

In Colombia some cows have *raza*, others also have breed: Maintaining the presence of the translation offers analytical possibilities

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Abstract

This article is about cows in Colombia, the practices that make them different. Although our main concern is not the difference among breeds, we pay crucial attention to the word *breed* which, in its exclusive animal-use, does not exist in Spanish. Its translation becomes *raza*, a word that is also used to classify humans and therefore easily translates into English as ‘race’. Maintaining these differences in analytical sight, we follow the practices that make *res* and *ejemplar* – two types of bovines. Untranslatable to English, *res* refers to an ordinary cow or bull; the second one indicates an exemplary bovine, even a prized one. The practices that make these animals are different. We explain how making *res* does not meet the requirements of *breed*, while making *ejemplar* does; consequently, while the latter has *breed*, a *res* has a slippery *raza*, one that, difficult to pin down, transgresses the firmness of *breeds*. Thus, *raza* can be different from *breed*, and surprisingly, it is also different from ‘race’ in English: the slippery quality of *raza* also surfaces when talking about people, at least in Colombia and Peru, the countries of origin of the authors of this article. If classified, their *raza* may shift from ‘white’ to ‘mestizo’ (not white) depending on the eyes of the beholder – like *res*!

Keywords

artificial insemination, *breed*, cow-making practices, *race*, *raza*

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This article is on ‘cow-making’ in Colombia. Growing out of joint ethnography, it imagines ‘cow’ (or rather *res*) as a complex entity that weaves innumerable non-humans together with human beings in mutual life-shaping conditions. In this way of thinking, ‘cow-making’ in Colombia becomes the convergence of multispecies material-semiotic assemblages.¹ At the same time, the article is also about language, language differences, and the uses of language by the authors.

We are both anthropologists. Santiago (also a physician) was born and works in Colombia while Marisol is a Peruvian who reads and writes Spanish but lives most of her life in English. Santiago works and writes mostly in Spanish, but also reads and writes English. This shows in our collaboration: working together we tend towards more Spanish, but we also routinely use both languages, even in the same sentence. We may use English to clarify what we have said in Spanish and, of course, the opposite also happens. Our practice (of which we are usually oblivious) fractalizes English and Spanish as they entangle and affect one another in our work. This gets more complex when we consider the idiomatic heterogeneity of Spanish (*español* for Santiago, but *castellano* for Marisol).² Variations proliferate in our fieldwork (Marisol sometimes needs Santiago to ‘interpret’ what is being said in the field), but though ‘working between languages’ frequently leads to uncertainty, it is also ethnographically enriching. So our fieldwork diaries are in Spanish and English, as were the early drafts of this article. Pushed into English at a late stage, we came to realize that we would not have written the same article in Spanish. At the same time, the tensions between the language of fieldwork and that of (the final version of) writing has also been productive. Indeed, in one sense we follow Walter Benjamin’s (1968) call for the language of the original to inflect the language of the translation.

These complexities noted, our focus is ethnographic: our concern is with human–cow relations in Colombia. Crucial to the practices in our field are the words: *res*, *ejemplar* and *raza*. None of these three terms finds easy translation into English. *Res* and *ejemplar* refer to different types of cows in Colombian bovine idiom.³ *Res* is something like a ‘common bovine’, an animal that is not outstanding or remarkable, while *ejemplar* is a bovine of excellence, an ‘exemplary’ creature. In the pages that follow we start by looking at these words and the practices that make each of these entities. Then we turn to ‘*raza*’, a word that both overlaps with and differs from the English word ‘breed’ into which it is usually translated. The bumps that make ‘*raza*’ and ‘breed’ different from, yet translatable into, each other allow us to conclude with a brief discussion of *raza* as a multispecies category: a Colombian bovine idiom that overlaps and is different from breed, and a nation-building category that classifies humans that is built historically on a tension between biology and culture.

Res

Res is one of our favourite Colombian bovine idioms; it is also an ordinary Spanish word. The *Diccionario de la Real Academia de la Lengua Española* (an authority similar to the *Oxford English Dictionary*), defines *res* as ‘four-legged animal belonging to certain domestic species, like bovine cattle, sheep etc, or wild ones such as deer, boar, etc.’ (*‘animal cuadrúpedo de ciertas especies domésticas, como del ganado vacuno, lanar, etc., o*

de los salvajes, como venados, jabalies, etc.’). It also specifies that in certain Latin American countries, Colombia among them, *res* is synonymous of ‘animal vacuno’ or ‘bovine animal’.⁴ So in Colombian bovine idiom, *res* may be used to refer to bovines disregarding age and sex: cow/*vaca*, bull/*toro*, steer/*novillo*, heifer/*novilla*, calf (male and female, *ternero* and *ternera*, respectively), they can all be called a ‘grupo de reses’, a group of *reses*. *Res* can also be used to refer to any bovine disregarding its phenotypical characteristics.

In the singular, the word *res* (in its reference to bovine) does not travel into English. In English, ‘cattle’ is always plural⁵ and it does not distinguish between animals in terms of breeds, sexes, or age – indeed it can also be translated to Spanish as *ganado*. Both words, ‘*res*’ and ‘cattle’, have implications of ownership: they refer to property in the relations between human and animal.

