

**WITNESS TO SOVEREIGNTY**  
ESSAYS ON THE INDIAN MOVEMENT IN LATIN AMERICA

This book spans more than 30 years of history, the same three decades in which "indigenous sovereignty" emerged from five centuries of banishment as an unauthorized and unspeakable taboo to become a major topic of national political contention. Varese is both the author of this fascinating chronicle and a key actor in the very process and transformations that he narrates. The arenas of these political practices have an impressive scope: denouncement in international forums of repression against indigenous peoples; work on international legal instruments for indigenous rights; a pioneering land titling program for indigenous communities in the Peruvian Amazon; innovative bilingual-transcultural education and "cultural worker" training in Oaxaca; work with transnational organizations of indigenous immigrants in California. This book also breaks ground theoretically, by offering a creative fusion of a "political economy" analytical frame with ethnography sensitive to the meaning, premises, politics and imaginaries of indigenous peoples' cultural production and resources - what might be called indigenous hermeneutics. This book allows *the reader* to become a witness to sovereignty, by following Varese's 30-year odyssey of politically engaged scholarship on and with indigenous movements of Latin America.

Charles R. Hale  
University of Texas, Austin  
President, Latin American Studies Association  
(May '06 - Oct '07)



INTERNATIONAL  
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WITNESS TO SOVEREIGNTY

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ESSAYS ON THE INDIAN MOVEMENT IN LATIN AMERICA

Stefano Varese



IWGIA is an international, non-governmental, membership organisation, which supports indigenous peoples world wide in their struggle for self-determination. IWGIA's activities focus on human rights work, research, documentation and dissemination of information and project work in co-operation with indigenous organisations and communities.

Since its foundation in 1968, IWGIA has followed the indigenous movement and continuously increased its activities and expanded its network with indigenous peoples worldwide.

Today, IWGIA has an established global network of researchers and human rights activists concerned and engaged in indigenous peoples' affairs.

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Essays on the Indian Movement  
in Latin America

**Stefano Varese**

Notes, comments and complementary texts

**Alberto Chirif**

Copenhagen 2006

**WITNESS TO SOVEREIGNTY**  
**Essays on the Indian Movement in Latin America**

**Author:** Stefano Varese

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*Again, to Linda, Vanessa, André and Isabella Sophia.  
And to my Italian, Peruvian and Gringo families.*

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## PROLOGUE

Guillermo Delgado-P.  
University of California, Santa Cruz

The first time I ran into Stefano Varese's work was in 1972. At the time, I was attending the Catholic University in Santiago de Chile and frequently visited the Documentation Centre, where I read several of his early articles on the ethnology of the Indians of the Peruvian Amazon and a report on the Barbados Meetings. The journals were sent from Peru and carried a very prolific new anthropology. It problematized the Other from an holistic perspective, coming from immersions that retrieved an indigenous episteme, distancing itself from the ahistorical trends then proposed by structuralism. I understood this anthropology to be liberationist as it invited a discussion on the ethics of research vis-à-vis the ulterior responsibility of the researcher. The term Urgent Ethnology was coined at the time, as a late modernist concern for the increasing demise of indigenous peoples, their languages, cultures and territories around the world. The new processes of displacement and uprootedness we experienced gave way to inevitable isolation, or a merging in cities with other ethnicities as a way of survival. The prolific and emergent anthropology Stefano Varese offered has been read as an active documentation process mediated by a transparent commitment to the human nature cause. It established a dialogue that ruptured the distance between the "objectivist knowledgeable ego" and the "informant". In this sense, such anthropology gave new meaning to the concept of decolonization.

In the Chile of the 1970s, anthropology meant archaeology. A woman lecturer, Dr. Ximena Bunster, a former student of Oscar Lewis, taught ethnography from within the Department of Sociology since anthropology was unavailable as a specialism. With the coup d'état against President Allende in 1973, university departments were closed or forcibly re-organized. Hundreds of students and professors all over the country went into hiding, exile or were executed by the military. Foreign students were denounced as subversives and conspirators. They were persecuted implacably, and several were assassinated or were disappeared. In this turbulent situation, and with my professor's support, the direct assistance of liberation theologians and a few very dear Chilean friends, I was able to finish my degree and then left the country, along with a broken dream. "Un Rito Mítico

Indígena" was the title of my thesis, a theme inspired by the work of Stefano Varese. It analyzed forms of Quechua ritual continuity in the Andean mining communities of Bolivia.

A few years earlier, sometime in August or September of 1969, and thanks to the audio technician who let me into the recording lab at the Universidad de Chile, I had attended the private a cappella recording of a couple of songs and a short story interpreted and narrated by José María Arguedas, the Quechua-raised novelist of Peru. To tell the truth, I did not know about him then but his singing was electrifying. Listening to his voice and his Quechua language meant immediate familiarity with and strong endorsement of something I was working on. And, of course, his short story "El Sueño del Pongo" (The Pongo's Dream), and later the reading of his novels stuck with me forever. It was not until December 1999, thirty years later, on Long Island, New York, that I met Prof. Dr. Pedro Lastra through my wife Professor Norma Klahn, a former student of his. Professor Lastra was the person responsible for taking José María Arguedas to the Universidad de Chile in 1969. In our 1999 encounter with Professor Lastra, I described the 1969 scene to him. He remembered it as clearly as if it were yesterday. Arguedas had been his very dear friend but, as we know, the anthropologist and novelist's suicide shortly after affected us all.

I am highlighting some points of reference in the traveling of ideas, persons, projects and the construction of power. And as I revisit Professor Varese's intellectual contributions in this book, I realize that some pivotal linkages were established earlier on by the augural circulation of human energies that juxtapose themselves in the process of history making. For this very reason, these texts constitute an appreciable addition to the anthropological record; they bear the marks of intellectual identity, in this case, of the making of Latin American anthropology, so distant and distinct from some centralist Euro-American anthropologies. In his *Envisioning Power* (1999), Eric R. Wolf wrote: "For some time I have thought that much good work in the human sciences falls short of its mark because it is unwilling or unable to come to grips with how social relations and cultural configurations intertwine with considerations of power. Anthropologists have relied heavily on notions that see cultural coherence as the working out of cultural-linguistic logics or aesthetics. As a result, they rarely have asked how power structures the contexts in which these promptings manifest themselves or how power is implicated in the reproduction of such patterns." The contexts and cultural spaces in which these essays have been formulated offer a clear example of Wolf's observations, by favoring a view of culture immersed in the problematic of power. Varese writes about cultures that struggle against the powers that be, often from positions of weakness, but from visions of inexorable strength and remembering. The articles map out a "liberationist" Latin American anthropology, a different tradition that has been in the making, a tradition that calls for a dialectical commitment between the ivory towers of academia and the real world.

The tension and friction of this relation is provokingly depicted in the penum proposed by Varese.

As part of a great dialogue, anthropologist after anthropologist named in this collection of essays confirms the boundaries within which a process of decolonization of academia itself needs to be realized before continuing to establish the breadth of a Latin American anthropology. José María Arguedas probably envisaged this need early on. The Arguediana we inherited as readers highlights this issue, a major lesson indeed. The lessons are laid out in this very collection, in which other dialogues beyond Peru are clearly established.

The interdisciplinary and interethnic conversations found in Varese's anthropology of liberation essays are of profound importance to us as active readers. They implicitly propose thinking in an epistemic direction by acknowledging the orthodoxy of foundational ideas but also answering an invitation to reposition our professional and human responsibilities. There are demands posed by historical circumstances, and academics need to speak up against abuses perpetrated by powerful structures, and specific individuals.

Presumably academics should rarely permit themselves to mingle in power struggles that question the status quo, and far less in those struggles that maneuver anthropology at the service of missionaries or bureaucrats. The issue reminds me of the Camelot Project. Yet today, entire university research think-tanks are financed by private funds. The aim is to buttress the powers that be. In Latin America, on the other hand, there is a history of engaged responsibility that influential academics exercise regarding the future of these societies. It means that one must be self-critical, but it also means that there are ethical responsibilities to be enacted by those that seize accessible ideas in order to make sense of the world. A handful of foreign and national anthropologists working in Latin America have committed themselves to accompanying the struggles of native peoples and their cultures. Stefano Varese is one such person, as his work inspires sustained dialogue and the meeting of future challenges.

His work acquires a different meaning, as opposed to others that see the avid consumption of "indigenous cultures", or its theorizing, as a commodity that obtains added value far away from the places where data has been collected.

By challenging this depressing fact, and working on the specific nature of indigenous peoples of the Americas, Varese shows in this collection of essays an important history and memory that needs to be passed on to future generations of young readers and students. For the first time, he traces the co-workings of a whole generation of Latin American anthropologists who re-invented anthropology by decolonizing it, and whose intimate essays have not been clearly enough read in the English-speaking world. Some time ago, Michael Taussig wrote in his *The Magic of the State* that, "Capitalism in Latin America is a not a self-evident law". When we come to think about it, and when we read Stefano Varese's articles, we are indeed invited to be guests of processes and areas that Eric R. Wolf

himself called "The People without History", reminding us about those [indigenous] peoples' histories that are also our own histories. Another issue arises, it is the problem of synchronicity. We can confirm that the Conquest of the Americas was not a synchronic act. The articles compiled in this collection make us realize that the Conquest does indeed continue to this day in indigenous territories.

In a sense, Stefano Varese is showing us a path, not the other path nor the shining one but, rather than limiting himself to the restrictive hallmark of an anthropological approach, he illustrates what Eric Wolf called "to submit its pre-suppositions to the test of direct and intensive encounters with culturally specified populations". Stefano has enhanced the anthropological approach by opening up a much wider scope, reintroducing Fernand Braudel's "longue durée" (originally applied to chorographic and ecological aspects) to something that can be called the "cosmologies of capitalism" in the context of the Amazon and the Americas. As Marx wrote in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, "the tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living". Varese makes us aware of such tradition, but for liberating purposes. At the root, then, is the fact that a resilient memory stronger than amnesia continues to inspire the great social movements of a new century, as we witnessed in the twelve Bolivian highland days that shocked the world in October 2003. This was an Aymara-Quechua Indian social movement that ended with the ousting of the neo-liberal president of that country.

In the Quechua language, the lingua franca spread by Pachakuti Inka throughout a significant territory of the Andes more than five centuries ago, the *Yachaqkuna* and the *Amauta* (the knowledgeable) were individuals considered to have achieved knowledge that was later disseminated throughout the territory, presumably to benefit the livelihoods of the peoples. The *Yachaqkuna* were individuals that aimed at reaching a perfect equilibrium between the *Ñuqa* (self) and the *Pacha* (world), between the *Yuyayniyta* (thoughts) and the *Rumi* (matter), between the *Pacha* (nature) and the *Jamp'i* (cure). Throughout these essays, Stefano Varese lets us taste a little piece of the Quechua sense of achievement of knowledge, knowledge that departs from the *Yunga* and the Amazon *Taypi* to benefit humanity. Indeed, as the Chaqueño novelist Jesús Urzagasti wrote, "The fruit is prefigured in the seed".

Photo: IAC/A. Sanchez



# PREFACE

## THE AUTHOR AND HIS WORK

Alberto Chirif

In the space of less than a year, I have received two requests to write texts to accompany books, both of them by Stefano Varese. The first came from the *Fondo Editorial del Congreso del Perú*, for a re-publication of *La sal de los cerros* (*Salt of the Mountain*) plus a small number of additional articles.<sup>1</sup> The second was for this book, *Witness to Sovereignty*, a compilation of thirteen previously published essays that brings together an important part of the prolific intellectual production of the author and his political contributions. Despite their similarities, these two requests have differences that I would like to highlight. In the case of *La sal de los cerros*, the task was a broader one as it was a question of reflecting on what had happened to Amazonian indigenous societies in the almost 40 years since the book was first published. This time, however, I have been asked to write a preface explaining the technical structure of the book, updating the demographic information in the texts and providing a summary of each essay with an indication of its place and date of publication, in addition deciding which of them requires a postscript.

And yet because of the great friendship between Stefano Varese and myself I must confess that I am at a loss as to how to adopt a clinical attitude when writing about the work of a colleague, teacher and close personal friend. Because of this, before moving on to the neutrality of a technical description, I would like to begin by highlighting some of what I consider to be his greatest contributions to an understanding of the indigenous societies of the Amazon and their inclusion as a political issue worthy of concern not only to anthropologists but also to professionals from other walks of life involved in building a just society.

The different vision of the region and its native inhabitants presented in *La sal de los cerros*, which I consider to have been a forerunner in terms of Peruvian anthropology's commitment to the destiny of indigenous peoples, stimulated particular interest in their situation among many people who were students at that time, myself included, and also among later generations. Even today, almost 40 years on, the book still attracts professionals and students of anthropology and other disciplines alike, who find in the text an open window through

which to reflect upon and gain a knowledge of the reality of the Amazonian indigenous peoples, so frequently the target of prejudice and stereotypical portrayals.

In Peruvian history, lies, betrayal and defeats are the norm, and this is the tradition in which we have been brought up. The country began to take shape during the Conquest with the founding act of Pizarro's lies and betrayal at Atahualpa, which marked the start of the destruction of the Incan army. Felipillo was the traitor's name, synonymous also with crime and lies, and so it matters little whether the character really existed because his value, like that of myths, although without their exemplary nature, lies in giving an account of the fundamental events that have marked the history of humanity. In this tradition, furthermore, it is always the poor that lose out, poor being a category that is defined in relation to the values and models of the dominant society established by the Conquest and which, notwithstanding crises and modifications, continues to this day.

The views put forward of the Amazon, and of the indigenous peoples that inhabit it, presented distorted images of their reality and did so with the weight of dogma, emphasising their timeless and unchanging condition. Thus it is, because thus it was, and thus it will always be. The poor, and this self-evidently includes the indigenous, are considered by the dominant classes as having been placed on this earth by Providence to serve the rich and powerful. This was borne out by the words of a foreign consul when analysing the issue of the prevailing work conditions in the Putumayo Basin at the start of the 20th century, following complaints of slavery and massacres of indigenous at the hands of the rubber barons.

What does Stefano Varese show us in his founding book and different essays, in addition to the indigenous victory over authority which, in itself, was quite something? In his writings, in his lectures and public speeches, Varese brings his readers, listeners and interlocutors in touch with a society that has deep democratic roots and yet is not subject to the representational processes on which our society claims to base the principles of democracy. Many indigenous societies, such as the Ashaninka,<sup>2</sup> have been societies with authorities but without chiefs, that is, with people who have gained prestige through socially recognised merit but who have not established relations of leadership and imposition over others because of this. This is how it was until the distortions introduced by the rubber and subsequent booms. And yet they were not anarchic societies, respect for socially accepted norms was guaranteed by a wide and diffuse system of social control, accepted by all. Access to knowledge was free, and despite the fact that access to shamanism was (and still is) more restricted, such access did not depend on a person's economic power but on the qualities and willingness of those who were to learn it and the willingness of those who were to teach it. Possession of the means of production was also free and based on a person's capacity to put

them to good use in obtaining the food or raw materials with which to make the necessary products. In more traditional areas, this still continues to this day.

In other words, these were societies in which the success of some in providing themselves with a good life did not create misery among the others, and far less did they consume natural resources at the current levels, in which the contamination and disappearance of species and complete ecosystems is not a future speculation but a tragically concrete reality.

