship. This is our model of a solidarity-based economy.

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The most important work of la coope lies in its micropolitics: in how its members weave relationships in each space in which they move, between the team, with communities, with the technologies that they design, think, and imagine, with a politics of care of solidarity and hope in building the world they dream of. That world of shared knowledges, as their slogan says. In other words, the revolution is in how they do what they do. But relationships are also ridden with difficulties, which affect how they do what they do.

Conflicts and Negotiations

The co-op is not perfect, nor its story a fairytale. Its members have confronted internal fissures, conflicts, and irreconcilable differences, and their relationships are constantly being negotiated. People have left la coope for numerous reasons: new job opportunities, changes in personal circumstances, or moving to another country. But there have also been bitter disagreements about the co-op's mission, structure, and procedures, personal conflicts among activists, a lack of understanding of how a cooperative works, and the very real need to earn a higher and more secure income than the co-op can provide. Often these departures have been interpreted as betrayals, ending what had been close friendships.

Every time someone has left la coope, it has implied an "affective rupture," Kemly explained to me: "Contrary to traditional business theory, in which everyone is considered disposable and replaceable, everyone here is indispensable. Every single person who has belonged to la coope has been indispensable, and when they leave, la coope goes through a profound restructuring process. La coope will never be the same organization after that person left. We have always reorganized, restructured, and changed, but the organization that emerges is different every single time. There is both an organizational transformation and an affective rupture." In my interviews, this idea of an "affective rupture" was repeated over and over, albeit in different forms. Marina, one of the founders of the co-op, told me that it was "exhausting" to see so many people given a platform for "growing," "yet, once they grow, they leave, but at what cost?" And Juan said that some of these departures have been "very painful," but that they come with the organization's commitment to maintaining joint

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worker-management control (*autogestión* in Spanish). One of the co-op's most recent members, Pabru, told me that the co-op did not operate like a regular business, where everyone is disposable: "At la coope, everyone's value is incalculable. Every time someone enters or leaves la coope, the dynamic changes, the vision changes. The new person who comes starts to interact with everyone else and offers a different perspective. This process is so enriching, and la coope values this so much."

Cycles of financial turmoil have caused many people to leave the co-op. In addition to producing tremendous emotional upheaval among the activists, these partings temporarily destabilize the flow of the organization. Activists develop certain skills, make contacts, and create networks and then take these elsewhere. One of the major challenges of Sulá Batsú since its foundation has been to attain financial sustainability—the same stability they work to promote in the communities they serve. The balance between maintaining the joint worker-management control of the organization—with streams of "individual" income being distributed among the collective—has been very challenging. Juan and Gabriel—two of the founders of the co-op who have survived various cycles of financial crisis—told me in separate interviews that throughout the years, they have advocated for the co-op to obtain a fixed stream of income from more "commercial" contracts. Gabriel spoke at length to me about the challenges of running an organization that is so "emotional" and solidarity-based, while having to make compromises to be able to survive financially.

Like many other grassroots organizations, Sulá Batsú constantly has to balance its solidarity-centered model based on collectivization and social justice with the material conditions it needs to do its work (an issue I discuss in-depth in chapter 4). Gabriel feels conflicted because on the one hand, he wants the organization to preserve its commitment to affect and relationships, but on the other hand, he believes that the organization must make some sacrifices, such as decreasing its core staff and contract-hiring experts for specific projects. He explained that "people say how beautiful this project is and then want to stay, and this is unsustainable. . . . Everything I am saying seems contradictory to what we believe in, right?" These unresolvable contradictions and dilemmas are a structuring part of organizational life.

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One of la coope's most difficult financial crises was in 2013. Kemly, along with other associates, proposed the unimaginable: to launch Casa Batsú, a cultural community center that would house la coope, the associates' external projects, and other organizations, while also providing collective spaces for events such as art exhibitions, dance lessons, music concerts, conferences, and workshops. Kemly and her then partner, who has worked in the cooperative field in Costa Rica for decades and was an associate of la coope, laughed while they remembered how this disagreement almost cost them their relationship. At the moment he thought that the idea of opening Casa Batsú was a huge mistake because it would drain their already scarce economic resources. La coope was split. There were discussions, fights, resentment, and misunderstandings. Kemly told me, "For me it was either we do this one big thing that we had dreamed about, or it was over." They finally voted and approved Casa Batsú.

During my fieldwork trip to Costa Rica in the summer of 2019, the organization was going through another very trying financial situation. Grants have become more competitive and donors more selective; international development agencies have turned to countries considered much less privileged than Costa Rica; and selling services is more difficult in the context of national and global economies in crisis, growing inequality and violence, and continued slashing of social protections due to neoliberal policies. And this has only gotten worse during the COVID-19 pandemic. Already in 2019, some activists were worn out; after working for months without income, exhausted, desperate, some of them felt hopeless. Laughter, fun, and solidarity continued to permeate their space and everyday interactions, but something had changed. La coope is much more than a job; it is a way of living. Amid the crisis, Kemly had told the team and repeated to me numerous times, "If we must close, we will do it with a celebration, a big party. This is also part of our experimentation. If it must be, we will celebrate." Knowledge is also produced in this act, in this "how," while our lives are shaped and reshaped.

Some of the activists were showing signs of exhaustion due to the challenging financial situation that the co-op was facing. Pabru, for instance, told me that "passion and love" continued to characterize la coope, but that unfortunately, the economic precarity was affecting the

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organization: “As a cooperative, we have not managed to generate the resources to satisfy the material needs of the people who constitute it, so there is a delicate, super-delicate issue there. But I personally, since I’ve been dealing with this all my life, I’m actually used to it, so to speak. If you have to eat only rice, you eat only rice.” Clara told me that she was very sad with the economic situation—many of them had not received any income for months—because the “objective of la coope is to work from a place happiness.” But, she added, “obviously we live in a capitalist system that reduces every possibility to what is convenient to the system. We are one of those things that can be reduced to the minimum when there is a crisis.”