In addition to definitions, words and things become through material-semiotic ecologies of practices. To illustrate what we mean, we offer a fieldwork entry narrating some cow-making practices that include people, animals and things (corrals, trucks, ropes, prods, money) and work to make *res* and *reses*. We draw the entry from our visit to the *feria de ganado* – the local term for a cattle market or cattle fair – in a town near Bogotá called Zipaquirá where we went with our friend Eduardo, a cattle merchant, whose small plots of land are next to the house where we stay when we are doing fieldwork in the area. This is from Santiago’s field notebook:

The person in charge of the animals is a young tough-looking guy. He holds a long thin stick with a leather string that works as a handle; called a *bordón*, the stick is a commonly used tool when working with cattle and sold at the *ferias*. Two other guys help the first one and we are attracted by their constant movement, their loud voices and also by the way they handle a group of ten animals of heterogeneous colour and size. They are moving them from a larger corral – where they have been with other cattle – to one that is smaller from where the animals will board a truck (or more realistically, the men will have to make them board the truck.) At the same time Marisol is recording the scene with her cell phone.

I approach the metal fence to listen and get a better look at what they are doing. The tough-looking young guy yells that I should be careful: the *res* can hit me – *la res te puede golpear*, he tells me. I take the opportunity to ask what they are doing. He answers ‘these *reses* are going to the *matadero*’, the slaughterhouse; they need to get them into the truck. We then see the men walk behind the *reses*, raise their open arms and wave forward with their hands; they also push them and poke them with the *bordón*. It is not easy task; while the majority reluctantly walk into the truck, not all *reses* collaborate, some turn back into the corral as the truck gets full.

Here age, size, or type is irrelevant. The man uses the word *res* (singular) to warn Santiago, and says they are ‘taking *reses* (plural) to the slaughterhouse’. He disregards the animals’ sex, except for a bull that was tethered to make loading easier and prevent him from harming the others. Their breeds were disregarded notwithstanding their heterogeneity; a *matarife* (almost literally: one who makes kill) had bought the lot and was taking them to be transformed into *carne de res* to be sold in small butchers in nearby towns.

Ejemplar

If the Feria de Zipaquirá is populated by *reses* and humans, this is not the case of some other *ferias de ganado*. These may be populated by expensive animals, their owners, and representatives of cutting-edge cattle industry equipment. So not all ‘cow-making’ practices make *reses*. We ask a female veterinarian about *res* and the cattle fair she attends in Bogotá:

It does not make any sense to say, ‘I am going to show one or two *reses* at AgroExpo.’ She adds very emphatically: ‘Those are not *reses*!! What we say is we are going to take x number of *ejemplares* to the Fair.’ [She grimaces with disgust at the thought, and maybe even at our question, as she mockingly imitates someone saying:] ‘I am going to show three *reses* at AgroExpo’ ‘*Llamar reses al buen ganado es un insulto.*’ It is an insult to refer to good cattle as *reses*.

AgroExpo is the most important cattle fair (*feria ganadera*) in Colombia. It happens every second year and convenes the most important associations of cattle breeders (*asociaciones de criadores de ganado*) as well as representatives of every imaginable cattle industry product. Animals are purportedly the main exhibit and (it seemed to us) in constant competition. This is implicit as they are shown in corrals that display the name of the *finca* (ranch)⁶ they belong to, and it is explicit in the arenas where (not infrequently international) judges choose champions. Winning a championship at AgroExpo is a big feat for the breeder–animal couple. Like entering the national Cattle Hall of Fame, it grants prestige, and with this the possibility of becoming a supplier of breeding stock, most usually semen, but embryos as well. And this is why, as our veterinarian friend told us, AgroExpo is not a place to find *reses* – at all! What we find there is *ejemplares*: ‘exemplar/s’ would be a literal translation (as the reader correctly suspects). It indicates that the cow or bull is the best of its breed (which includes its productive purpose: milk or beef) at its specific reproductive stage (adult male or female, heifer or steer, female or male calf). An *ejemplar* does not simply belong to a breed. It *exemplifies* the breed and it is thus more than the animal itself: it is a successful multispecies biocapitalist conglomerate, an economic, scientific, political and reproductive vital entity, the gathering of distributed heterogeneous practices.⁷ In short, the difference between AgroExpo and the market in Zipaquirá could hardly be greater. At AgroExpo there is no crowding or prodding. Instead the place of the *ejemplar* is in AgroExpo’s manicured arena where, along with its trainer (both stern and pampering), it is paraded before the judges. Two different worlds.

The different lives of cows: *ejemplares* are registered information, *reses* are only known by their owners

The life of an *ejemplar* begins at a ranch, where soon after birth it is marked with an identifying number on an ear tag – a common biopolitical practice for monitoring cattle health. However, when it comes to the *ejemplar*, this number is special for it will eventually be connected to a considerable amount of valuable data; usually known as pedigree, it includes the *ejemplar*’s ancestry, birthdate, his and his descent’s

productive and reproductive features. Registered in an *asociación de criadores* (a breeders' association) he becomes a documented animal, a member of the *raza*-breed he represents.⁸ If the animal is exceptional this bull will continue his life as a commercial breeder, spending days at a 'semen collection centre'. There his semen is extracted, analysed for quality, marked with his name, date of collection and then frozen to be conserved in straws or *pajillas de semen* (literally 'straws with semen').⁹ He becomes the ancestor of entire populations that can trace their lineage to his famous name.¹⁰ These kinds of bulls, producers of semen biologically known and commercially handled, populate cattle catalogues replete with the hereditary information supposedly carried in every semen straw that buyers look at when they are selecting the right bull for their cows.