Varese's writings and work as a professional and teacher, in addition to having motivated a number of careers (mine included), have been important in defending the rights of the continent's indigenous peoples, and this can be seen in his wide experience covering the Andean Amazon, Central America and South-west USA. This is well covered by him in his introduction to this book. Without wishing to repeat it, I wish to emphasise his work within the Peruvian state.

In the early 1970s, Stefano Varese took up a position in a small *ad-hoc* office attached to the General Directorate of Peasant Communities of the Ministry of Agriculture, which was to take responsibility for Amazonian indigenous affairs. His own experience with the Asheninka<sup>3</sup> of the Gran Pajonal, plus that which he gained in those early years with the Aguaruna of the Alto Marañón, had shown him the lack of protection from which they were suffering. It was on this basis that he wrote and promoted a draft bill of law that would recognise their specific rights as native inhabitants and their general rights as Peruvian citizens. Up until then, no laws - either colonial or Republican - had recognised the Amazonian indigenous peoples' right to own their territory. This was in contrast to the situation in the Andes, although in practice this has not helped the Andean population greatly in enforcing their rights in the face of arrogant *hacienda* owners and mining companies. ILO Convention 107, in force since 1957, was openly integrationist, considering the indigenous as a tiresome rung on the ladder of human evolution that had to be overcome. This therefore only offered a tenuous defence of their rights. In accordance with this Convention, national legislation established reserves for the population, although these reserves did not consolidate their ownership nor guarantee them exclusive use of the forest resources.

Initial sociological data with which to produce the draft bill was taken from the area known as the central forests of Peru - the *Selva Central* (eastern foothills of the Andes, between 2000 and 600 m.a.s.l.). It was an area of long-standing colonization, dating back at least to the mid-19th century, and which had been consolidated by seizing areas historically belonging to indigenous peoples such as the Yanesha, Ashaninka, Matziguenga or Awajun. Settled groups of these peoples had been hemmed in on all sides, surrounded by settlers.

For this reason the bill, which was finally approved in 1974, was aimed primarily at safeguarding and consolidating the ownership of isolated indigenous settlements, which came to be known as *native communities*. Other reasons ex-

plaining this approach were the scant experience of legislating for a little known reality and the lack of indigenous organisations (such as there are now) with solidly developed concepts of territory, people, self-determination, intellectual property and so on.

In the time that has elapsed since then (32 years), the law has undergone various changes. It was replaced in 1978 by a new regulation, although the part referring to the communities was retained largely intact. It came under greatest attack in 1995 when the government promulgated a law on agrarian investment in the country (Decree Law 26505). By then, however, the indigenous peoples were already organised in their own defence. But this is not the place to enter into such details.

Suffice to say that the problem of isolated community units has been resolved through the practice of titling. Where possible, the communities have been titled contiguously, such that their adjacent spaces form, at least partially, the territorial unit of that indigenous people. In terms of a community's legal status, there are also ways of overcoming their isolation from one another. For example, all or some of them can agree to form one unit, hence processing one single title. Such has been the case of the Matsés. Some ten settlements, representing the whole of this people's population in Peru (they are also to be found in Brazil), managed to unite into one community to process a single property title by which they were finally recognised some 400,000 hectares.

As the postscript to chapter I of this book shows, the total area titled for indigenous Amazonian communities comes to more than 10 million hectares, to which must be added 2 million more of *communal reserves*, a category of natural protected area for the benefit of those inhabiting the area, mostly indigenous people, who also participate in its management. An additional 2.5 million hectares are currently being processed in this form. Finally, there are another 2 million hectares of *territorial reserves*, which is a legal transitional formula offered for *peoples in voluntary isolation*. A further indeterminate amount is in the process of being negotiated for new reserves of this kind.

### Structure of the Book and Subjects

This volume contains 13 essays plus an introduction by the author. This latter is of immense value because it enables one to discover more not only about his personal career but also the processes followed by indigenous peoples and their organisations, which are as varied and creative as their own cultural diversity. These processes range from their struggles to claim their territorial rights to the ways in which they have organised in environments as varied and hostile as California, where they work as domestics or seasonal farm labourers. In general terms, it can be said that the first three essays refer to the indigenous situation in

Peru and the next four to that in Mexico and Central America, whilst the others refer to the "cross-border" processes (political organisation, emigration, cultural reconstruction) that take place in America in general, including the U.S., and California in particular, which hosts large numbers of indigenous immigrants. The order of the essays is determined by a combination of territorial location and chronology. The works were published over the course of 31 years, from 1971 to 2002.

In the two first essays, written at the start of the 1970s, Varese offers an approach to the issue of the Amazon and indigenous peoples. Their value lies more in political than scientific terms. Both were written in the years when he was working as a civil servant, responsible for writing a draft bill of law for these peoples. They were years in which little was known within Peru about the region, and far less about its indigenous peoples. Worse still, people had a distorted image of them, the result of prejudices accumulated since colonial times and exacerbated during the Republic. These were the first attempts to analyse this reality and offer historical reflections with which to understand the role the colonizing society imposed on the region and its inhabitants. His book *La sal de los cerros* had been published in 1968, the fruits of his undergraduate research in what was then the School of Ethnology and Archaeology of the Catholic University of Peru. These texts fulfilled the role of systematizing our knowledge of the region at that time (for example, the ecological processes of the Amazonian forest), presenting a view of the injustices suffered by the indigenous (missionary compounds, rubber exploration, plundering of their territories) and questioning the inflexible concepts that served to underpin settlement policies (the region as an uninhabited space and source of never-ending resources). And above all, they fulfilled the political role of supporting a law for indigenous Amazonian communities, approved in 1974, which formed the first Republican legislation in Peru to recognise the indigenous right to ownership of their lands and other resources. This law, modified over the years, today still forms the backbone guaranteeing their collective territories.

In these works, I would also highlight the author's insistence that the region and its indigenous societies form part of a wider context, both national and international. The Amazon is not an island but a region linked to wider processes that influence it. He attacks the vision of the region as primitive, magical forest. His vision is a political and integrationist one of the Amazonian space, which plays a dependent role, as does the country itself, within capitalism. With these reflections, he is trying to break with the vision of the indigenous as isolated societies. He also questions the ethnographic descriptions that offer ideal situations, reconstructed on the basis of a systematization of cultural patterns gathered through conversations with indigenous informants; when measuring the changes produced by colonization there is then a failure to compare these with the reality of the moment. There are no "two separate realities", the "two Perus" that some

authors talk of: the modern and the traditional, that of the 21st century and that of the Stone Age. There is only one, the integration of which has expanded the chain of poverty transmission to sectors of society that were previously not poor, precisely because they were not included in this dynamic of integration via stratification. The situation of the indigenous is thus due not to their isolation but, on the contrary, to the conditions they have been subjected to since this contact which, in brief, can be summarised as a loss of rights (territory and resources, self-determination and others, such as their right to develop their own knowledge and language) and a "gain" of duties that have formed heavy responsibilities, particularly that of menial work.

A number of these issues are in fact considered from new perspectives in the subsequent essays. His analysis of ethnic conscience which is, or can be, class conscience, is consistent with the idea that indigenous societies are not separate realities but immersed in complex political and economic networks woven from global power centres. In this respect, anthropological visions devoted to the ideal reconstruction of cultures that no longer exist in this way in reality, and furthermore do not stop to analyse the causes of their transformation, are as limited as those with fatalistic overtones, which consider indigenous societies as passive entities with neither the capacity to respond nor to adapt to the new conditions being imposed by colonization and the market. From this perspective, there is little that can be done except to watch them disappear off the face of the earth.

In the minds of many, the concept of indigenous seems to implicitly carry with it that of immutability. Specific indigenous societies conform to this as long as their members continue to respond to ideal models constructed by means of studies that give an account of their conceptions, values, institutions and behaviours, described as traditional, but they stop being so when they break with this trend. The transformation is inherent to any society, and to prove this we only have to look at our own society from an historical perspective of 30, 40 or more years, as far as our own age will allow us. This change, however, which is positively perceived as a sign of progress and modernity, seems to become a kind of disqualifying fault when it refers to the indigenous. For an external observer, the indigenous must appear to be unchanging (like Caesar's wife) and, for this reason, visible signs are necessary. Although nakedness may be a little extreme in this day and age, this does require that certain clothing be worn, along with face painting, weapons and other things.

From this point of view, it is assumed that - at the moment of the European invasion in the 15th century - the indigenous were as they always had been. The absurd concept of *prehistory* to refer to everything before the written word, ethnocentric like so many others, implies that at this stage *there was no history* and the future was paralyzed. And yet the changes that took place must have been amazing, not only due to the millennia passed before the geographical error that brought Columbus to these shores, but also for the fluid social and economic in-

terchanges that took place amongst the native peoples of the Amazon and those of the rest of the world and, in many cases, between the two.

Peoples are constantly in a process of change, absorbing concepts and technologies from different cultures and, in this regard, their originality does not stem from the creation of a cultural act but in the stamp they imprint on it to make it their own. Nevertheless, it is also clear that in many cases external influences can be so strong that peoples end up losing their own structures and disappearing as specific entities, overwhelmed by the weight of domination.

Varese presents and analyzes cases in which the ethnicity of indigenous societies has been adapted or redefined in the light of conditions radically opposed to those that first brought them into being and formed their context for cultural reproduction and creation. He highlights the case of indigenous people from Mexico and Central America in California (a region he now includes within the boundaries of Latin America) who, in spite of their isolation, not only in relation to their place of origin but also socially, and insofar as they are working in individual jobs, have recreated the traditional institutions of mutual support that they previously used to help each other in farm labour or house building and which now fulfil the role of supporting recently arrived immigrants. Bonds of solidarity are also maintained with their places of origin through the remittance of funds to family members.

This encounter between uprooted indigenous people from different traditions, subjected to the pressures and inequalities of the Californian labour market, accelerates the formation of a class conscience and creates new kinds of social relations that give rise to organisations to respond to their needs. Although local, these organisations have a transnational dimension insofar as they support people from different backgrounds, from the Andes to Central America and Mexico. This transnational encounter is also expressed by means of institutions such as the Coordinating Body of Indigenous Organisations of the Amazon Basin (*Coordinadora de Organizaciones Indígenas de la Cuenca Amazónica* - COICA), which today has affiliated confederations in nine different countries. Despite the problems it faced in 2005, COICA remains a valid spokesperson for proposals and demands from this part of the continent. The *Alianza para la Protección del Bosque y del Clima* and the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations are also associations that stretch beyond borders.

### Globalization

In one of his works, Varese considers it naïve and ahistoric to state that the dismantling of the indigenous spatial/cultural cosmos in order to subjugate its peoples is neo-imperial or a recent phenomenon of the "New World Order". He maintains, in contrast, that the indigenous world became globalised in the 16th

century due to the European invasion, and that an awareness of this rupture, this intrusion, of the dismembering and dispersion of the indigenous social and cosmic body, is clearly expressed in the indigenous accounts and records of Taki Onqoy, Inkarrí, Guamán Poma de Ayala, Inca Garcilaso, Blas Valera, Chilam Balam, of the Kaqchiquel and in all indigenous American literature since the 16th century.

I subscribe to Stefano Varese's vision and I will now try to offer some reflections on globalisation, a word which in some people's minds seems to have acquired an almost magical nature, capable of curing all humanity's ills, without taking into account the fact that the intercommunication implied in this process only widens the scope of previous asymmetrical relations.

To my mind, when one talks of globalisation today, two errors are committed. The first is to believe that it is a recent phenomenon dating from the last few decades, due to improvements (and speed) in transport and communication systems such as the Internet and satellite communications in general. The second consists of considering this as something that democratizes people's access to information and knowledge, when in reality it does none other than reproduce the unequal structures in which they are placed.

While the Western world expanded from the 16th century onwards, the indigenous world, in contrast, contracted. What was the first measure adopted by the invaders as the strategy for their policy of conquest? To establish "missionary centres" ("*reducciones misionales*"). To *reduce* people was a concept that they implemented in practice in its widest semantic meaning: to subject, compress, cut out and diminish. In effect, people who lived and thought freely were henceforward subjugated, shut away in small areas that became dominated by others, their access to their own resources diminished, their knowledge transmission systems restricted, leading to their decline, and with the possibility for exchange visits with different and distant indigenous nations at an end.

The phenomenon of expanding the borders for some whilst simultaneously reducing them for others is something that has repeated itself regularly ever since. One example is the process that began in the first half of the 19th century in South America, a terrible time for the indigenous in which this dynamic of expansion/contraction acquired a perverse nature based on the establishment and growth of national states (rubber in Peru, the *desert campaign* in Argentina and the *pacification* of the Mapuche in Chile), supported by ideas taken from positivism and evolutionism, which affirm the superiority of civilization over savagery, and of the industrialization imposed by the dogma of progress. The actual contraction of apparently expanded spaces can also be seen in the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent increase in repressive measures, in political and security terms, that restricted access on the part of the growing Third World population to the industrialised countries of North America and Europe. These measures have now reached climax point with the U.S.'s plans to build a wall along the border between the United States and Mexico.

The development of communications technology is certainly a recent phenomenon, but this does not mean that the people previously had no other methods of globalization. In his book *La sal de los cerros*, Varese describes the mountain where individuals from different indigenous peoples used to meet to obtain salt supplies as a sort of arena for globalisation because there they exchanged not only their own products for salt but also ideas, knowledge and technology, in a word, culture. Many other similar spaces existed, for example the Vaupés and Caquetá rivers in the Colombian Amazon, where peoples of different languages met to exchange knowledge and products. There were also regional interconnections, by means of which Amazonian products reached the coastal deserts (e.g. wood, resin, feathers) and products from the coast were, in turn, taken inland.

This form of globalization was also exerted over wider areas. In an important conference, Borges referred to the exchange of knowledge and culture between East and West. I shall give one example. He talked of a series of tales gathered in Alexandria (Egypt) in the 15th century, which were originally told first in India and then in Persia and Asia Minor. He indicates that finally they were compiled in Cairo and, written in Arabic, were published as *The Book of One Thousand and One Nights*. I am not now referring to a simple translation of literary works, something that was certainly very common centuries ago, but of the creation of a culture and the processes by which societies with different traditions re-create and appropriate this. To continue in a literary vein, *Tuti-Nama* or *Tales of the Parrot*<sup>4</sup> is a compendium of 52 stories spanning over an equal number of nights. Their passage into and re-creation by different civilizations gives an idea of this enriching globalization. Some are based on tales originally written in Sanskrit and other languages of India, and which were later re-translated and re-created in Persian and Arabic. The author who gave them the form we know today was born in Nakhshab, a city that was part of the Mongol Empire. Apart from this, the work is remarkable for references that demonstrate an understanding of ideas and knowledge from different cultural traditions such as Islam, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity and Classical Greek.

Globalization is nothing new. What is new is the way in which it is now taking place: instead of ideas that have the power to enrich we are being passed minced up beef and minced up ideas, both of them indigestible, and cars all of which explode in the same way on all the screens of the world's cinemas.

With regard to the asymmetry of relationships expanded by current globalization, perhaps this process is best characterized by the factories and cross-border plants (through a recent article by Eduardo Galeano I found out that they are called *sweat shops*) of Mexico, Central America and Asia, by means of which transnational capital produces industrial goods under the protection of special laws to attract foreign investment which, simply stated, means getting around the labour laws (that of unionisation, for a start) and environmental protection measures which, in both case, are enshrined in international agreements signed by these countries.