A moment that foregrounds the co-op’s messy textures of care was exemplified in one of their staff meetings. Kemly was critical of the work of a coworker who was not at the meeting. She was disappointed and frustrated because this person had not completed some very urgent tasks. Other staff members defended their coworker. Kemly later told me: “They defended her, and that is exactly what they had to do.” This speaking up for the other, talking back, and risking confrontation and conflict are also part of their collective politics and constant reflexivity. The content goes hand in hand with the structure of the organization. Talking about their cooperative model, Kemly remarked: “This has not been easy. But if we change this, we change who we are. The other option is that everyone earns his or her own salary. But this is not what we want. I mean, if we get to that point, we would rather dissolve the organization.” And another associate, Alejandra, said that “many people simply cannot understand” the model and leave, while Marcela believes that generally women have understood their collective philosophy better than men. Alejandra gave a clear description of the cooperative’s dynamics:

Imagine that there is a pot and we’ll do the roast together, the soup together. You put in the water, I put in the potatoes, someone else the meat. We all eat the soup. In the end, although the water is the cheapest ingredient of the soup, you had to go get the water, and the soup cannot be cooked without water. Then you’ll eat a bowl of soup just like mine, and I was the one who brought the meat. In that sense everything is shared equally. Some people have not understood

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this model and leave. They say, “*Púchica* [damn], I brought this big project, huge, which brings in so many thousands of dollars, and my wages did not increase, and everyone is eating my money.” Well, that is the way it is. Someday you’re not going to be bringing in the money, and someone else will work so you can eat. So when people do not understand this model, they tend to leave.

During a meeting in the summer of 2019, Kemly asked me to share some of my reflections about la coope with the activists. I was a bit hesitant, but she insisted. She said that I knew and loved la coope, but that I had also been critical of their work. As a researcher, I was an outsider and simultaneously an insider, someone who felt a deep *cariño* for the activists and the organization. My reflections sparked a lively conversation—sometimes sad, other times tinted with anger and frustration. They all agreed that something had to change and were immersed in that very process that has continued, even though they have mostly worked remotely since 2020 because of the pandemic. This is a snapshot of the reflections I shared that day:

During my visits in 2015 and 2016, the coope was a different organization. There were other people, fewer men, different projects. There was a tremendous enthusiasm for the work you do, a collective rooted in justice and solidarity. Today, the coope is going through a difficult time, and that, understandably, also affects everyone. I find some signs of disappointment and exhaustion, of questioning the model and the content, of stagnation, of a certain nostalgia for the past. But I also see that many of you feel that it is a moment of reinvention, of repositioning, of reorganization.

I see that solidarity, tenderness, and affection remain the fundamental axes of the work, but there is also a need for something to happen, for something to change. There is a prevailing expectation. There are some people who also have a longer institutional memory and have seen these cycles come and go. . . . More of you also position the coope as a feminist and political organization. It is interesting for me to see how your work, the daily practice of the coope, its relationships, the work with the communities, the vision of the world may have influenced this more explicit politicization.

Several of you have also told me that the coope is better positioned than ever at the national, regional, and global levels, and that it is

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necessary to take advantage of this moment to rethink the organization and strengthen that international image. Finally, I want to say that several of you mentioned joy, emotion, and passion as engines of the cooperative, and that is something you must continue to build on.

And so, their relationships remain always in construction.

Conclusion

“Not one of us would have been able to do any of this alone,” remarked Kemly during a session with *la coope* where I presented my research. We were discussing what it meant to them to be part of a collective, to share knowledge, tasks, time, space, and income as well as affection, *solidaridad*, conflict and disagreements. Their work on technology is bonded with their caring relationships and organizational praxis. It is in this “how” that technology is produced and reimagined. This is what makes a “technology of feelings” possible, and this technology of feelings is most importantly a technology of justice. A technology that facilitates, creates, and supports sustaining life with dignity in the midst of death and violence. A technology that is permanently being negotiated through care and solidarity, pain and anger, individual and collective struggle, precarity and abundance.

Development plans for the virtuous Third World Technological Woman encounter challenges, sometimes even unbeknownst to the actors. *Sulá Batsú* is not necessarily an anticapitalist organization. Members affirm that “women cannot be afraid of the market” and that *la coope* is an “enterprise.” Yet their project also challenges market logics based on individualism, self-sufficiency, and personal responsibility as solutions to inequality, even when they operate within those same dynamics. *Sulá Batsú* reproduces the entrepreneurial framework in their work with women. At the same time, *Sulá Batsú* challenges this dominant development paradigm through principles of horizontality, redistribution, knowledge exchange, and care. The emotional relationships embedded in their organizational process embody a feminist praxis. The co-op both reproduces and subverts the entrepreneurial model.

While *Sulá Batsú* may center aspects of an ideal Technological

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Woman, their feminist practice—enabled by a politics of care—contests mainstream development agendas. “The defense of life” is crucial in a world in which colonial-capitalist policies, which govern most of our technologies, increasingly thrive on the extraction, exploitation, and dispossession of life, human and nonhuman.⁴⁴ And that is what *la coope* does: they defend life, forging a “politics of connections,” as Segato says. These relationships of solidarity not only *denounce*, and here is the key, but they also *announce* the possibility of more just worlds, where everyone, the land, animals, and objects—why not?—can flourish together.⁴⁵