The productive and reproductive success of their hereditary composition adds to the value attached to their names. At the same time, the price of their semen – the vital substance and the subject of scientific inspection and economic speculation – may vary in the course of their lifetime. This is because their names also carry with them the names of their owners, and their historical *criadores*, breeders, and their success in championships adds to the socio-economic and bio-prestige of the *finca* that made them. Against this, an animal whose genealogy – and productive and reproductive information – is not known cannot be registered; its *raza* is not certified even if the animal fulfils the appropriate phenotypic characteristics. The *raza* of an *ejemplar*, in English its *breed*, depends on an extensive administrative apparatus. As a data generation practice, then, the registration of *ejemplares* is necessary to turn particular bulls into specific biocapitalist entities and their semen into a commodity. And because the *certified* reproductive substance also guarantees a considerable rate of success in impregnation, by purchasing it the idea that buyers are also acquiring an *ejemplar*'s offspring is not far-fetched. The *ejemplar* is itself a market of futures.

Now let us go back to Zipaquirá, the rural town fair we visited near Bogotá. Here, as we noted, most *reses* are on their way to the slaughterhouse. The sex of these animals is unimportant, they are *reses*, immediate objects of monetary transaction. When a buyer asks, *cuánto por esta res?* How much for this *res*? the seller is not offended. In these small *ferias*, the cattle whose immediate fate is not the *matadero* are usually cows – female bovines. Bought by peasants for reproduction, such cows will probably get pregnant (via insemination) throughout the course of their lives and produce milk for their calves, for the family, and for sale. Eventually, albeit a lot later, they too will be taken to the *matadero*, the final destination of the *res*. Lack of pasture, an endemic condition in these farms, currently intensifying due to the frequency of drought or excessive rain caused by climate change, seems to be shortening the life of *reses*, and consequently, increasing their numbers at the slaughterhouse.¹¹

The qualities and defects of *reses* are known to their individual owner, and unlike *ejemplares*, they do not belong to a lineage; their name (they usually have one) is only known in the small farm where they live. The origin of the *res* is usually unknown. With some luck someone may recall who the mother was, while lost in memory will be the source of the semen with which the latter was inseminated. This animal may be marked by phenotype that while marking *raza*, does not translate into breed.¹²

When *raza* does not translate into breed: making cows with slippery phenotypes

If the *raza* of an *ejemplar* may be translated into the English word ‘breed’, this is not the case for the *raza* of *res*. So much we learned when watching a small herd in the *altiplano* of Cundinamarca while talking to Rosalba, Eduardo’s wife. She raises cattle, *res*, but does not necessarily breed them. Marisol asks Rosalba to identify the *razas* in the herd.

- R. [This] one is a *barcina*, she is *la más criolla*, the most creole. Some people call them *montañeras*, *indias*, *aindiadas* – they are from ‘out there’, they have never been inseminated, *nunca han tenido cruces*, they have never been crossed. They maintain the line. They are not domesticated.
- Q. And the ones closer to us?
- R. The third one is a mix, *como con jersey*, like with a jersey mix, it is lighter . . . The others are *normandos*, Normande. *Tienen pinta de normandos*, they look sort of Normande. That cow is Normande because she has almost no horns, her horns are not long.
- Q. And those smaller ones?
- R. Mmmm that first calf, is also sort of a Normande, but it should have more freckles . . . it is more like with Holstein, but it also looks Normande. It is neither Normande, nor with black [spots] like Holstein – it can be both: a Normande of Holstein. The other one is Holstein with Ayrshire; but [also] neither because Holstein is white and Ayrshire is red – this one is neither one, but it is both.

All of the cows we are looking at are mixed, but there are some whose mixtures are lost in time and/or not the result of insemination, like the *barcina* in Rosalba’s description which, she tells us, has never been inseminated. She describes this condition as ‘having never been crossed’ and therefore being ‘*más criolla*, less mixed’ by which she means (implicitly, it became explicit after we ask) ‘with commercial breeds’. *Barcina* describes a colour (brown-reddish) but the cow could share this with other cows, and this is therefore insufficient to mark her *raza*. She is a ‘*más criolla*’ because Rosalba knows the cow’s origins: she came from ‘out there’, a *montañera*, ‘from the mountains’, a hillbilly, or ‘like an Indian’, *aindiada* as Rosalba puts it. All these features indicate that the reddish cow we are looking at ‘has not been domesticated’, by which Rosalba means that it is not the result of insemination and therefore, it or she is *more criolla* – more creole – which means ‘more pure’ in our friend’s bovine idiom.¹³ Perhaps *menos* [less] *criolla* would be the result of insemination, therefore less pure and somewhat domesticated. It becomes clear that every cow in the herd is mixed, and that what went into the mix is unclear.