This globalization of minced beef and aseptic ideas has also affected professionals, who instead of supporting processes of strengthening the grassroots social sectors have now become propagandists of the benefits of the transnational forays onto their territories and resources and into their social spaces.

For those of us who trained under the warmth of friendship and the teaching of Stefano Varese, we can but thank him for having given us a new way of viewing anthropology in which there is no subject and object of study as complete opposites but agents integrated in a process that aspires to changing social relations and building a just society. And thank him also for having taught us how to create hope because, as a quotation from Lamartine that accompanies one of his essays says: "*Utopias are often nothing but premature truths.*"

Iquitos, March 1, 2006

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *La sal de los cerros* (*Salt of the Mountain*), the first book written by Stefano Varese, was published in 1968 by the Peruvian University of Science and Technology (no longer in existence). This was in many ways a founding book. Firstly because it marked the beginning of Amazonian anthropology in Peru, even though some authors (particularly from the United States) had conducted research at the start of the 1960s, and because it offered a new and critical vision of colonization. But secondly, and more importantly, because of the impact the book had on the then government of the Socialist General, Velasco Alvarado, causing it to pay attention to the reality of Amazonian indigenous peoples. Varese was, in fact, charged by this government to design *ad hoc* legislation for them, and this was finally approved in 1974. These actions, in turn, encouraged the indigenous peoples of the region to initiate a vigorous organisational movement to affirm and defend their rights. The book was re-published in 1973 (*Instituto Nacional de Investigación y Desarrollo Educativo - INIDE*, Lima) and this latter also published a third edition in Spanish. It was published in English under the title *Salt of the Mountain. Campa Asháninka History and Resistance in the Peruvian Jungle*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002.
- <sup>2</sup> If this word were to be Hispanicized, it would be written *Asháninka*, with an accent on the second "a" to show where to place the emphasis. It is an agreed principle among linguists, however, that the grammatical rules of one language should not be transferred into another, even in a case such as this, in which the Ashaninka language is immersed in a Spanish-dominated context. For this reason, I use Ashaninka.
- <sup>3</sup> Asheninka is a linguistic variation of the Ashaninka language that is spoken in the Gran Pajonal, part of the Pichis and Perené basins and along the upper course of the Ucayali River. Up until two decades ago, speakers of all variations of Ashaninka were called *Campa* indiscriminately, a term that has negative connotations.
- <sup>4</sup> Tuti-Nama is a 16th century compendium that originates from India.

Photo: Paolo Laszlo



# INTRODUCTION

## NOTE ON HOW TO READ (OR NOT TO READ) THE INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I finish writing the Introduction I realize, not without some embarrassment, that I have in some way ended up doing precisely what I have been critiquing almost obsessively in my courses on anthropological research and indigenous peoples: the self-centered positioning of the anthropological writer in a discourse and social analysis that should, by its very nature, be de-centered or rather multi-centered. The indigenous voices that I have intensively sought and passionately wanted to expound have been hushed and veiled by my own self-reflection. The intention of my Introduction was to offer the readers a context, in both time and space, for the fifteen essays that constitute this book. I also thought that it would be useful and honest to reveal the sources of my moral and political position with regard to social issues. I did not want to collude with the unfortunate academic practice of obscuring ideological affiliation behind claims of scientific objectivity.

The academic – and political – hegemony of Anglo-American anthropology and social science is visible in the almost systematic absence of Latin American scholars and analysts (far less Indian ones) from the listed references of most of my peers in U.S. academia. I needed to emphasize, especially for an audience of young North American students who will live in a globalized and less parochial community, the fundamental contributions of Latin American intellectuals to the development of independent cultural and social disciplines. In the study of Latin American social movements, as they are addressed by most North American academics, what seems to be at issue is the imperial provinciality and a deeply-rooted sense that “English only” produced thought is more than sufficient to explain the universe. In this sense, rather than proclaiming “the poverty of (Anglo-American) theory” as European scholars might do, I would contend that it is intellectual isolationism and cultural impenetrability that threatens our scholarly creativity in this country.

## INTRODUCTION IN THE GUISE OF A STORY

### The Journey

This book is in the shape of a spiral. In it I visit, circle, revisit and intertwine themes and issues related to the centuries-long struggle of the indigenous peoples of Latin America to survive, retain their independence, gain autonomy and achieve higher levels of ethnic sovereignty. The writings travel a spiral path in time and space that began more than four decades ago in Peru where I had landed as a young immigrant following the footsteps of my Italian father. There, in the northern Sechura desert of the Central Andes and, later, in the Amazon valley of the Huallaga River in the company of my father, I literally discovered the awesome and startling beauty of the cultural “other”: the indigenous.

My incipient fascination and intrigue for indigenous exoticism did not last too long, however. It came to a sudden halt during a trip to an *hacienda* owned by the Church in the southern Andean region of Cusco. Poverty, hunger, exploitation, humiliation, oppression and discrimination soon became the indelible signs of being indigenous in Peru. My first published article describing indigenous backstrap looms (Varese 1963-64) belongs to that initial stage of seduction by illusory indigenous exoticism, followed by a booklet for high school students on the life and scientific travels in Peru of the nineteenth-century Italian naturalist Antonio Raimondi (Varese 1965). By the end of my graduate studies in 1967, all illusion of maintaining a cold, detached and unmoved analytical attitude toward the situation and fate of the indigenous communities of Peru was gone. My academic training in the Catholic University of Peru, under the rigorous guidance of French ethnologist, Jean A. Vellard, and the humanist teachings of Italian historian, Onorio Ferrero, had provided me with efficient theoretical and methodological tools for descriptive empiricism, functionalist analysis and the phenomenological disquisition of social and historical facts. The ethical imperatives of the scrutiny and quest for social justice, however, were purposely left out of our novel and inexperienced intellectual and scholarly education. I can only recall one extraordinary occasion when issues of politics and morals were at the core of our study. During my graduate studies, I took an enlightening seminar on Marxist dialectical materialism offered by a young theologian, Father Gustavo Gutiérrez, who, at that

time, was elaborating his liberation theology. Gustavo Gutiérrez' book *Teología de la Liberación*<sup>1</sup> and his teachings at the Catholic University had built the fundamental moral bridge – sought by my generation – between the socialist and Marxist materialist claims of equality and social justice and the Latin American and Amerindian traditions of spiritual inclusiveness.

Between 1963 and 1967, I traveled and lived for long periods of time in the Amazon region of Peru. I was working on my doctoral dissertation project on the Ashaninka<sup>2</sup> indigenous peoples in the Gran Pajonal of the Central Amazon area (*Selva Central*) and I was trying to become more acquainted with the vast Amazonian region of my country that accounts for more than half of the national territory. In those years, for an urban *Limeño* student like myself, traveling extensively and deeply in the *montaña*, the Amazon area, depended on the goodwill of two types of institutions: the Catholic missionaries, the Protestant missionaries of various denominations, and the military. It took me a while before I realized that I could learn from the poor *mestizo* peasants, the Andean, and the Amazonian indigenous how to travel with very limited economic means, relying instead on the local communities. Those years of journeys to the Cocama indigenous village of Flor de Punga on the Amazon, to the Ashaninka territories of the Gran Pajonal and on the Ene, Perené, Tambo, Pichis, Pachitea rivers, to the Aguaruna and Huambisa lands on the Marañón, Morona, Santiago and Pastaza rivers, to the Shipibo communities on the Ucayali River, and to the river heads of the Yuruá, the Tapiche and the Yaquerana on Matsés indigenous lands became my initiation, my pilgrimage to the profound indigenous Peru that had been invaded militarily in the 16th and 17th centuries and had practiced astonishing forms of resistance ever since.

In 1963, two political forces representing the emerging urban professional middle class, the Popular Action and the Christian Democrat parties, contested the state power of an aging and obsolete oligarchy that had ruled over Peru since its political independence from Spain almost one and half centuries earlier. Fernando Belaúnde Terry, Popular Action candidate, became President of Peru claiming his affinity with the United States, with its Kennedy-era Alliance for Progress, and especially with the “modernization theory” professed and imposed worldwide by J.F. Kennedy’s adviser, Walt Rostow (1960, 1963). President Belaúnde Terry’s textual interpretation of this theory meant a disdain and absolute disregard for the indigenous roots and essential components of Peruvian national, regional and local cultures. Belaúnde’s government’s contempt for indigenous Peru was revealed in his political platform entitled *The Conquest of Peru by Peruvians*. And, in fact, conquest was what his government practiced in the Amazon region.

In 1967, I published an article under the title “The New Conquest of the Rainforest” (Varese 1967) in *Amaru*, a new journal of culture and politics founded by eminent Peruvian poet José Emilio Westphalen. In the article I denounced Presi-

dent Belaúnde’s government for genocide and charged him personally with crimes against humanity. President Belaúnde had personally ordered the Peruvian Air Force to bomb and machine-gun the villages of three of the four clans of Mayoruna (Matsés) of the Yaquerana river. The fourth clan at that time was living across the border in Brazilian territory. The bombing of defenseless Matsés men, women and children was presented by the national press as an act of heroism on the part of Peruvian air force pilots fighting against brutal savages who were opposing the country’s progress. The truth behind the media propaganda was that the Mayoruna were in the way of a few national and transnational timber companies. In 1970, my wife Linda Ayre and I traveled to the Mayoruna territory and interviewed the survivors of the bombing. An older woman who could speak some Spanish told us the details of the attack by the Peruvian Air Force. The Mayoruna people had developed survival techniques that included teaching dogs not to bark when ordered to, cultivating small *chacras* (polyculture plots) in different hidden spots of the rainforest, and establishing shorter periods of itinerant horticulture in order to avoid being detected by Peruvian *mestizos*. The older women could afford to be ironic in telling us that most of the splinter bombs exploded in the forest canopy and not on the ground. In my short research I could determine, contrary to the opinion of the evangelical missionaries of the Summer Institute of Linguistics who were attempting to Christianize them, that the Matsés-Mayoruna were not an isolated group of non-contacted indigenous people but rather a group that had escaped from Spanish colonial oppression and sought refuge in the depths of the eastern Amazon region of Peru in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by traveling more than 800 kilometers from their original territory in the lower Huallaga River. My complaint did not even merit an answer or an explanation from President Belaúnde’s government nor did the Matsés-Mayoruna ever receive an official apology.<sup>3</sup>

On October 3, 1968, under the leadership of Juan Velasco Alvarado a small group of young generals and colonels of the Peruvian army overthrew Belaúnde, put him on an airplane and sent him into exile in Argentina. The Revolutionary Government of the Armed Forces, as it became known, did not intend to restore the old oligarchic power but instead to carry out the economic and social reforms promised by the “democratically” elected government of Belaúnde and never delivered. On October 9, the military revolution expropriated and nationalized the oil fields, equipment and installations of the International Petroleum Company (IPC), a subsidiary of Standard Oil of New Jersey. Some time later it became public knowledge that the IPC had helped the Peruvian Air Force to develop a type of napalm bomb that was used against the Matsés-Mayoruna as well as against the socialist guerrilla insurgency of the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR).

On June 24, 1969, the revolutionary government of Velasco Alvarado promulgated a sweeping land reform which abolished the old coastal plantations and

Andean *haciendas*. In a televised speech, Juan Velasco Alvarado proclaimed Peru's agrarian reform with these words:

*Today, for the Day of the Indian, the day of the Peasant, the Revolutionary Government honors them with the best of tributes by giving to the nation a law that will end forever the unjust social order that impoverished and oppressed the millions of landless peasants who have always been forced to work the land of others. ... As of this lucky June 24, Peruvian peasants will truly be free citizens whose motherland has finally recognized their rights to the fruit of the land they work and a position of justice within a society where nevermore will they be second-class citizens, men to be exploited by other men ... To the men of the land, we can now say in the immortal and liberating voice of Túpac Amaru:  
Peasant: the Master will no longer feed off your poverty! <sup>4</sup>*

The nationalization of the oil industry and the agrarian reform were the first two structural reforms initiated by the Revolutionary Government of the Armed Forces as part of the "Inca Plan" aimed at forging a state-directed "third way" of national development that would avoid the ideological trap of the mutually exclusive capitalist or socialist paths. The Velasco government's reforms included nationalization of foreign enterprises, the establishment of self-managed worker-owned medium-sized enterprises, co-management of co-owned (workers and state) large enterprises, nationalization and socialization (as workers' cooperatives) of the mass media, and the creation of a state-run social organization – the National System of Social Mobilization (SINAMOS) – charged with implementing social reforms. In addition, the government initiated an educational reform with reformulated curricula, a revisionist approach to the social and cultural history of the country, a bilingual (Spanish-Quechua) early literacy program and, finally, declared the Quechua language the official language of Peru, on an equal footing with Spanish. Of all these sweeping structural changes, by far the most substantial was the massive land reform, which radically changed the country, transforming a feudal rural society in which 80% of the land was owned by a few dozen oligarchic families into a modern aggregate of autonomous communities of indigenous, peasants, farmers and agrarian cooperatives. Obviously, these radical social transformations provoked the anger of an oligarchy that had ruled over the country for one hundred and fifty years, an aspiring capitalist class that was relying on the social, political and economic status quo, and the United States government and investors, who had benefited shamelessly from this neo-colonial situation for years.

The huge Amazon region of Peru, however, had been left out of these fundamental changes. In 1969 I was appointed director of the newly created Division of Native Communities of the Rainforest, as a branch of the Ministry of Agriculture and the National Office of the Agrarian Reform. My responsibility was to

research, develop and implement state policy on territories, jurisdictions, and cultural and political rights of the indigenous peoples of Peru's Amazonian region. I did not accept this overwhelming assignment lightly, nor was I prepared for the enormity of its political and moral implications. With very scarce resources and a few friends and colleagues from the university, we initiated a demographic and ethnic survey, an evaluation of the territory and resources, and a consultation and political mobilization of the "tribal peoples" of the Amazon. By 1974 our collective work had resulted in the Law of Native Communities of the Rainforest (Legal Decree 20653) which introduced sweeping reforms and radical changes to the situation of the indigenous peoples of the Amazon basin, by now officially denominated Native Communities. Peru's Law of Native Communities garnered centuries-old indigenous demands for cultural and political autonomy and territorial stability as well as a series of Latin American indigenous peoples' claims that were increasingly voiced at indigenous congresses, meetings and social mobilizations.

### European Interlude and an Anthropology of Liberation

During the late sixties and early seventies, I was fortunate to be exposed to the early internationalization of the indigenous peoples' ethno-political movement which was taking place in an uncertain and unstable alliance between some Latin American and European anthropologists and indigenous leaders, activists and intellectuals. In the late sixties, Helge Kleivan, a Norwegian anthropologist, had founded IWGIA (the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs) in Copenhagen, one of the first indigenist research and advocacy groups. My short period as IWGIA's Executive Secretary was extremely instructive as I realized the commonality of the major problems faced by indigenous peoples not only in the Americas but throughout the world. Helge Kleivan had educated me on the struggle of the circumpolar Inuit and Sami peoples, his collaborator Peter Aaby on the major issues of de-colonization in Africa, and Søren Hvalkof was illuminating regarding the impact of U.S. imperial missionaries in Latin America.<sup>5</sup>

In the northern Huallaga Valley and along the shores of the Sisa, Mayo and Saposoa rivers live several thousand Llakwash or Lamista. They speak a dialect variation of the Andean Quechua, which is also spoken by thousands of other tropical rainforest indigenous people of the Napo (Santarosino), Pastaza (Inga) and Tigre rivers (Alamas). The Llakwash's oral tradition claims that they were Andean Quechuas defeated by Inca imperial expansion who sought refuge in the depths of the Amazon forest. Whatever their historical origin, the contemporary Lamista have a reputation for being extraordinary healers with a vast ethno-botanical knowledge of the Amazon forest. It was this reputation that brought French ethnologist, writer and traveler Bernard Lelong to Peru in the late sixties.

Lelong combined a very pragmatic interest in indigenous biomedical knowledge with the more esoteric aspects of indigenous spirituality and shamanism. I met him in Peru when I myself was in the process of trying to understand Ashaninka indigenous spirituality. As I think back to the kind of friendship we developed I realize that we had established some sort of unspoken reciprocal system whereby I facilitated his entries into Peru's Amazon forest and he made it possible for me to approach and re-visit Europe, and especially France.

I can say that I rediscovered an old and new universe when, through a combined invitation of Bernard Lelong, Helge Kleivan and Peter Aaby, I embarked on a lecture tour of France, Denmark, Sweden and Norway. In Paris, Bernard Lelong guided me through the intellectual community of progressive anthropologists and humanists who were struggling to maintain a critical, independent and creative position between Marxism and bourgeois sociology. I met and befriended Robert Jaulin, mathematician turned anthropologist who had just published his outspoken book *La paix blanche*<sup>6</sup> on Colombia's indigenous decimation. It was he who popularized the term ethnocide to describe the cultural and physical massacre that accompanied the expansion of the national frontiers in Latin America. I would meet Robert Jaulin again a decade later when we were both appointed jury members of The Fourth Bertrand Russell Tribunal on the Rights of the Indians in the Americas (held in Rotterdam, The Netherlands in 1980). With my introduction to the French intellectual community and with the generous support of Bernard Lelong as my translator, and others such as Jean Duvignaud, France-Marie Renard Casseviz, Philippe Descola, Jean Copan and Françoise Morin, I was able to publish some of my works in two of the most prestigious journals in France, *Les Temps Modernes*, established and directed by Jean Paul Sartre, and the *Annales*, the leading journal of French historians founded in 1929 by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre and adopted by Fernand Braudel's school.<sup>7</sup>

These were times when Latin American anthropology was critically reconfiguring itself against the backdrop of the Paris 1968 student and popular rebellion, the 1968 Mexico-Tlatelolco student massacre, the anti-Vietnam war and civil rights movements in the U.S., the Cuban revolution, the peasant and indigenous movement in Latin America, the American Indian Movement in the U.S. and the anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist critique exercised by Franz Fanon, Albert Memmi, Jean Paul Sartre, Amílcar Cabral, Léopold Senghor and Ho Chi Minh. In 1975, a shorter and modified version of the document published by IWGIA<sup>8</sup> was included by Jean Copan in his edited book on *Anthropology and Imperialism*.<sup>9</sup> The trip to Europe became the catalyst for my anti-imperialism, which I perceived as being the most appropriate political position for a Peruvian and Latin American social scientist engaged in the revolutionary experiment of my country. At the same time, I began to develop strong sentiments and analytical perspectives of anti-colonialism as the proper tool by which to understand the historical process of subordination of the indigenous peoples of Latin America.

The readings of Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto (1979), André Gunder Frank (1969) and the World System analysis of Immanuel Wallerstein (1974) were becoming part of my theoretical background. So were the works of Chilean Osvaldo Sunkel (1971) and of my countrymen José Carlos Mariátegui (1971, 1976) and Aníbal Quijano (1965). However, the most influential intellectual and creative Peruvian writer I ever met in my early years of intellectual formation was José María Arguedas, the Quechua and Spanish language poet, novelist and anthropologist who redefined - for me and for scores of Peruvian generations - the role of Andean indigenous peoples and culture. José María Arguedas was a senior professor in the department of anthropology in Lima's National University of San Marcos when I was hired as an assistant lecturer to teach courses on Amazonian indigenous peoples and cultures. I was actually challenged by most of the department's faculty because I was bringing to the forefront of Peruvian anthropology taught at the National University of San Marcos issues and topics of Amazonian lowland societies considered irrelevant, exotic and unimportant by the dominant Andean anthropology. José María Arguedas, with his sensitivity and open mind, became a kind of mentor to me in those early skirmishes with mainstream anthropology. I can still recall my sense of surprise and cultural pride when, during departmental meetings, Arguedas would suddenly start to speak Quechua to my young colleagues, Luis Lumbreras and Rodrigo Montoya, leaving the rest of the faculty purposely out of the conversation, especially those Quechua speakers who were denying and hiding their mother tongue and Andean culture. José María Arguedas took myself and other young emerging scholars under his protection in a rigidly hierarchical university system that was making it difficult for new ideas to flourish. I ended up teaching at the National Agrarian University of La Molina together with Arguedas when, destroyed by his inner ghosts and the nightmare of our country's injustice, he took his life in an act of desperate desolation that we could not comprehend and, selfishly, could hardly forgive.

In 1972, I took a brief visiting lecturer's job at the University of California, Berkeley, which confirmed to me that, even in the midst of "imperial academia", the foundations of "objective empiricism" and politically detached social science were fast collapsing under the students' movement and strong criticism from progressive intellectuals. The revelations of anthropologists' involvement in U.S. government anti-insurgency activities in Latin America, South East Asia and the rest of the Third World had caused commotion among liberal social scientists in the U.S. and an outrageous, albeit not surprising, response throughout Latin America. Fortunately for the international progressive movement, a few brilliant and honest minds were fighting the imperial project from within and, towards these American intellectuals and activists, some of us Latin American anthropologists felt a great sense of respect and solidarity. British anthropologist Kathleen Gough and UC Berkeley professor Gerald Berreman<sup>10</sup> had led a devastating

critique of mainstream anthropology and its political quietism and moral abstinence on the central issues of war, social inequality, counter-insurgency politics, political repression and human rights abuses. *NACLA Report on the Americas*, the *Monthly Review* publications and *Latin American Perspectives* became essential and inspiring tools of analysis and very early on in my intellectual career I became disappointed (and frankly bored) by mainstream professional journals issued in the United States that were indulging in purportedly scientific objectivity while systematically avoiding any commitment to social justice, world peace and the ethics of knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

### Reconciling Class and Culture

I believe that I owe my late discovery of the power of culture to my early exploration of Antonio Gramsci's writings in Italian. All this happened in a kind of itinerary of *corsi e ricorsi* between my native Italy and my adopted Peru. It took me a few years of double journeys from Italy - which I abandoned rather hastily in search of a mythical Peru - and then back to Europe in an attempt to reconcile the future of a past never fully understood, that gave meaning to my European background and to my newly found Latin Americanism. In my youth, secluded in the basement of my maternal grandfather's bookstore, I had known - but not precisely read - Antonio Gramsci and some Italian translations of socialist philosophers.<sup>12</sup> From working class children, companions of mine at the Quintino Sella school in Turin, I had learned about the assassination attempt against the Secretary General of the Italian Communist Party, Palmiro Togliatti, and the general strike that followed and paralyzed my city and, most importantly, my beloved tramways. With my school friends, whose names I have long forgotten, I also learned about the *dopolavoro* club, which became a sort of secret alternative to the Catholic parish boy scout club where my mother insisted I should go. With my school friends I would join the FIAT car factory workers and their family in the joyous First of May socialist festival where I could wear red carnations and sing revolutionary songs. My loosely Catholic upbringing in my anticlerical grandparents' home did not contradict my newly discovered socialist ideals, nor did the growing admiration that I was developing for jazz and for American literature.

At some time, at what age I do not remember, as I was laying in bed ill I heard the news of Stalin's death, and I cried desperately. But then again, years later as I was driving an old Chevrolet along Avenida Wilson in Lima I cried uncontrollably at the news of J.F. Kennedy's death. Some years later, I found myself reading avidly Antonio Gramsci in the few free hours I had after my work in the Division on Native Communities of the Rainforest, trying to make sense of his central concepts and applying them to the indigenous communities of the Amazon for-

est. Fortunately for me, my aging Italian language became a precious tool of knowledge once more. With the generous help of my mother - and probably against my grandfather's will - I kept *aggiornato* and well-informed on the development of Italian and European social sciences and philosophy. Between 1957 and 1970 I was educating myself in Peru with Italian and French books sent discreetly by my mother. Each brown paper packet of books, covered with dozens of Italian stamps and the return address of my mother's bookstore, was like a gift from some protecting and nurturing deity of the intellect. Slowly, almost furtively, American authors started to appear in the packages interspersed with Raffaele Pettazzoni (1965, 1966), Benedetto Croce (1955), Ernesto de Martino (1958, 1962), Norberto Bobbio (1955, 1977), Claude Lévi-Strauss (1960, 1963, 1966, 1968), Vladimir Propp (1949) or Vittorio Lanternari (1960, 1967). I believe that my first startling discovery of American alternative intellectual life came through some early writing of Noam Chomsky read in Italian, then came Paul Sweezy (1942), Wright Mills (1962, 1963) and Herbert Marcuse (1968a, 1968b). It was sometime during this decade that I began to secretly enjoy the notion that Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce was a self-educated intellectual and French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, who had written those wonderful treatises on the metaphysics of fire and water, was a postman. It became clear to me that the poverty of some of the Third World underdeveloped academia I was dealing with was not completely responsible for either my intellectual flaws or any of my few merits. What has excited me ever since in my intellectual life is the conviction that by stepping out of conventional mainstream thought, either because forced to do so by the mediocrity of the educational system or by choice, I have found avenues of ideas and creative itineraries that would have been obscured by the "light" of the official history.

Was it accidental then, that I shifted, dialectically I would say, between historical materialism and spirituality or even to some expression of esotericism in my efforts to understand the Ashaninka indigenous religion and shamanism? Amazonian poet and novelist César Calvo, surrealist pilgrim of his beloved forest, once defined some members of our generation as "spiritual Marxists".<sup>13</sup> The obliged eclecticism, a certain taste for improvisation, the dominant mode of *bricolage* in our formation was seldom perceived as an absence or a weakness, it was rather our challenge, our invitation to discover new paths, to imagine, nurture and increase the difference. Henry Lefebvre, with his apology of the *différence* issued from a well-grounded Marxist stand, became part of our most precious intellectual belongings.

I never fully abandoned Europe, nor did I shut my Italian ethnic background up in the aching trunk of nostalgia. I intentionally became bilingual and then multilingual in my Italian-Peruvian environment where the Genovese, the *Zenese* (dialect or language?) of my father and stepmother displaced my mother's *Piemontese* (dialect or *Lingue d'Oc*?) in a constant game of linguistic code shifting.

I believe that the polyglot atmosphere of my Peruvian home firmly marked my later positions on the language rights of the indigenous people and Mexican and Latin American migrants to the U.S., or my more recent radical stand on the intellectual and cultural destitution of American society in its dogmatic and parochial insistence on an "English only" policy. My polyglot conviction also constitutes the port of entry to my impassioned multiculturalism, which I perceive as the basic human rights to express and develop one's own cultural preference and option with the only restrictions emanating from the social other's equal rights. Language and culture belong to the domain of diversity; social, political and economic justice belong to the domain of equality.

### The Mexican Connection and the Island of Barbados

I must have begun to exchange letters with Mexican anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla around the year 1969. His letters were mostly inquiries about the Peruvian Revolution and its approach to indigenous peoples' issues. Bonfil, like most of the intellectuals of his generation, had emerged deeply wounded by the experience of the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre and the disillusionment of almost fifty years of revolutionary promises never fully delivered. With six other anthropologists, he co-authored a merciless indictment of the Mexican official anthropology and its undeserved progressive and pro-indigenous reputation.<sup>14</sup> Since the 1940s, when post-revolutionary Mexico's President Lázaro Cárdenas convened the First Inter-American Indigenous Congress in Pátzcuaro, Michoacán, the Mexican government had carefully built a continental fame around postulating and implementing progressive indigenous policies that favored some form of soft integration of indigenous communities into the wider national society. Huge government investments in education and community development were channeled through the *Instituto Nacional Indigenista-INI* (National Institute of Indigenous Affairs) and its numerous local agencies staffed with anthropologists and other young professionals. The reputation of the successful Mexican indigenist policy was based, among other things, on the historical precedents of Manuel Gamio's early writings (1916, 1922, 1935, 1948), his academic links with one of the founders of modern American anthropology, Frantz Boas,<sup>15</sup> the open support of John Collier, the initiator of the New Deal approach to the Native Americans' social and cultural issues and innovator of the Bureau of Indian Affairs-BIA's policy and, last but not least, on the undeniable influence of Marxist sociology on some of the social scientists and policy makers in Mexico.<sup>16</sup>

The inheritor of this tradition of pro-indigenous indigenistic reputation was Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, a brilliant medical doctor turned anthropologist and top government administrator for indigenous peoples' affairs. What Guillermo Bonfil Batalla and his peers were demonstrating was the falsity of the Mexican

policy of indigenous integration and its true nature of crude assimilationism of indigenous peoples by a powerful authoritarian state, in collusion with private investors and capital, interested mostly in controlling indigenous resources and domesticated labor force (Bonfil Batalla et al. 1970).

A couple of years after we initiated our correspondence, in June of 1971, I finally met Guillermo Bonfil Batalla and another fourteen Latin American anthropologists on a sunny beach of the Caribbean island of Barbados. The World Council of Churches (Geneva) and the Ethnology Department of the University of Bern (Switzerland), under the leadership of Georg Grünberg, had convened all of us to the University of West Indies in Barbados with the charge of analyzing the situation of the indigenous peoples in Latin America, paying particular attention to the tribal peoples of the South American lowlands. We all arrived prepared with detailed reports on the genocide and ethnocide situations we had witnessed more or less directly. After one painful week of testimonies and factual proof of atrocities against the indigenous peoples of Argentina, Paraguay, Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela and Mexico we could only express our rage in the rhetoric of an iconoclastic declaration that we thought should accompany the dossier of denunciations. The English edition of the dossier survived almost unknown in a Swiss publication of the World Council of Churches (Dostal 1972), while the Spanish publication in Uruguay had a much more heroic fate: it was burnt publicly by the military dictatorship of Uruguay as a subversive document (Grünberg et al. 1972). What did escape scholarly anonymity or the ire of the extreme right was the couple of pages of the Declaration of Barbados I. Issued in Spanish and immediately translated into Portuguese, English and French, the Declaration of Barbados I became a political tool in the hands of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, in some of the emerging political organizations and even among governmental officials, members of the Catholic Church and NGOs. The document, in its simplicity and directness, expounds the responsibility of states and governments, the Catholic Church and the various Protestant and Evangelical denominations, the private sector, and the anthropologists and the scientific community in the mistreatment and abuses against the indigenous. According to Alison Brysk<sup>17</sup> the indigenous "... transnational movement formally began in 1971 with the Barbados Conference of dissident anthropologists, who pledged to promote indigenous self-determination and enter politics ..." (Brysk 2000:18). The Barbados Declaration demanded a moratorium on missionary work, a radical revision of the relation between the state and indigenous peoples, and a political and ethical commitment of non-indigenous social scientists to support indigenous peoples' self-determination and autonomy. The core statement of the declaration was that the liberation of the indigenous could only be achieved by the Indians themselves.