It is self-evident that Rosalba knows about cows and distinguishes their phenotypic qualities. These, however, are not revealed in recorded data, and neither are they simply displayed by the cow. Rather, Rosalba discerns the marking features of cows through evaluations of her own. But what is most noteworthy about this is that these have *no pretence of stability*. She may embark in discussions with Eduardo, her husband, or with her neighbour, the owner of the cows, to decide the *raza* of a particular cow. But what is

decided at one moment may be different later. In Rosalba's practice the animals' *raza* is variable and, albeit within limits, the criteria she uses to identify *raza* are also flexible. That flexibility marks the difference between the *raza* that Rosalba is concerned with and the *breed* that depends on singular, clear-cut and stable, administration.

In Rosalba's practice – a practice she shares with her neighbour and her husband – the *raza* of the cow she describes is not a mixture of well-circumscribed breeds. Instead, *raza* shifts and mixtures are guessed at with more or less probability.¹⁴ Yet records are kept: Rosalba may remember the *raza* – in the sense of breed – of the semen she used to inseminate her cows even after she sells them. The name of the bull it belonged to may be relevant or not. Rosalba's cows are uncertain mixes, *cruces* whose compositions are unknown in the way required by breeding associations. Nevertheless, the practice of artificial insemination in these farms does more than reproduce *reses*. Through it, commercial *raza*-breeding meets *raza* in the making of lineage-less animals whose reproduction, in turn, increases the demand for the industrially produced semen straws created by commercial *raza*-breeds.¹⁵

Raza meets breed as commercial language: making better cows

So, what more can be said about the encounter between *raza* and breed? Consider the following:

Simmental is a good *raza*-breed to cross with the Brahman/Cebu *razas*-breeds because it increases the yield of both meat and milk. . . . The well-known characteristics of the Brahman/Cebu such as resistance to heat, to parasites, their grazing ability, and calving ease complement with the qualities that *la raza Simmental*/the Simmental breed offers, such as their fertility, longevity, milking qualities, early sexual maturity, maternal excellence, fast growth and high-quality meat thus increasing and potentializing the production of these two *raza*-breeds.¹⁶

This, taken from a Colombian webpage, is strikingly similar to the description of Simbrah cattle in a US based webpage.¹⁷ *Raza* from the first is equivalent to 'breed' in the second; *hacer raza* Simbrah would find translation as 'breeding Simbrah', a process that requires careful in-farm registration of the genealogical mix until the combined right proportion of Simmental and Brahman obtains Simbrah, a different breed that is also described as 'synthetic' in Colombia (a word that is also used in English). In the process of this particular kind of breeding, offspring are obtained that cannot be identified as Simbrah. When they have 50% of each (Simmental and Brahman) they are called F1. Others are a mixture of the two breeds in percentages that do not find a name in *raza*-breed nomenclature,¹⁸ though when these animals participate in the reproductive genealogical progression towards Simbrah, their information is recorded to calculate their percentage contribution to the process that will eventually result in the 'synthesis' that is this breed.¹⁹

Crossbreeding does not simply produce new synthetic breeds.²⁰ Though it sounds oxymoronic, it may also produce a 'pure crossbred animal'. The quote that follows is an explanation of how this works from our fieldwork in Bogotá.

If I mix two animals of different *razas*-breed the result of the first *cruce* is registered as an F1; if I continue with the same two breeds, the second one is registered as 3/4; the third one is registered as 7/8; the next one will be registered as 15/16. Finally, the result of the next crossbreeding will be an animal known as *puro por cruzamiento* or 'pure after crossbreeding'.

Crossbreeding requires that each of the two *razas*-breeds that participate in the reproduction be treated as a unit. At each moment of crossbreeding that unit is divided by two so that the fractions of each breed in the next generation can be calculated. Making *raza*-breed through crossbreeding makes animals whose genetic characteristics are followed and certified so that they can be used to design an animal that reflects the specific productive and reproductive objectives of the breeder, the *criador*. Thus, registered animals are also used in long-term designs to improve herds via crossbreeding.

Gilberto, a good friend and a wise and caring veterinarian, explains how he used *cruces* (crossing breeds) to improve the milk quality on a dairy farm. Milk of good quality, he says, is free of microbes (it is clean) and has a specific protein/fat composition. The first requirement can be achieved with hygiene and health controls. But to improve milk composition he has, in his words, to *meter raza* or introduce different *razas*-breeds to the herd.

Here you see cows of different *razas*-breeds. [He points at the animals to show their varied heights, weights, colours, face shape, shape of udders, their height from the ground, the shape of their legs and hooves.] We have handled this herd genetically to improve the quality of the milk. When I started working on this farm, the herd was mostly Holstein and a few Simmental; I started to mix them with diverse *razas*-breeds: Jersey, Brown Swiss, Montbeliarde. I got Parhol [not a *raza*-breed, but a well-known Brown-Swiss and Holstein mix] and Montbeliarde-with-Holstein which I then mixed with Holstein again. Now we get more and better milk.

Borrowing Santiago's fieldwork dairy, he sketches his explanation of how he organizes this crossbreeding. He uses the *finca*'s records, which include genealogical information that goes deep back into the history of the farm. Then he studies catalogues to choose the semen he will buy, taking into consideration the characteristics of *each cow* in the farm's milking herd. He remembers each of them individually, but if he has any doubts he consults the carefully kept records. This programme connects data across farms with the catalogue of the company that sells the semen which is the bull's only until it has been extracted. This practice is impossible without records.