No Indians were present in the meeting of Barbados I. It would take another six years for the Barbados group to convene a second, larger meeting of thirty

five participants, eighteen of whom were active militants in the Latin American indigenous movement. Some of the indigenous members of Barbados II traveled to the island secretly. The Guatemalan Maya and the Colombian Páez were actually risking their lives by being at the conference. Finally in 1993, the Barbados group met in Rio de Janeiro, 23 years after the first meeting, to mourn the death of one of its most enlightened members, Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, and to address again old indigenous issues of neo-colonialism, wars, land eviction, genocide, human rights abuses and cultural destruction. These old problems, however, were now presented by the transnational community of capitalists as the unfortunate price to be paid by the weak to give way to a necessary globalization of the economy and the establishment of a "new world order".

The three Barbados meetings can be read as a 25-year synopsis of a few Latin American anthropologists who had accompanied the indigenous liberation movement. The Declaration of Barbados I, "For the Liberation of the Indigenous People," (1971),<sup>18</sup> was a strong denunciation and demand sent to the State, the Church, the private sector and social scientists to satisfy the basic human and ethnic rights of the indigenous people. Barbados II, in 1977, reflected both the indigenous and anthropologists' activism and direct involvement in the social movement of liberation. A decision to be involved in such activism carried many risks. Some of the indigenous participants and some of the anthropologists were already either in hiding within their own countries or in exile. The Declaration of Barbados III, "Articulation of Diversity," in 1993, evaluated the last 25 years of Latin American anthropology and its contributions to the indigenous struggle for decolonization. There is little optimism in this assessment, which recognizes the ethical distortions of contemporary theoretical meandering and self-gratifying solipsism that disguise the lack of commitment of academic anthropology to the indigenous people's liberation struggles. Finally, Barbados III emphasized that, at the end of the century, the indigenous movement of the Americas was an issue on the international agenda that would have to be weighed up in any major decision regarding world peace and development.

### Indigenous Frontiers of Civilization and National Projects

In 1964, Brazilian anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro, one of the most independent thinkers in Latin America, was forced into exile by his country's military dictatorship. For almost 30 years he traveled as an expatriate in Latin America, from country to country, Uruguay, Venezuela, Chile, Peru, Mexico, waiting patiently to return to his beloved country and fight for democracy and social justice. On his journey through Latin America, Darcy Ribeiro taught generations of Latin American social scientists and intellectuals not only his theory of the "Anthropology of Civilization" as the fundamental tool with which to understand our Ibero-Amer-

ican subcontinent but especially the practical application of his theory to the gigantic task of emancipating our countries from neo-colonial dependency by developing all their *civilizational* potential. Darcy Ribeiro's anthropological contributions began in the late fifties with studies of indigenous peoples of southern and eastern Brazil. His work with the tribal people of Brazil marked a watershed in modern Latin American anthropology. After Ribeiro's studies (see especially Ribeiro 1970) it became impossible for us young Latin American social scientists to keep doing conventional field ethnography that was disconnected from the regional, national and international arena as well as synchronically insulated from the historical "long duration". By the early seventies, Ribeiro had published some of his most important books (Ribeiro 1970a, 1970b, 1971a, 1971b, 1973, 1976). In the eighties, Darcy Ribeiro wrote short stories and novels where, as he confessed to us anthropologists, he could freely express the poetry of indigenous life without feeling constrained by the logic of formal science. Finally, in 1995, before his death, he was able to finish what he considered his most important contribution to the people of Latin America, a manuscript that he had carried with him through decades of exile and in which he exemplified his theory of the anthropology of civilization in order to understand and explain the "Civilization of Brazil" (Ribeiro 1999).

I met Darcy Ribeiro in 1971, on the island of Barbados, and again in Lima at the beginning of 1973 when he was invited by the revolutionary government of Juan Velasco Alvarado to direct an ambitious project of social and political popular participation sponsored jointly by the Peruvian government and the United Nations' International Labor Organization (ILO). At the Centro (Center for the Study of Popular Participation), Darcy Ribeiro convened an international team of social scientists, most of them expatriates and exiled from the dictatorships of Brazil, Argentina and Chile, charged with developing a simulation of what Peru's society would look like if and when all the structural changes and reforms introduced by the revolutionary government took place. Darcy Ribeiro invited me to coordinate the social science team. I accepted, leaving the Division of Native Communities of the Rainforest in the hands of my anthropologist colleague and friend Alberto Chirif (1976, 1991), who had developed an outstanding knowledge of the Amazonian indigenous communities and their social, political and economic needs. Alberto Chirif was not only morally committed to the indigenous peoples' liberation movement but also personally engaged in the movement.

At the Centro I worked with a team of mathematicians, systems analysts and social scientists such as Argentine Benjamín Zacharías and Oscar Izcovitch, Brazilian Carlos Senna Figueiredo (1983) and Italian Carlo Magni. The principal investigator on the UN team was Argentine physicist and mathematician Oscar Varsavsky, founder of a pioneering social methodology based on "numerical experimentation" and simulation models. His central contributions to Latin Ameri-

can social sciences and the social movement are contained in his theory of "National Projects". Varsavsky developed the idea of National Projects in 1967, during the process of producing an incisive critique of Latin America's scientific and cultural colonialism which he identified not only among mainstream scientists but also and especially among thinkers of the leftist opposition. His proposal for a "creative socialist model" of development called for a radical conceptual autonomy of the "new" Latin American thinkers. "Oscar wanted a better world, that we could reach and in which we could live. But it was not enough to dream of such a world, it was necessary to construct it. And for this it was not sufficient to act, but it was essential to talk, discuss, imagine it, define it, calculate if it was viable and how it could be made viable..." (Figueiredo 1983: 16-17). Varsavsky was reminding us that recent history showed that it is less difficult to attain political power than to use it correctly in order to achieve one's objectives. A negative characteristic of progressive political programs is precisely the incomplete, vague definition of the objectives in their essential elements and the impreciseness of the means to achieve them (Figueiredo 1983: 17).<sup>19</sup>

Darcy Ribeiro and Oscar Varsavsky's pivotal idea of constructing a "utopian" societal model by analyzing, quantifying and projecting the effects of structural modifications, reforms and the displacements of the old "dystopian" social order, coincided fairly well with the proposal made by my Division of Native Communities to verify the consequences of the legal and structural changes introduced by the Law of Native Communities. Armed with these ideas, in mid 1973 I began a participatory research project that aimed at probing the possible effects of structural, legal and institutional changes and reforms aimed at the indigenous communities of the Amazon region. The Law of Native Communities of the Rainforest had already been presented to the Revolutionary Government and was being reconciled with other relevant legal instruments, especially in the area of the agrarian reform, the legislation governing the logging and forestry industry, and the educational, cultural and language policies. With demographic and statistical information input at the national, regional and local level provided by researchers at the National Institute of Planning (Instituto Nacional de Planificación-IPN), the National Office for the Evaluation of Natural Resources (Oficina Nacional de Evaluación de Recursos Naturales-ONERN) and various other relevant government ministries and departments, we were able to initiate the construction of a model of numerical experimentation that would inform us of the broader consequences of the legislative reforms.

An extremely contested and politically hot issue that we needed to define with caution and accuracy was related to the amount and modality of territorial legal recognition and allocation to the approximately sixty indigenous ethnic "nationalities" of the Amazon basin. The ideological battle with economists, agricultural economists, and social planners was fought on the cultural/civilizational terrain. We had to argue against the prevalent notion that land and re-

sources (nature/the world in all its cosmological complexity for the indigenous communities of the Amazon) could be treated exclusively as quantifiable and commoditized entities. For the officials of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Agrarian Reform office, the quarter of a million members of the indigenous people of the Amazon basin could be granted a certain fixed amount of hectares of land per family according to a formula devised in some abstract ethnocentric social laboratory. At the Centro we played the ideological game on two complementary fronts: a strictly *quantitative* approach to numbers of hectares needed by a native family in order to survive and be productive; and a *qualitative* approach that would look critically at the indigenous definitions of *family, economy, production, land and resource use, sacred values of territory, historical rights*. With the help of mathematicians Oscar Iztovich and Benjamín Zacharías we developed a mathematical model that included all the environmental, agro-ecological, cultural, historical, social and political variables intervening in the definition of the minimum requirements of land allocation for the survival and reproduction of the social group. First, in its indigenous subsistence economy; and second, in its combined integration in the regional and national market economy. To this mathematical model we were going to add the more complex model of "numerical experimentation" and "ethnic project" developed along the theoretical and methodological lines of Oscar Varsavsky. What we intended to do was to use Oscar Varsavsky's "...abacus to calculate the truth of our dreams" (Figueiredo 1983: 57).

We never finished our projects at the Centro. On September 11, 1973 a bloody military coup against the democratically elected socialist government of Salvador Allende in Chile marked the beginning of the end of the Peruvian Revolution. The Centro was slowly starved politically and economically throughout 1974, and finally shut down just before the counter-revolutionary military coup of General Morales Bermúdez. Juan Velasco Alvarado suffered a fatal coronary illness, the amputation of one leg, and a premature death that spared him the pain of witnessing the systematic dismantling of six years of progressive changes and reforms that had restored hope and self-reliance to the poor of Peru.

What was the balance of the social reforms introduced by the Law of Native Communities of the Jungle and the political initiatives and programs implemented by the Revolutionary Government among the indigenous peoples of the Amazon? Since the very beginning of our engagement to undertake the revolutionary transformations needed in the Amazon region, we postulated that very little could be achieved by delivering to the indigenous communities, from the top of governmental agencies, well intentioned measures and reforms. We insisted that it was absolutely indispensable to induce a mass social mobilization and to facilitate the full participation of the indigenous people in all stages of planning, operation and implementation of the political reforms. With the scarce resources assigned to the Division of Native Communities of the Rainforest, we were bare-

ly able to conduct a pilot consultation on the proposed bill among a random sample of indigenous communities (Yanesha, Ashaninka, Huambiza, Aguaruna, Quechua of the Lower Amazon, Llakwash). With anthropologist and friend Richard Chase Smith, who had worked for years among the Yanesha helping them to organize their own political ethnic organization,<sup>20</sup> we were able to gather some feedback on the main issues at stake for most of the indigenous communities of the Andean Amazon. Some friendly Catholic and Protestant missionaries were also involved in the survey and contributed their expertise to shedding light on the needs of the indigenous communities in specific regions. The dynamics of social mobilization, consultation and community participation in the measurement and definition of land and territorial needs required by the law produced a phenomenon of ethnic-politicization among many of the indigenous peoples of the Amazon. Congresses, meetings, communication between different ethnic regions created a sense of commonality and of shared history and political culture that persisted even through the successive regimes of counter-reforms and repression. The Law of Native Communities of the Rainforest recognized the rights of indigenous peoples to form ethnic federations and multiethnic confederations that would be the official interlocutors with the government. And this political opening was understood and used by indigenous communities and organizations to advance their own ethnic agendas and political projects. Besides a series of local indigenous councils, congresses and assemblies established along the lines of linguistic and ethnic affiliations and geographical proximity, the Peruvian Amazonian indigenous peoples formed one important national multi-ethnic organization, AIDSEP (Asociación Interétnica para el Desarrollo de la Selva Peruana, Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Rainforest) and joined COICA (Coordinadora de Organizaciones Indígenas de la Cuenca Amazónica, Indigenous Coordinating Body of the Amazon Basin), an international federation of Amazonian indigenous movements from nine countries of South America.<sup>21</sup> The national and international political mobilization of the indigenous peoples of the Peruvian Amazon had begun and would not abate, even under the most severe moments of repression and violence during Alberto Fujimori's regime in the 1990s.

### Expatriation Two

I hope I am paraphrasing José Martí correctly. I became Peruvian in Peru, Latin American in Mexico and, hopefully, universal in my later years in California. I left Peru somewhat in haste at the beginning of 1975. My friend Guillermo Bonfil Batalla had sent me an open invitation to join him in Mexico in his new project as director of the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH). With the Centro in Lima dismantled, the counter-revolution successfully reversing every

political achievement of Velasco's regime and most of my friends and colleagues either in exile or on their way to internal ostracism, I decided to accept Bonfil's encouragement. The decision turned out to be appropriate: a few months and years later both my sister Chiara and my brother Luis were arrested in Lima and thrown into jail in an irrational orgy of political persecution led by mediocre people who resented the resistance and persistence of revolutionary ideals and thirst for democracy.

"Mexico, Mexico so close to the United States so far from God!" Was it really Porfirio Díaz' dictum? I never gave too much consideration to the sentence until I realized that - maybe subconsciously - I had traveled to the United States with my wife Linda, bought a very old VW bus, loaded with a few precious memories and my mature Andean dog and headed toward Mexico City through the Sonora desert. The old VW had a different plan. In Tepic, Nayarit it decided to take a break in an old, cosy and greasy mechanics yard where during one week of sleeping in the tilted car, eating *tortillas y frijoles*, and enjoying the warm hospitality of the mechanic's whole family, I started my "field work" and learned the arcane cultural differences that separate and unite Mexico and Peru. By the time we reached central Mexico, we were completely broke and waiting for the saving money order sent by the wonderful administrator of the INAH, Licenciado Leopoldo Zorrilla, who years earlier had learned heterodox administrative skills working as an aide to Che Guevara in the Ministry of Economy of the Cuban Revolution.

Guillermo Bonfil Batalla was in the process of de-centralizing the huge bureaucracy of the INAH. He had created a few Regional Centers in the provinces of Mexico where he intended to entice some of the hundreds of anthropologists, archaeologists, linguists, historians and specialists in colonial art that were concentrated in the central offices of the Institute. The task was never fully achieved, but the INAH Regional Centers became, nevertheless, important sites of research and intellectual activity. Bonfil's suggestion was that I should go to the INAH center in Mérida, Yucatán. As we started to drive toward Yucatán, I was already experiencing panic attacks thinking in the hundreds if not thousand of texts that I would have to study in order to approach any possible research project dealing with the Maya civilization. In two days, we were camping in Oaxaca under some mango trees, close to the house of the director of the INAH Regional Center. We never made it to Yucatán. Oaxaca's spell was immediate and incurable. We settled, raised two children, adopted a few other dogs and cats, and became careful and respectful students of one of the most complex, fascinating and seducing civilizational areas of the Americas.

The state of Oaxaca, the third poorest entity in the Mexican Federation, is nevertheless privileged by the presence of some sixteen distinct indigenous ethnic-linguistic groups or "nationalities" that constitute more than half of the total population of the state. In the Central Valley of Oaxaca, a few kilometers to

the west of *Lulá* – the city of Oaxaca according to the Zapotec speakers - the ancestors of contemporary indigenous peoples left clear evidence that more than 10,000 years ago they had domesticated squash (*Cucurbita pepo*), which became one of the basic staples of ancient Mexicans. A few kilometers to the north-east of the Valley of Oaxaca, and some centuries later, Meso-American indigenous domesticated corn (*Zea mays*), beans (*Phaseolus vulgaris*) and avocado (*Persea americana*). The Valley of Oaxaca and the surrounding areas became one of the main centers of plant domestication and agricultural development in the world, setting the stage for the unfolding of an astonishing civilizational phenomenon.

In my naïve and somehow impertinent way I decided to study the long history of one of these indigenous peoples that had contributed to the rise and development of the Meso-American civilization. The *Bennexon* or *Binnigula'asa'*, or Zapotec, began the enormous historical task of transforming themselves from an aggregate of small farmers living in small scattered hamlets into a complex centralized, urban state that lasted for eight hundred years, to be followed by a series of more decentralized city-states that co-existed until the Spanish invasion in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. As I began to look at the archaeological, historical and ethnographical sources and bibliography on the *Bennexon* I found myself swamped by more than a thousand references. Books, articles, archive documents, colonial vocabularies, codices, "Relaciones Geográficas" and, added to these "secondary sources" I was in the midst of more than a quarter of a million "primary sources": the Zapotec people themselves. Some of them with university diplomas and academic positions, others with professional careers as architects, lawyers, medical doctors; others as writers, novelists, poets, musicians, painters.