The result of this crossbreeding to improve the herd is not an *ejemplar*, but *neither is it a res*. What is being made are *vacas*, cows: productive animals '*con información*', with information, whose genetic composition is known. However, the purpose of such information is not the production of a commodity (like the embryos or sperm of *ejemplares*) but to improve the productive capacity (of cows and milk). These are profit-making cows whose breeds can be identified. Some may be referred to as *animales de raza* and like the families that may own them, this phrase might translate as 'well-bred'. Yet, our veterinarian friend talks about these animals in a way that would be insulting to the families he works for. He explains that being the result of mixtures, these animals are registered as '*animal mestizo con tipo racial predominante*', a *mestizo* animal with a predominant breed type. The nuance has to do with *raza*. This Spanish word is used to classify not

only animals but also humans in ways that no longer feel comfortable for the seemingly English equivalent word ‘race’. The conclusion is that while ‘*meter raza*’ (introducing different *razas*-breeds to the herd) translates as ‘breeding’, it means more. For this term is not just about cattle. It also absorbs local idioms to do with nation building and this calls for attention to human ‘race/s’. But since ‘*meter raza*’ is at the same time intertwined with international practices of breeding (and the information and records that go with those practices), making ‘*animales de raza*’ is also part of a worldwide market-oriented conversation.

Using semen straws to produce *reses*

We are in Chocontá, a small rural town where we learn about peasant cow-making as we visit with one of the local veterinarians, Dr Rodríguez:

... there have been too many bad experiences with black Holstein. I rarely sell that semen. They eat too much, they are too delicate [prone to disease], the rate of successful insemination is low: they calf every two or three years! And then, it takes too long for the calf to be independent. The best-selling semen straws are Normande and Jersey – people cross Jersey with Holstein.²¹ People also like Normande: those cows easily get pregnant at insemination, every year! It works like clockwork, it is dual purpose, and it acclimatizes well here; when the cow is small, I recommend Jersey, otherwise during labour the calf, and even the cow may die.

When his clients seek advice he asks: ‘What is your cow like? Is it sort of Normande? Is it small?’ He does not ask for the breed. When he says ‘sort of Normande’ he wants to know the size and productive purpose of the cow: ‘sort of Normande’ may include other *razas*, and precision is irrelevant. The characteristic he thinks his clients should look for is *facilidad de parto* (or ease of calving), for the main goal is successful reproduction. Then, once he has sorted out what the client wants, he goes to the catalogue and looks at the bulls with all their information about genealogy. But he doesn’t really need detailed information. He is only after ‘basic’ productive features.

I need a milk producer, that calves easily, and one that makes daughters because that is what people want. We also check that it is not white. The catalogue has all the information about the bull, it is the history of the bull.

In short, he converts (translates!) the information about commercial *raza*-breed into the capacities of those local cows and the productive needs of their owners. And it is here that *raza* both meets and escapes ‘breed’ in the commercial sense of the term. This is because the semen in the straws he sells certifies a bull that exemplifies a breed, for example a Jersey. Yet, the offspring will never rise to the standards of their paternal exemplary origin. Instead, they will be ‘cows’ or ‘bulls’ – they will be *res*. They will labour on a peasant farm, and the commodities they produce will not be registered in meticulously kept data files that are scientific or quasi-scientific and that serve the reproduction of their lineage. Instead, their milk, meat and hides will go to local markets to be sold for money to sustain the family.²²

Criar and crianza: living with cows . . .

We learn, then, that in Chocontá, *pajillas* (semen straws) participate in the reproduction of *reses* – or cows that will become such – without necessarily translating peasant households into profit-making endeavours. Indeed, in a peasant context the homogenizing tendency of commercial breeds to improve herds (in order to increase profits) is being diverted into making cows with a slippery *raza* in order to assure a better life for the peasant human–animal family. We spent several cold and rainy days with Daniela. Like Rosalba she lives in Chocontá and manages a herd of perhaps 12 cows (five or six may be her sister's, the rest are hers), four of which are milking.²³ The cows graze in three hectares of very poor pasture – the landscape is hilly all around. She uses artificial insemination and borrows a bull only when this fails. We asked her what she looks for in a semen straw, and her answer was: strong legs because the cows have to climb a lot, and good milk production. She remembers the name of the bull (definitely an *ejemplar*) whose semen she used to impregnate each of her cows because it is bad reproductive practice to impregnate a daughter with her father's semen – but the *raza* of the cows is slippery: they have names, and a sort of approximate *raza*. Daniela does not 'improve her herd' in order to increase profitability: her cows may eventually become *carne de res*, beef. But meanwhile she lives with them and vice versa. The money she gets by selling their milk is also for the cows, for their food, which then leads to more milk, which represents more money both for the cows and the family. Ultimately, they all eat with the money obtained from the cows and, to be sure, from Daniela's work.²⁴ Her way of 'making cows' is a far cry from that practised in commercial breeding. Instead she would describe her practice as *criar vacas*, a phrase that moves to English as 'rearing cows' but also as raising them, as in a multispecies family. Here again, then, there are bumps in translation, and those bumps continue to make us think. So, for instance, speakers of the Colombian bovine idiom who understand English would frown if we were to translate Daniela's practices of '*criar*' as 'breeding', while they would approve of translating *Asociación de Criadores de Holstein* as 'Holstein Breeders Association'. There is a fork in the translation here that ties to different practices because *criar reses* (peasant *vacas*, cows that will eventually become *reses*) does not require practices to improve the breed of the herd. Practices of *crianza* may make (slippery) *raza* on the peasant farm, and breeds (that demand stability) as they are taken on by member of an *asociación de criadores*.²⁵

Jonat, a Simbrah *ejemplar* bull in the semen-collection centre, illustrates a case of *crianza* that translates into English as 'commercial breeding'. After a successful performance at AgroExpo, we met Jonat at the cattle ranch owned by Don Raúl; at AgroExpo, he was referred to as Jonat's *propietario y criador*. The phrase comfortably moves to English as 'owner and breeder'. Imagined long before his birth, Don Raúl designed Jonat during a laborious 10-year experimental process in which he impregnated the best of his own Simmental cows with the semen of Brahman, Simbrah or Simmental bulls, until he finally obtained the bull that satisfied the qualities he was looking for. Jonat has become perhaps the most important of Don Raúl's biocapitalist assets, his semen a commodity widely sold in straws for artificial insemination coveted as good breeding material. Don Raúl invests money in Jonat, keenly marketing the bull's reproductive potential and genetic capacities, and providing him with comfort and care, for both commercial and

non-commercial reasons. The bovine idiom *propietario y criador* emphasizes Don Raúl's importance in Jonat's life and radiates (to a possible market audience as well) the feelings of pride and care that attach Don Raúl to the bull's genetic qualities which he, Don Raúl, considers to be not only his property, but also his own achievement.

Despite the differences, Don Raúl's farm also resembles that of Daniela: there is care. When we met Jonat we also met Ricki, a worker on the farm. He was involved in the process of designing the genetic mixture that finally yielded Jonat, but now he attends to the bull's everyday wellbeing. He visits the pasture where Jonat grazes every day, provides him with water and salt, and looks after that major and crucial exhibition feature of *ejemplares*, his bodily form. They know one another in ways that allow Ricki to swiftly handle Jonat's huge body. They travel together to cattle fairs, share days and nights, and at the AgroExpo Ricki sleeps, eats and takes baths with Jonat. They even catch the same diseases. Ricki may also act as an intermediary between potential buyers of Jonat's semen straws and Don Raúl, but he is also deeply attached to Jonat. He missed him when the bull was at the semen collection centre, and cheerfully sent us a voice message when Jonat returned to the ranch. '*Volvió el hombre*', he said, 'the man is back'.

Crianza links to both *raza*/‘breed’ and slippery ‘race’. It links people who would not otherwise be together. But in both cases, in addition it connects animals and humans in practices of care comprising intimacy and *cariño*, a deep feeling of attachment coupled with generosity that ‘affect’ only superficially translates. *Crianza* is embedded in diverse ways of multispecies togetherness.

Conclusion

In this article we have explored a series of Colombian bovine idioms. Drawing on our fieldwork on ‘making cow’, we have shown how the practices for doing this vary from location to location. There are places – the AgroExpo is one example – in which a bio-commercial logic of breeding dominates. Here animals are bred as *ejemplares*, exemplary animals, that will become tomorrow's suppliers of semen for those who wish to improve their herds. Stability here is crucial: in these practices what we have called the ‘*raza*-breed’ is held in place, and as a part of this, information is crucial. Each animal – and each semen straw – comes with a long genealogy. The value of the animal resides in this combination: a biological form that is carefully maintained goes together with information about the breeding that produced the animal.

This is *raza* in one form. Alongside this, peasant farmers also practise *raza*, but in a different way. So, for instance, we showed that Rosalba's cows are mixed as to their *raza*. Some are the product of artificial insemination, and some (those that have not been ‘domesticated’, are more *criolla*, ‘more creole’) are not. They also have different *looks*, and as she describes their colour and size Rosalba uses the language of breeds (Normande, Holstein) even though these are animals without a recorded lineage. But what is even more striking is that the names that she uses to describe a particular cow shift. A ‘bit of Normande’ does not necessarily remain a ‘bit of Normande’ but may become something else instead. If the *raza* of *ejemplares* is all about stability, in the context of peasant farming flexibility stands out as crucial. This has to do with local concerns. Peasants want their cows to do well in a specific setting. So, as we saw, Daniela is hoping for cows that

will thrive on her poor hilly pasture, *res* with strong legs and good milk production, cows that are productive. She remembers who parented her cows but does not hold on to information about their long-term genealogy and is not invested in certification. On the small farm, the cows are not *ejemplares* but rather *res* and this comes with a different investment in what it means to have a *raza*.

So peasant *raza* is unlike commercial *raza*-breed. At the same time, these two worlds intersect. Peasant farmers may want to use commercial semen straws to improve the productivity of their animals and this helps to feed biocommerce. This logic was described to us by the veterinarian Gilberto. He worked with genetic information for farmers who wanted to improve the milk production of their herds. The resulting cows came with genetic information about their lineage, and hence are neither *ejemplares* nor *res*. Instead they counted as *vacas*. The intersection of the two worlds also goes in the other direction: some of the practices of human–animal care that characterize peasant farming may also be found in the high-tech biocommercial and competitive world of the *ejemplares*.