Coming from my ethnographic study area expertise of small "tribal" people of the Amazon I saw this new task as an overwhelming challenge. I had to reconfigure myself as a scholar of agrarian societies, a specialist in peasant cultures, an ethno-historian, and possibly an anthropologist of complex societies. In two years of deeply felt nostalgia for Peru and the security of my Amazonian knowledge, of attempts to grasp some basic Zapotec language – how arrogant of me to think that I was a polyglot - of more or less systematic reading of studies on Meso-America, Oaxaca and contemporary Mexico, I produced a manuscript of a few hundred pages that I conceived as the first two chapters of a book entitled: *La Aldea y el Estado. Historia Zapoteca (The Village and the State. Zapotec History.)* I wanted to address the 3,000 years of *Bennexon's* social history with a mixed methodology: an approach to the Zapotec "*longue durée*" (the long duration) à la Fernand Braudel, and a Marxist analysis of the political economy of the Zapotec people's ethnic permanence and resistance to pre-colonial state power, to Spanish imperial/colonial state and, finally, to Mexican liberal and post-revolutionary authoritarianism. As I confirmed in my research, the core of my argument was that the Zapotec people were able to negotiate, throughout centuries of their existence as an ethnic group, forms of coexistence with the various expressions and manifes-

tations of state power (pre-colonial, Spanish, Mexican) from the safety of their efficient, highly integrated, productive and "democratically" managed village/community unit. There was very little that any state formation could do to totally subjugate the village, besides taxing it and short of destroying it by eliminating the people or deporting them and razing their land. No state formation, not even the liberal modern state, was interested in such a radical outcome. In fact, I could argue that every single state formation that emerged, developed, imposed itself on the Zapotec village people (and was eventually substituted) was interested in maintaining the village autonomy, since the whole system's success depended economically and politically on the limited sovereignty of each local unit.

The manuscript was cautiously stored in one of my drawers. I was too afraid to submit it to my Mexican colleagues and terrified of having it checked by my Zapotec friends. After a few years I gave a fragment of the manuscript to Zapotec historian and poet Víctor de la Cruz for its publication in the Zapotec journal *Guchachi Reza* (Varese 1982a).<sup>22</sup> In the process of my research on Zapotec cultural history, I conducted comparative interviews with one of the greatest Zapotec/Huave writers and intellectuals, Andrés Henestrosa (1992), and with poet and historian Víctor de la Cruz. Both have been strong advocates of the use of Zapotec language in their writings, Andrés Henestrosa since the early 1930s, when he participated in founding the journal *Neza* (The Path) and, a few years later, in the new version of the journal entitled *Neza Cubi* (The New Path). I was fascinated by the conceptual similarity between Quechua writer José María Arguedas and both Zapotec writers, Andrés Henestrosa and Víctor de la Cruz (1984). Henestrosa, in fact, stated that he was aspiring to be like the 17th century Peruvian Quechua writers Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, Guamán Poma de Ayala, and contemporary José María Arguedas: compelling defenders and innovators of their indigenous language and Spanish as creative bilingual writers.

### A Decade of Indigenous Internationalism

1979 was a watershed in the contemporary history of the Latin American indigenous movement and marked the beginning of a decade of increased indigenous activism in the international arena. After years of armed struggle against the U.S.-backed thirty-year-old Anastasio Somoza's dictatorship, the FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front) of Nicaragua liberated most of Nicaragua's territory, announced its socialist program of government, and attempted to extend it to the country's Atlantic Coast. The story of the relations between the *Mestizo* Spanish-speaking Nicaraguans, mostly from the Pacific coast and the central regions of the country, and the Atlantic Coast English-speaking black Caribbean Creoles and indigenous Miskito, Sumo and Rama, is paradigmatic of the deep historical misunderstandings and prejudices that have separated mestizo Latin

America from its indigenous peoples. In spite of the initial progressive declarations by the Sandinista leadership about bringing social justice to all the oppressed and exploited people of Nicaragua, the encounter between the Spanish-speaking Nicaraguans and the indigenous people and Creoles resulted in a bloody and painful armed confrontation, with Miskito fighters bolstered and militarily supported by the U.S. In 1986 an agreement between the Sandinistas and the Miskito, Sumo, Rama and Creoles was reached on autonomy for the Atlantic Coast. Interestingly, after years of meddling in the internal affairs of Nicaragua and actively and illegally supporting the counter-revolution with weapons and money, the U.S. government did not play any role in securing the agreement (Brysk 2000: 112-116; Hale 1994). With the exception of the Kuna of Panamá, who achieved a certain degree of ethnic autonomy in the early 1920s, this was the first case of the successful attainment of autonomy and ethnic sovereignty by indigenous peoples in Latin America. The victory, however, came at a very high social and cultural cost for the indigenous, the people of Nicaragua and even for those social scientists, anthropologists and intellectuals around the world who had supported both the socialist experiment of the Sandinistas and the indigenous peoples' ideals of autonomy.

In the late spring of 1986 I accompanied M.I.T. anthropologist Martin Diskin to the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua on a fact-finding mission under the auspices of the LASA Human Rights and Academic Freedom Commission (Diskin et al. 1986). My knowledge of the indigenous peoples of Nicaragua was vague and based on two direct sources: my brother Luis' involvement in Nicaragua, where he lived for long period of times, being later active in the Sandinista revolution as an internationalist and as an officer in the Sandinista Army, and my personal long-standing acquaintance with poet and Trappist monk Ernesto Cardenal since we had met in Lima after having corresponded for years precisely about indigenous peoples. What I found during my mission with Martin Diskin was the curt corroboration that issues of indigenous peoples' autonomy and cultural sovereignty were not only extremely complex and thorny in terms of domestic politics but almost intractable when they were turned into international geopolitical issues by external interests, in this case linked to the paranoid U.S. government. President Ronald Reagan's administration had unwillingly contributed to the radicalization of Nicaragua's indigenous peoples –and by extension other Latin American indigenous peoples - pushing them to both extremes of the political spectrum. The Miskito's armed involvement in the CIA-supported *Contras'* war against the Sandinistas and their well planned media exposure and projection on the international scenario as indigenous made it clear to the rest of the indigenous movement that the time had come for all of them to play a pivotal role in the global geopolitics being imposed from the top.

Just one year after the Sandinistas' victory, in 1980, hundreds of indigenous leaders and activists from North, Central and South America were invited by the

London-based Bertrand Russell Foundation to present their cases of genocide, ethnocide, discrimination and oppression before the Fourth Russell Tribunal on the Rights of the Indians of the Americas. This people's tribunal, held in Rotterdam (Netherlands) before an international audience of thousands, had a format of a conventional court and jury made up of plaintiffs (specific indigenous peoples), defendants (countries' government), prosecutors (international lawyers), defense attorneys (who were invited by the Russell Tribunal to represent their clients but did not come) and a jury of thirteen members. I was invited to be a member of the jury together with some old and new colleagues. At the court I met again with Guillermo Bonfil Batalla (Mexico), Darcy Ribeiro (Brazil), Robert Jaulin (France), Eduardo Galeano (Uruguay), and met other international human rights experts for the first time. The sheer amount of cases presented before the court was overwhelming. The extent and depth of misery, suffering and injustice that were presented by the indigenous plaintiffs was staggering. All the governments and states of the Americas were found guilty either by omission, by collusion or by intentionally acting to eliminate the indigenous peoples from their national composition.

The case of the Maya people of Guatemala and the later case of the Quechua, Ashaninka and Yaneshá peoples of Peru, became the unfortunate examples of genocide and "ethnic cleansing" practiced equally by dictatorial and pseudo-democratic governments of Latin America without any accountability. As in the case of the Mapuche of Chile, who suffered violent repression and massive deportation under Pinochet's military dictatorship, most of the egregious human rights abuses against indigenous people were not acknowledged by the national and international communities nor were the governments held accountable for such violations. During 1984 and 1986, I was a direct witness to the effects of the genocidal policy against the Maya people being implemented by the Guatemalan state and governments. In 1985, I joined a team of social scientists who were conducting research into Guatemalan refugees in Mexico under the sponsorship of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) and El Colegio de México (Aguayo, Christensen, O'Dogherty, Varese 1987). I visited four resettlement camps in Campeche and Quintana Roo to evaluate the impact of the Mexican government's response to the massive inflow of Guatemalan Maya refugees across the border and the consequent relocation of approximately 45,000 of them to the eastern frontier states of Campeche and Quintana Roo. What I found in the camps among the Maya refugees was an amazing level of political and cultural wisdom and a clear awareness that they, as indigenous, were the targeted victims of an intentional policy of ethnic and racist genocide. The civil and military elite of Guatemala, culturally and racially *mestizo/ladino/white*, were perceived by the Maya refugees as foreigners that wanted to take away everything the Maya people had: their lands, their culture, their language, their lives. "What we want ... is not to have our children go through the same

suffering as we have ... we aim ... to go back to Guatemala: a changed society, with no discrimination, no disregard for human rights, where every rural inhabitant has the right to work his own land ... as long as there are ... landholders who have large holdings, there will be no equality" (interview with a refugee in Los Lirios camp, in Aguayo et al. 1987: 83).

It can be argued that the increased internationalization of the indigenous movement during the 1980s resulted from the confluence of external impositions on the part of repressive and authoritarian policies and self-generated needs to respond to these national policies at the international and multilateral arena level. What is evident, however, is that from 1980, when the Consejo Indio de Sud América (CISA) was founded, through the Fourth Russell Tribunal experience (1980), the Miskito's autonomy struggle (1979-1986), the internationalization of the Guatemalan Maya struggle, the Latin American indigenous movement reached a degree of high visibility in the global community and in the eyes of multilateral and intergovernmental institutions responsible for recommending indigenous peoples' development policies to national governments. In 1983 the indigenous peoples were able to persuade the UN to establish a Geneva-based United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations with consultative status. In 1989 the International Labor Organization (ILO) revised Convention 107 on the Protection of Indigenous Populations established in 1957 and issued ILO Convention 169, has now been ratified by the majority of Latin American governments. What these two latter international legal bodies are producing is an environment of international legality for the specific national and local indigenous claims for social, political and cultural justice.

It is not an accident then, that the first important national indigenous uprising, *El Levantamiento Indígena*, took place in Ecuador in 1990 and forced the government to respond to the sixteen demands announced by the indigenous organizations, which were essentially related to adjustment pressures imposed by the international financial market (Brysk 2000:154-158). The indigenous were responding to the new pressures of globalized capitalism, even before the various national working classes had been able to articulate an assessment of the situation. In 1992, the indigenous movement organized a global, pan-indigenous anti-quincentenary campaign that put the decolonizing and anti-globalization struggles of the indigenous peoples on the world's TV screens and in major publications. In the same year, Rigoberta Menchú received the Nobel Peace Prize for her international defense of indigenous peoples' rights. In 1994 Quechua Aymara Víctor Hugo Cárdenas was elected Vice-President of Bolivia. In 1994 the Maya Zapatista insurgency of Chiapas, Mexico sent an awesome wave of hope through the indigenous world. A few years later, in early 1997, the Ecuadorian indigenous Pachacutik movement was to successfully remove from office the corrupt and incapable president of the country. As the year 2003 comes to an end, the Aymara and Quechua people of Bolivia have removed the neo-liberal president of the

country from power through a massive popular uprising, sacrificing the lives of 65 indigenous rebels killed by the army, and refusing to accept the conditions of neo-colonialism presented by the multinational financial conglomerate and its national proxies as the only way out of poverty.

### Culture as a Resource

For seven years, from 1980 to 1987, I coordinated a relatively large action-research project, initially in the southern state of Veracruz and later in the state of Oaxaca. I was appointed Director of a new program of action-research on ethnic identity and cultural recuperation among indigenous communities of the two regions by Mexico's Deputy Secretary of Culture and the General Directorate of Popular Cultures. I must admit that, with the exception of my years engaged in the liberation struggle of the Amazonian indigenous peoples, this project gave me one of the most exciting and creative times of my intellectual life. Mexico's national program of Popular Cultures (and Indigenous Peoples) had been created by a team of progressive anthropologists under the leadership of Rodolfo Stavenhagen, Guillermo Bonfil Batalla and Leonel Durán and with the support of a couple of government ministers.

The central strategy of Popular Cultures was to complement, enrich – and eventually displace – the policy and programs of the National Institute of Indigenous Affairs (Instituto Nacional Indigenista) and the General Directorate of Indigenous Education which, for years, had concentrated their actions on issues of indigenous community development with an assimilationist perspective, ill-disguised as national integrationism. Since the early years of post-revolutionary governments, and increasingly after the 1940s, state administrations thought of indigenous peoples and their cultures as impoverished remnants of ancient pre-colonial civilizations that had survived as vestiges of the ravages of Spanish colonialism and republican neglect. The *acción indigenista*, the state policy for indigenous peoples, was conceived as a pro-active intervention of government agencies in the social life and culture of indigenous communities with modernization projects that would essentially teach the indigenous to abandon their "customs and language", their native culture, and adopt modern Mexican *mestizo* values, technologies, Spanish language, knowledge system and economic values. As I mentioned before, a new generation of Mexican anthropologists had initiated a radical critique of this type of indigenous policy or *indigenismo*. Guillermo Bonfil Batalla and others were contesting the legitimacy and efficiency of Mexican *indigenismo* and, more importantly, had disclosed the deception of a system that could only claim as its greatest achievement not the overthrow of poverty but rather the demise of rich cultural heritages in the name of modernization.

At the core of Popular Cultures' theory and actions lies the principle that:

... the culture of an indigenous people (of any of the indigenous ethnic groups of Mexico), no matter how subjugated and altered it may be, can constitute the mobilizing axis of the urge to self-affirmation and autonomous development. The principle acknowledges the supremacy of the spiritual realm, of the civilization, of the ideas and of the specific indigenous language that conceive and express them ... rather than endorsing the common opinion that indigenous peoples can only copy and mimic the steps of development walked by the dominant sector of the national mestizo society (Varese 1983c: 35).

The principle asserts the primacy of cultural recuperation and restoration as the central initiative of the indigenous community on its way to autonomy and self-determination. The assumption is that autonomous community and ethnic development can only be achieved through a process of cultural revolution. Such a process of re-discovery of one's own cultural richness and value, of the historical depth of one's own people, cultural knowledge, language and cosmology is fraught with uncertainties and dangers. It implies an often painful journey of collective introspection into the alienation imposed by centuries of colonial intentional demeaning of the colonized. As Albert Memmi has pointed out " ... the existence of the colonizer requires that an image of the colonized be suggested ..." (Memmi 2000: 205) and that image, or myth, must be internalized and assumed as true by the colonized. Biological inferiority, even "depravity", intellectual and aesthetic deficiency, language and rational inadequacy are all characteristics of the colonized indigenous people that gives legitimacy to the system of domination and makes it morally and politically acceptable to the victims - the indigenous - and the co-victims - the poor mestizos.

The goal of the action-research program of Popular Cultures was to initiate, with a selected group of members of indigenous Chinantec, Mixe and Zapotec communities of the Northern Sierra of Oaxaca, a journey back to the deep historical roots of their cultures in order to re-appropriate the civilizational initiative and actively seek collective participation in this enterprise. I assembled a multi-disciplinary team of specialists (anthropologists, linguists, geographers, biologists, arts and performing arts specialists, educators) and thirty-two Chinantec, Mixe and Zapotec "cultural promoters" from different indigenous communities of the Northern Sierra. The selection of both the individual members and community participants was done with the help of local indigenous organizations and community traditional authorities. We sought the mobilization and participation of a sample of villages that had been affected by the main issues impacting on the region: lack of land and resources, lack of credit for agricultural and/or forestry development, high level of out-going migration to urban areas and the U.S., and a notorious absence of State and Federal government support for political participation and democratic governance.

The permeating sentiment among most of the members of the three ethnic groups of the Sierra was the widespread collective notion that the local ethnic cultures, identities and languages were not only inadequate to deal with the challenges posed by the interaction with Mexican urban-driven modernity, but actually an obstacle to be removed by a voluntary act of assimilation and disappearance as specific expressions of indigenous cultures. We soon realized, however, that behind this internalized colonizer's discourse there were plenty of contradictions that were inter-playing against the backdrop of gender, age groups, social stratification, nearness to State political power, migrants vs. non-migrants, traditionalists vs. modernizers, Catholic vs. Evangelicals. In a kind of Paulo Freire approach, we used the methodology of the "generating concept" to undermine and de-construct the colonial discourse and allow the community activists to re-appropriate their own cultural initiative. We worked on four broad fields of cultural re-appropriation. Firstly, we looked at the recuperation of ethnic ideas and history of place/space. The exploration was centered on ethno-geography and the development of a cultural approach to issues of territoriality, land, water and resources. Secondly, we looked at the recuperation of the word: the ethnic language recognized as an accomplished tool for generating new ideas and re-discovering ancient knowledge. On this point we insisted that the indigenous languages could and should be written with the implicit goal of achieving one or more unified *koynés*, or "national-ethnic languages". Thirdly, we concentrated on the recuperation of time, of the revised and re-written history of the group from the pre-colonial era to contemporary times. Finally, we motivated a reflection on the recuperation of the future, of the collective will to imagine a social project for the future of the community and the whole ethnic region.

### Expatriation Three. Indigenous Diasporas

I learned a few important lessons from my years working with the indigenous communities of Oaxaca. Certainly, the most important was the confirmation of my readings of Amílcar Cabral and my neo-Gramscian intuition that culture has a tremendous revolutionary potential, but only insofar as it is assumed or re-captured by the individuals and the collectivity in a process of critical and painful self-discovery that absolves them from any guilt by association with the colonizers' dominant culture or neglect and disrespect for one's own native heritage. The same self-perceived native culture, which looks inadequate and useless to a Serrano Zapotec on his way to economic deportation and migration to the U.S., may re-appear in the consciousness of the Zapotec farm worker in the Central Valley of California or in a sweatshop in Los Angeles as a powerful resource for his survival in a hostile foreign environment and for his re-enlistment in the Zapotec diaspora. The same *Nusave* language of the Mixtec migrant in California or

Oregon that had caused him to be discriminated against in the Mixteca region of Oaxaca can now be perceived as a tool for defense, a shield that protects the whole Mixtec community in exile and allows for its integration as a new political entity.

My third expatriation, this time to California, was strictly due to family reasons. It was, however, fortunate that the transition from the Valley of Oaxaca and the Northern Sierra Madre to the Central Valley of California was accompanied by my exposure to the phenomenon of massive Oaxacan indigenous migration to California and the U.S. I followed, not by conscious choice, the same route that Mixtec, Zapotec, Chinantec and Trique from Oaxaca are forced to take in order to survive the extreme poverty of their lands and the abuses of the Mexican political system. But my privileged status of academician, legally crossing the international border with all the required documents, not showing any cultural or phenotypical sign of my ethnicity, deeply challenged my sense of fairness and professional ethics. After a short residence at Stanford University and, from my safe academic position at the University of California, Davis, I felt for the first time uncomfortable, almost disingenuous, treating the indigenous Oaxacan migrants as my "field of study". These were the peoples that had received me generously, that had hosted myself and my family with warm festivity, with happiness, with friendly irony, with the aristocratic simplicity of people who own nothing and are ready to give everything. Juan, Filemón, Rufino, Sylvia, Federica, Manuel were not the ethnographer's "informants", they were *compañeros* - and a metaphor - in an unequal struggle for the survival of entire indigenous peoples not only in Oaxaca, not only in the diaspora, but in the entire American continent. Could my scholarly convictions be shaken and radically reshaped by these new diasporic, transnational, de-territorialized indigenous people who were questioning with their mere presence and persistence most of the methodological and theoretical assumptions of this anaemic discipline that we call anthropology? I still do not have an answer. I know that, once more, their struggle is now mine.

San Felipe del Agua in Oaxaca and  
Davis in California,  
September and October 2003

### Notes

- 1 Gutiérrez, Gustavo, 1971: *Teología de la Liberación*. Lima. Published in English in 1973, *A Theology of Liberation*. New York: Orbis Books.
- 2 Varese uses the expression Campa-Ashaninka in the original. Campa was, for centuries, the name given to this indigenous people by outsiders. Nevertheless, due to the political process of affirmation of their own identity that has taken place in recent decades, they have rejected this name and recovered that of Ashaninka. When asked the meaning of the word *ashaninka*, they translate it as *fellow countryman*. Some anthropologists give meanings such as *our relatives*, *our comrades* or *com-*

*patriots*. In the areas of the Gran Pajonal and the Pichis, upper Perené and upper Ucayali river basins, the people call themselves *Asheninka*, which has the same meaning but which represents a way of affirming a dialectic variation and a differentiated identity. In agreement with Varese, the word Campa has been deleted from this book, except in cases of textual quotations or article titles. [Ed. note]

- 3 Fernando Belaúnde's record on human rights did not improve when, 13 years later, he was elected President of Peru once more. At the end of August 2003, Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission issued its voluminous report on two decades of political violence (1980-2000), revealing that more than 69,000 Peruvians died or disappeared in the twenty-year period and three regimes of Fernando Belaúnde (1980-85), Alan García (1985-90) and Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000). Fernando Belaúnde's regime was responsible for the largest number of human rights violations and for 28 per cent of all deaths and disappearances. The Commission's president, Dr. Salomón Lerner, sociologist and Chancellor of the Catholic University of Peru, asserted that 75 percent of all victims were indigenous people from the Andes and Amazon forest, confirming the deeply rooted racism and social exclusion of Peruvian society (see: <http://www.cverdad.org.pe>).
- 4 Quoted in *The Peru Reader* (1995:265-269) ed. Starn, Orin, Carlos Iván Degregori, and Robin Kirk.
- 5 Aaby, Peter and S. Hvalkof, 1981: *Is God American? An Anthropological Perspective on the Missionary Work of the Summer Institute of Linguistics*. Copenhagen: International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA); London: Survival International.
- 6 Jaulin, Robert, 1970: *La paix blanche. Introduction à l'ethnocide*. Paris: Seuil.
- 7 Varese, Stefano: "Considérations d'anthropologie utopique", *Les Temps Modernes*, no. 316, Paris, Nov. 1972c; Varese, S.: "Au sujet du colonialisme écologique", *Les Temps Modernes*, no. 321, Paris, April, 1973a; Varese, S.: "Deux versions cosmogoniques Campa: esquisse analytique", *Annales, Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, no. 3, May-June, 1976, Paris: Libr. A. Colin
- 8 Varese, Stefano, 1972d: *The Forest Indians in the Present Political Situation of Peru*, IWGIA Document no. 8, International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), Copenhagen.
- 9 Varese, Stefano, 1975: "Les communautés tribales dans la nouvelle politique péruvienne", in Jean Copan (Ed.), *Anthropologie et Impérialisme*, Coll. Bibliothèque d'Anthropologie, Dir. Maurice Godelier. Paris: F. Maspero.
- 10 Berreman, Gerald, 1968: "Is Anthropology Alive? Social Responsibility in Social Anthropology," *Current Anthropology*: 391-398. In the same issue of the journal Kathleen Gough published her anti-imperialist position, which she reasserted in the nineties, just before her death, in the article "Anthropology and Imperialism Revisited", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 4 August 1990: 1705-1708.
- 11 In the 1967 annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, the issue of ethics and anthropology became central to the debate. Kathleen Gough and Gerald Berreman presented a resolution condemning the U.S. war on Vietnam. Margaret Mead opposed such a resolution arguing that political statements were not in the professional interests of anthropology. Young anthropologist Michael Harner, who was conducting field research among the Shuar of Ecuador, declared that "Genocide is in the professional interests of anthropology" and the resolution was passed (Gough 1990: 1705).
- 12 Just a few years ago I learned from my older sister Ilaria a story about my "conservative" grandfather that humbled me tremendously. During the war, in a deep and dark underground of this basement, called *infernetto* - little hell - my grandfather had hidden and protected a Jewish man from the hatred of Nazi fascists, and by so doing risked his life and the safety of his entire family.
- 13 One of César Calvo's most representative books is *Las tres mitades de Ino Moxo*. 1981. Iquitos: Proceso Editores.
- 14 Bonfil Batalla, Guillermo et al., 1970: *De eso que llaman antropología mexicana*. Mexico: Editorial Nuestro Tiempo.
- 15 Boas, Franz, 1912: "La Escuela Internacional de Arqueología y Etnología Americanas," *Boletín del Museo Nacional de México*, Mexico, tercera época, Vol 1, no. 10: 187-93.
- 16 Although he never clearly admitted it, it is obvious that anthropologist and political figure of indigenous policy Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán was heavily influenced by Marxist literature. See Aguirre Beltrán 1957, 1967 and especially 1976.

- 17 Brysk, Alison, 2000: *From Tribal Village to Global Village. Indian Rights and International Relations in Latin America*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- 18 Published as IWGIA Document no. 1. Copenhagen: IWGIA.
- 19 The thoughts, theoretical and methodological contributions of Oscar Varsavsky are too complex to be reduced to a few lines; besides Figueiredo (1983) see Varsavsky (1971, 1975) and Varsavsky, Sachs, Figueiredo (1973).
- 20 In 1967 I founded the Centro de Investigaciones de Selva-CIS (Rainforest Research Center) within the Instituto Raúl Porras Barrenechea of the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, Lima. While the CIS was established as an academic unit dedicated to the advancement of ethnological knowledge of the Amazon I was also hoping that it could bring the Amazon indigenous peoples to the attention of the urban community of scholars and politicians. It was in fact at the Centro where I was interviewed for the first time by members of the revolutionary government and invited to establish the Division of Native Communities of the Rainforest. CIS published one issue of a journal/bulletin *KIARIO* (1969) where the first information about the foundation of the *Congreso Amuesha* can be found.
- 21 AIDSESEP [www.aidesep.org.pe/](http://www.aidesep.org.pe/), COICA [www.coica.org](http://www.coica.org)
- 22 Víctor de la Cruz recently concluded his doctoral dissertation on the Zapotec's cosmology and calendaric thoughts (de la Cruz 2002). In the spring of 2002, I co-authored with Michael Grofe a paper in which I revisit some of the themes of my unpublished manuscript (Varese and Grofe "Notas sobre la Territorialidad, Sacralidad y Economía Política Bennizá / Binigulá / Beneshon", which we presented at the Tercera Mesa Redonda de Monte Albán, CONACULTA-INAH, Oaxaca, 26-29 June, 2002.

Photo: IWGIA, 1973



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In this book, I have gathered together essays written over a period of more than thirty years of my life. It is difficult to remember and express gratitude to all those people who have contributed with their knowledge, patience, advice, critique and friendship to my own professional growth and to enlightening the indigenous peoples' struggle for autonomy. In the Introduction, I have recognized my intellectual debts to those friends and teachers who, through their words and writings, have influenced my thoughts and actions. There are, nevertheless, many other people to whom tribute is due. Of the many peers and colleagues of the Peruvian period I will mention, in no particular order and in the hope of not forgetting anyone important, the following: Alberto Chirif, Richard Chase Smith, Carlos Mora, Jorge Osterling and Alejandro Camino, who were dear friends, students / teachers and collaborators during my time working in the Peruvian Amazon. Jorge Puccinelli, professor of literature in the National University of San Marcos, Lima, who was unable to induce my father to return to academia and teach law but was nevertheless successful in convincing me that I could earn a doctoral degree in a language I was only just mastering. To Quechua anthropologist Mario Vásquez, who took his life in desperation, I owe some of my best years as a government official working with and for the indigenous communities of the Amazon. With Carlos Delgado, Jaime Llosa, Jorge Ishizawa, Julio Ortega, Sergio Chang and Hugo Neira, and film director Carlos Ferrand, I also celebrated some festive times of revolutionary creativity, at times listening to the beautiful "criollo" music of Chabuca Granda, of a young and inexperienced Tania Libertad, and the deep and wise voice of Afro-Peruvian Nicomedes Santa Cruz. In the Amazon forest, in the Gran Pajonal, along the Perené, Tambo, Pichis, Pachitea, Ucayali, Marañón and Amazon rivers, I met many Indian friends and teachers whose names are now forgotten, lost in my notes or confused in my memory. I have already thanked, in another book, Poshano, Omega, Coronado, Pashuka, Irerena. Of the Shipibo leader from the Ucayali River with whom I shared a hotel room in Quito, Ecuador during an indigenous congress. I can only remember the name Pablo. But what he told me, almost humbly, in a soft voice, of his community's translation into the Shipibo language of the chapter on Juan Santos Atahualpa's rebellion from my book *Salt of the Mountain*, remains impressed on my memory.

Of the many colleagues and friends in Mexico that have influenced me, in one way or another, I will mention in no particular order, Nemesio Rodríguez, Ron

Nigh, Margarita Dalton, Pedro Lewin, Elba Gigante, Ernesto Díaz Couder, María de los Angeles Romero, María Teresa Pardo, Gudrum Dorhman, Poala Sesia, Jaime Martínez Luna, Miguel Alberto Bartolomé, Juan Julián Caballero, Manuel Ríos, Víctor de la Cruz, Alicia Barabas, Marcos Sandoval, Javier Castellanos, Eucario Angeles, Ninfa Pacheco, and more than a hundred other indigenous intellectuals and activists with whom I have worked and shared dreams of a better future. One, in particular, needs special tribute. Hermenegildo López was a Chinantec poet from the community of Comaltepec in the Chinantla Alta of Oaxaca. We worked together for a few years in the project for cultural recuperation and ethnic identity until his death in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec at the hands of drug dealers, bandits or political enemies, perhaps one and the same. To all the other people I am forgetting, I wish to express my gratitude for their contributions to my life. *A todas y todos, gracias.*

In California too, my community of colleagues, students and friends has become almost innumerable. Here at the University of California, Davis I met again, after many years, old friends from Peru, Andeanist scholars Ben Orlove and Steve Brush. Something similar happened with Native American scholar Jack Forbes, whom I had met for the first time at the Fourth Russell Tribunal in 1980 and who was co-director with David Risling of the Native American Studies Program at UC Davis when I was employed as a lecturer in 1989. Jack Forbes, Dave Risling, Sarah Hatchison, George Longfish, founders of Native American Studies at UC Davis, have supported me with the kind of hospitality, generosity and kindness that I have found all my life among Indians. To all my other colleagues in Native American Studies, Inés Hernández Avila, Steve Crum, Martha Macri, Víctor Montejo and Zoila Mendoza, I extend my gratitude. It is a privilege to work with such a team of scholars. All my graduate students have been generous contributors to my scholarly life with their own research projects, their ideas, their participation in seminar discussions. I consider all of them to be a gift to my intellectual life. A special thank you to Kerin Gould who translated some of my earlier essays written in Spanish. I must also acknowledge my colleague Carol Smith from the department of anthropology, with whom I have co-mentored extraordinary doctoral students. Finally, I would like to thank my friend Miriam Wells, anthropologist and Professor in Community Development who, for the last ten years, has kept me in good physical, mental and spiritual shape by insisting on our weekly Aristotelian peripatetic runs in spite of my cultural tardiness and genetic forgetfulness.