What are the lessons from all this for the trials and tribulations of writing in English? As we observed at the outset, our materials are in Spanish, our thinking, talking and writing is in both Spanish and in English, and this final text is in English (and has been revised by an editor). The bumps that we encountered along the way we have used as ethnographic and analytical opportunities. For out of the many bovine idioms at work in Colombian farming practices only a few map onto the categories embedded in the English languages. Trying to write about the other ‘untranslatable’ ways of organizing human–animal relations in English helps to rob everything that might seem self-evident in any particular bovine idiom of any self-evidence. ‘Breed’ is not the same as *raza*. There are overlaps, but also gaps between the two words and the work they do. Trying to articulate in English what *raza* is in commercial breeding practices and what it is in peasant farming helped us with our analysis of ‘cow-making’ in Colombia.

But there are lessons for English as well. And these do not just have to do with cows, but also with humans. Historically, as many authors have noted, terms of classification, such as *raza* and breed, have been used to describe both humans and non-human animals.²⁶ However, in English ‘race’ and ‘breed’ have been pried apart. Race came to be used for irreducible and unalterable human difference, while breed mostly came to apply to animals. As a part of this, race became a contested term, while breed became a commercial matter. The term ‘breeding’, interestingly, still applies to both, implying acquired and long-term improvement, cultural in the case of people, and genetic in the case of animals. However, and by contrast, in the Spanish of contemporary Latin America there is no word for the modern notion of ‘breed’ other than *raza*. This means that in the region *raza* is used to talk about both animals and people. And as we were analysing *raza* in the context of cow-making it struck us that this has different meanings. It may be fixed, as it is in commercial breeding and its genealogical databases, or it may be variable, as it is in most peasant practices. And what, then, about the humans? Historically, Latin American elites have often had ‘brown skin’. (Both of your authors fall into this category.) Unlike Anglo-American practices of race where skin colour was taken as a sign of ‘race’ that is obvious to the eye, in Latin America, to the disconcertment of at least some Europeans and Americans,²⁷ the *raza* of elites has been certified by lineage of blood or university

titles rather than skin colour. And the mechanism at work in creating those elites, then, is not unlike that of *raza* in the sense of ‘breed’: it depends on paperwork.²⁸ Perhaps this is an insight that might be transferred from Spanish to English?

There are complications to this argument that take us beyond the scope of this article. But the point that we want to end with is that bovine idioms and human idioms are not just linked because both may be the object of similar categorizations. Added to this, bovines and humans come together in human–animal practices, and the humble *res* and the arrogant *ejemplar* partake of – and strengthen – the status and the conditions of their owners. In the absence of a certified breed a *res* would be socially out of place in AgroExpo, while an *ejemplar*, an animal whose breed is certified, does not belong in the small town cattle fair of Zipaquirá. ‘Out of placeness’ is indexed by either having or lacking breed certification. But the people involved also similarly either belong or not. When visiting AgroExpo, Eduardo gets lost and wanders round its edges marvelling what he sees. The reverse is also the case. In small town cattle markets, owners of *ejemplares* are equally at a loss, and the semen of their prize bulls would not find a buyer because it is not obviously better than that of other bulls. In short, the making of *res* and *ejemplar* also makes social place and it may extend to the humans doing the making. Some are well bred while others – those lacking the certification of lineage – are not.

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Notes

1. That cow-making material semiotic assemblages are different and differentiated goes without saying (about material-semiotic assemblages see Law, 2019). About ‘cow’ as an object of history see Erica Fudge (2017).
2. Our English is not the same either and we both relate to it, our second language, differently as well. About the geopolitics of ‘bad spoken languages’ see Rodríguez Medina (2019).
3. ‘Bovine idiom’ is a notion coined by Evans Pritchard; it comprised an elaborate vocabulary he considered necessary to understand the social life of the human group he was studying (called Nuer) and was used to talk about the cattle and herds they owned (Evans Pritchard, 1940, p. 19). Analogously, we use ‘bovine idiom’ to name those cattle-related vocabularies and practices following which enables us to explore sections of the dense material-semiotic grids of cow-making in Colombia.
4. There is a slight translation bump here which we are not opening to discussion: we have translated *vacuno* as bovine, although the word is composed of *vaca*/cow plus the suffix *uno*/ish. So ‘cowish’ would be a ‘literalized’ way of writing what *vacuno* means.
5. Cattle is a *plural tantum* (plural only in Latin) according to the online *Oxford Dictionaries*: <https://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/2015/05/18/12-nouns-that-are-always-plurals/>
6. *Finca* is an interesting word in Colombian Spanish: it can name from a wealthy ranch to a small peasant farm.
7. Very briefly, we conceptualize the biocapitalist material-semiotic practices of cattle reproduction as the entanglement of the sciences of (animal) life and political economic regimes to produce life-generating substances as ‘objects’ (semen straws, frozen embryos), commodities (obtained/

expropriated from animals) to be sold, speculated with, and valorized in a capitalist market. This form of biocapitalism may partially displace the reproductive role of animal sex and replace it with diverse human and non-human intra-related practices for the production of animal life. An important consequence of this is that the reproduction and production of life become the same overlapping event (see Franklin, 2006; Franklin & Lock, 2003; Helmreich, 2008; Sunder Rajan, 2006). For a history of artificial insemination see Clarke (2007) and Franklin (2007).

8. *Ejemplares* are the result of practices of scientific breeding, about which Haraway says 'the breeding system that evolved with the data-keeping system was called scientific breeding, and in myriad ways this paper-plus flesh system is behind the histories of eugenics and genetics, as well as other sciences (and politics) of animal and human reproduction' (Haraway, 2008, p. 53).
9. In this article we focus on semen straws; we have yet to follow embryo transfer of fertilized oocytes, another important commodity that circulates in the biocapitalist market of cattle reproduction. As embryo donators cows can also be *ejemplares* but their number is proportionately smaller. The speed at which they become ready for this biotechnology is lower than that of bulls becoming bio-economically proven as 'good' sperm producers.
10. See www.calcioilandia.com/animais/visualizar/a7368-radar-dos-pocoos
11. The number of *reses* arriving at the slaughterhouse has increased, we were told on one of our visits to the facility; we have witnessed this growth as well as the consequent private investment to technically accelerate the dismembering process by enlarging the corrals, refrigerating, and delivery zones.
12. English-speaking scholars have written prolifically on 'breed'. See for example Harriet Ritvo (1992, 1995, 1997), Sarah Franklin (2007), Haraway (2003) and Gabriel Rosenberg (2017). Yet, as we discuss in the next section, some practices of '*raza*' also escape much of the history and practice of breed.
13. Here, 'pure' means *without* artificial insemination; intriguingly this idiom implicitly makes a difference between 'natural reproduction' (as in a cow impregnated by a bull) and human intervention in cattle reproduction, precisely as in 'artificial insemination'. About '*razas criollas*' see Gallini (2005).
14. Cristina Grasseni (2005, 2007a) talks about the relevance of vision for cattle farmers; Rosalba's vision is indeed trained and Grasseni would call it 'skilled' – yet '*res*' makes difficult the standardization of vision, and rather requires for it to be a hybrid skill: included in it would be a shared conversation about what is seen.
15. Working in European farms, Grasseni has described how applied locally reproductive technologies, including artificial insemination, 'provide ample scope for local negotiations, resistance and conflict' (Grasseni, 2007b, p. 496).
16. See <https://asosimmentalcolombia-com.jimdo.com/raza-1/raza-simbrah/>
17. See www.thecattlesite.com/breeds/beef/90/simbrah/
18. Even so, these animals are not *reses*; their individual and genealogical information – owner, number, sex, ancestral breed combination, productive and reproductive qualities and other characteristics – is fully registered in the pertinent breeders' association.
19. This may be what gives them their name in Spanish: *razas sintéticas*; the phrase translates to English most usually as 'composite' but they are also called 'synthetic' and 'hybrid'. See www.thecattlesite.com/breeds/beef/80/composite/ (accessed 7 October 2019).
20. In this process 'breed' is the unit to track what is being mixed. The production of synthetic breeds entails the calculation of proportions of the different breeds that will eventually make a single animal. To track what is being mixed, each breed is represented as a unit; from this process a hybrid synthetic bull results that is considered a new breed. Paradoxically to lay ears, crossbreeding produces a breed that is 'pure', yet this breed does not imply the purity of lack of mixture.

21. Normande is promoted locally by AsoNormando, the national association. They have a rural extension service to extend the market for the bull semen they produce at locally affordable prices.
22. What circulates in the sperm straw is, in a sense, placeless breed; after successful artificial insemination, it becomes placed, emerging through local animal epigenetics
23. That the size of the herd is unclear (to us) tells of Daniela's homestead: of course, she knows how many animals she has, but this number is not something she cares much about.
24. Daniela and her cows work together and for each other, to sustain their mutually dependent lives. On collaboration and work among farmers and their animals see Porcher and Schmitt (2012) and Porcher (2015, 2017).
25. Commercial semen straws are common to both; yet they may be differently entangled as they emerge from *crianza* that translates as 'breeding' and from *crianza* that does not.
26. The scholarly literature – both on race and breed – has already asserted the connections between race (and racism) and animal breeding as modern practice (Derry et al., 2018; Franklin, 2006). On human breed and breeding (as in 'well-bred') see Edwards (2000). In Latin America, the interrelated divergence between human *raza* (and race) and animal and human breed is replete with a long history of complexities for which this article is not the place. But see Ginzburg (2017) for the etymology of early modern human–animal *raza* and its connection with breeding.
27. In 1912, in the highland city of Cuzco, Peru, an English professor at the local university and the leader of the first urban census of the city, commenting on the accuracy of the data, complained that brown-skinned 'mestizos' tried 'to be included as white' (Giesecke, 1913, as cited in de la Cadena, 2005). This was not without precedent: when in 1846 the geographer Johan Jakob Von Tschudi visited Lima he had a similar complaint: the elites, he said 'self-identify as "whites" and confront Indians with superiority. Nothing can be more flattering than to ask them if they are Spanish, a question that they answer affirmatively, even as all their features are obviously indigenous' (von Tschudi, 1966, as cited in de la Cadena, 2005).
28. On differences between *raza* in Latin America and race in the US, see de la Cadena (2005). For differences among different Latin American countries, see Wade et al. (2014).

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