P.S. Some new names need to be added to this note: Søren Hvalkof and Alejandro Parellada of IWGIA deserve a special thank you for their generous, albeit critical, support of my manuscript. Thanks also to Elaine Bolton, who has successfully transformed my Spanglish into palatable English and to Jorge Monrás, for the design of this book. To my old friend Alberto Chirif, who added incredible values to my essays, *gracias, un abrazo y hasta que nos volvamos a ver.*

... Elba Cisante, ...  
 ... Guzmán ...  
 ... Caballero, ...  
 ... Eucardo ...  
 ... y ...  
 ...

# PERU

Photo: Cisante Aguirre



# CHAPTER I

## SOCIAL JUSTICE AND CULTURAL RIGHTS IN THE PERUVIAN AMAZON (1971)

### abstract

This essay\* can be described as confessional insofar as the author includes himself as an actor in the story he is retelling. The plot revolves around his participation in the Revolutionary Government headed by Juan Velasco Alvarado (1968-1975), which entrusted him with the task of defining a legal framework to protect the territorial, and other cultural and political rights, of the indigenous peoples of the Peruvian Amazon. In association with various colleagues, Varese took up the challenge of achieving his dream of social justice, taking an administrative post within the State apparatus. This essay summarizes the arguments he made to the government in support of the law on Amazonian Indigenous communities (*native communities*, according to official terminology), and the text is thus of significant historical value. It is clearly a text of a practical and political nature. The essay classifies the different areas of the Peruvian Amazon, along with the historical processes that have taken place there since the European invasion. It gives a synoptic vision of these processes, beginning with the evangelization by missionaries that took place during colonial times, often accompanied by *encomenderos* and soldiers, and continuing with the most dramatic and destructive processes of the republican era. Of these Varese highlights the rubber boom, the main cause of the demographic decline among many indigenous peoples, and of their social, economic and cultural breakdown. The text also takes time to analyse the reasons behind the colonization programme promoted by consecutive governments. The aim was to move Andean populations who had lost the right to their land to the tropical rainforest region in order to maintain unjust structures for the benefit of a landowning class which, until the revolutionary years of General Velasco, enjoyed substantial political power. This and other cases lead Varese to state that an analysis of indigenous societies cannot be undertaken in isolation from the wider society that surrounds them and which imposes social, economic, political and cultural conditions on them. In fact, this analysis should not even be restricted to

\* The essay is based on a report written for the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) in 1971 and published under the title *The Forest Indians in the Present Political Situation of Peru*, IWGIA Document no. 8, Copenhagen, 1972. An extended version of this text was written jointly with Sergio Chang in an official report for the Revolutionary Government (Varese and Chang, 1972). With a few amendments, it also appears in the first appendix to the second edition of *La sal de los cerros*, INIDE, Lima, 1973.

within the borders of countries that have indigenous populations because these countries also form part of wider networks dominated by the industrialized world. The essay offers a number of definitions that were important at that time, such as native communities and ethno-linguistic groups, as well as demographic estimates and considerations of the type of populations currently found in the Peruvian Amazon.

### Foreword and Context

In October 1968, a military coup brought to power a small group of young generals and colonels who initiated one of the most daring social and political reform programs ever undertaken in Peru. General Juan Velasco Alvarado's revolution expropriated and nationalized the International Petroleum Company, a branch of the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey; declared and implemented agrarian reform in the coastal region of the country by expropriating sugar cane plantations from a gentrified oligarchy, creating peasant-run cooperatives; and announced the expansion of land reform initiatives in the Andean and Amazonian Regions. Surprised by this unusual military regime that used progressive discourse and professed its intention to combat poverty, social injustice and ethno-racial discrimination, some of us young intellectuals accepted the challenge of confronting our dreams of social justice by accepting administrative positions within the state apparatus and the revolutionary government.<sup>1</sup>

In 1969 Mario Vásquez, a Quechua anthropologist from the northern Andean region of Ancash, invited me to join him in the recently created General Directorate of Peasant Communities within the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform. Vásquez was part of a small number of Peruvian anthropologists who had been recruited by Allan Holmberg, founder and director of the Vicus applied anthropology project, to study at Cornell University. There, Vásquez, a Quechua from a small provincial town in the northern Andes, gained a doctorate in anthropology and the greatly needed prestige and protection from racial and ethnic discrimination so common in Peru during those years. Vásquez challenged me with the formidable task of extending the land reform process initiated by the military revolution in the Coast and Highland regions to the Amazon region of Peru. In a remarkable meeting with Carlos Delgado, another Cornell University alumnus and anthropologist, the recently appointed Minister of SINAMOS (National System of Social Mobilization), plus a few other social scientists, lawyers and army colonels, Vásquez presented me with the challenge of defining the needs of the "tribal indigenous" of the Amazon forest, developing a legal framework for protecting their territorial rights and guaranteeing their language, cultural and politi-

cal rights, all of which, Vásquez reminded me, had to be done swiftly and with scarce financial and technical resources. Most importantly, these studies had to take place against the backdrop of long-held cultural and racial prejudices against the indigenous peoples of the Amazon, prejudices that were shared by the majority of criollo and mestizo Peruvians, the politically cornered oligarchy, the state bureaucracy and even by some of the progressive military who were running a government intended to bring social and cultural democracy to all Peruvians.

I accepted the challenge and, in 1969, I founded the *Division of Native Communities of the Tropical Rainforest*<sup>2</sup> (as a branch of the Ministries of Agriculture, Agrarian Reform and SINAMOS). Housed in a horrendous and dilapidated office in the old Ministry of Labor building and staffed with a few former anthropology students of mine, a "constitutional" lawyer, an agronomist and a Peruvian sociologist of Chinese descent whose cousin had been in the Che Guevara guerrilla movement in Bolivia, the Division started its mission by producing a social assessment of the indigenous peoples of Peru's Amazon region. With no reliable demographic data nor information as to territorial occupation, land tenure or resource management, the survey task soon became an overwhelming challenge. Peru's academia and government administration had no tradition whatsoever of social studies or censuses of the region. The Amazon area - encompassing more than half the national territory of the country - had never been taken seriously into consideration by the ruling elites nor by academia. The ethnic surveys that we were initiating had to rely on missionary sources: archives of Catholic orders such as those of the Jesuits, Franciscans and Dominicans, or Protestant sects; documentation prepared by groups such as the Summer Institute of Linguistics/Wycliff Bible Translators, the New Tribes Missions, and various other evangelical missions, all of which became our most important sources of information. The desolate landscape the state administration inherited after more than a century and a half of systematic neglect of the peoples and lands of the Amazon began to burden us. What were the key problems of the Amazon indigenous communities? What were their claims? What were their demands? Was there some form of indigenously generated political programs and platforms? Who and where were the indigenous leaders, the representatives of dozens of ethnic groups and literally thousands of local communities?

During the final months of 1969 and part of 1970, the team of social scientists from the Division of Native Communities carried out a pilot study of the Aguaruna communities of the Alto Marañón River (Varese 1970). Through this study we were able to show the subordinate position of the Aguaruna and Huambiza peoples within the regional market economy and political system, as well the dramatic loss of indigenous territorial possessions and control at the hands of the state planned military colonization, which encouraged colonization of indigenous lands by Peruvian civilian and demobilized army personnel. A wider assessment of the indigenous peoples of Peru's Amazon forest was concluded in

1971 and promptly stowed away as a "confidential document" in the bureaucratic maze of the Ministry of Agriculture (Varese and Chang, 1972). I used part of the information for a few articles (Varese 1972b, 1974a) as did my colleagues and collaborators, Alberto Chirif and Carlos Mora, in order to publish a monumental first attempt at systematizing the basic ethnography of the Peruvian Amazon (Chirif and Mora 1976).

The accumulation of this small and still precarious body of knowledge on the Amazon region's indigenous communities, as well as the increasing political pressure and mobilization of a few indigenous organizations, constituted the basis for the enactment of the *Law of Native Communities of the Tropical Rainforest* (Government Decree no. 20653), which introduced sweeping reform and radical changes to the situation of the indigenous peoples of the Amazon forest.

In 1975, the revolutionary government of Juan Velasco Alvarado came to an abrupt end. "Chino Velasco" as he was affectionately called by the people, died after a short illness, and a counter-coup brought to power a conservative sector of the army.<sup>3</sup> The political environment moved quickly to the right and toward the systematic eradication of years of social reforms. In response, the indigenous peoples of the Amazon forest threw themselves into politics and activism, resulting in a reactivation of local intracommunal organizations,<sup>4</sup> forming and expanding regional ethnic and multi-ethnic federations and making the Law of Native Communities their banner of ethno-political struggle.

### A Thirty-Year-Old Assessment

What follows is a compendium of some of the arguments that I presented to the revolutionary government of Juan Velasco Alvarado, as director of the Division of Native Communities, between 1969 and 1974 to support the need for special legislation for the indigenous peoples of the Peruvian Amazon region.

We need to answer certain basic political questions about the indigenous people of the Peruvian Amazon and anthropology has generally dealt with these on the basis of an analysis of inter-ethnic relations, emphasizing in its methods the aspects of cross-cultural contact and interaction but neglecting the national context and its political factors. In my opinion, the answers to these questions must be derived from an analysis that recognizes that inter-ethnic relations are also, importantly, class relations. Such factors as the socio-economic situation of indigenous society within the national framework, and its differential access or lack of access to the means of controlling political and decision-making power therefore necessarily enter into my analysis. It is in this perspective that I wish to examine this subject, convinced that an analysis of the micro-situation gains its full significance only if it is linked to the overall context. An old proverb says that it is hard to be a prophet in one's own country. When this country is political, the

prophecy runs the risk of being a utopian dream. The concluding part of this essay should be read with this reservation in mind.

First a point of method, which in turn derives from a theoretical premise that should be explained: that an analysis of "tribal" indigenous minorities cannot be isolated from an analysis of the wider society that surrounds them and which imposes structural conditions of a social, economic, political and cultural nature. The system of inter-ethnic relations in the Amazon involves not only the two directly interacting poles: indigenous society and the "white" Peruvian society or segments of it, but the fact that these two poles, as parts of a wider network, cannot be extrapolated and analyzed in isolation without running the risk of fragmenting the structure and being unable to comprehend the global phenomenon. The majority of the indigenous communities of the Amazon forest are not historical and synchronic islands, so attempting to concentrate our study on the local group or the micro-region, to the exclusion of a "macro-historical" and "macro-social" analysis, will lead us to false conclusions. To what extent can we say, for example, that there exist communities in the Peruvian Amazon forest that are isolated from the nation-state that politically, socially and economically includes them, and from the system of international/global relations, which obviously includes Peru? To what extent has even the tribal group most isolated from surrounding society's means of communication felt the effects of national and international social and economic events?

The social and cultural events taking place today among the indigenous communities east of the Andes should be considered the result, and in turn the dynamic, of a process that has continually involved and continues to involve a chain of social, economic and political constellations that extends to Lima, the nerve center of Peruvian society and beyond, to the centers of international trade. These international centers have during the course of history changed their location: from Spain in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries to England in the 19th century, and the United States in the 20th century. This spatial shift of the economic center has given rise to a shift in economic interests, such that there has been, in dialectical succession, more or less pressure on one or other sector of the overall society and thus on the Amazon forest and its inhabitants. The rubber "boom", which occurred toward the end of the 19th century, is perhaps the most eloquent example of this. From 1870 to 1915, the Peruvian tropical rainforest was transformed into one of the world's principal sources of crude rubber, collected almost exclusively by the indigenous people of the areas surrounding the Amazon, Ucayali, Marañón and Madre de Dios rivers and their principal tributaries. Around 1910, rubber produced by the English in Borneo, Ceylon and India began to take the place of Peruvian rubber.

In spite of its short duration, the Peruvian rubber "boom" had a fundamental repercussion on the indigenous people of the Amazon, in social as well as biological terms. A few figures will serve to illustrate this. During the first decade of the twentieth century, 80% of the indigenous population of the Putumayo River

region was annihilated. At the same time, of the 28,000 rubber workers of the Loreto region, approximately 22,000 belonged to native communities (Varese 1968a: 14-15). The human losses caused by mistreatment, epidemics and forced labor were replaced by raids during which members of native communities were captured and enslaved.

An economic factor of world importance such as rubber, with all its political and social ramifications and implications, exercised a decisive influence on the lives of most of the indigenous peoples of the lower Peruvian Amazon region. Today this phenomenon is being repeated on a different scale with the extraction of timber, hard-wood and animal products. According to official figures, which by their very nature are much lower than the real figures, more than US\$700,000 worth of hides and live animals were exported in 1969 from the Peruvian tropical forest (figures from the General Administration of Forests, Hunting and Lands of the Peruvian Ministry of Agriculture). This type of extraction is fundamentally carried out by members of indigenous communities working through the "barter-credit" system ("*enganche*"), in which raw materials and work are paid for with goods or credit for goods. Accordingly we can state that the present situation of tribal minorities should be seen, historically and synchronically, as the result of a more or less direct participation in the process of growth and development of the capitalist world.

This theoretical and methodological consideration gives rise to another: that it is impossible to separate the problems of Amazon's indigenous peoples from the problems of the social classes. Anthropological analysis has in general neglected this aspect and has not emphasized the fact that relations between social groups that differ in language, culture, social organization, economy and ethnic identity cannot be exclusively studied on the basis of a social and cultural analysis that considers indigenous society as a passive receptor of modifications derived from changes imposed by the centers of control and domination. These relations presuppose a differential access to the means of production and therefore to power. The overwhelming majority of the indigenous people of the tropical forest are in a state of permanent interaction with different sectors of "white" Peruvian society: lumbermen, rubber gatherers, traders or settlers. This interaction should be understood as a relationship between human groups (classes that are also ethnic groups) in which one of the groups can appropriate the "labor" of the other. And in this case, by "labor" I mean something very broad, which can range from the means of production and natural resources to the marketing system and the related use of transportation, of the "barter-credit" system, and of usurious interest rates for goods advanced. The inter-ethnic relations that take place between the various peoples of the Amazon rainforest are at the same time class relations, and both kinds of relations are part of a network or system of relations that must be understood at the level of society as a whole which, in turn, cannot be considered

on its own but only as part of a system of country constellations dominated by economic centers or core developed countries.

There is an abundance of examples. The timid attempts at agrarian reform initiated in Peru under the governments of presidents Manuel Prado and Fernando Belaúnde Terry in the 1950s and 1960s did not aim to eliminate the coastal and Andean *latifundia* (large landed properties with semi-servitude labor) but promoted, ideologically and technically, the colonization of the Amazon forest. The colonization of the tropical rainforest became falsely synonymous with agrarian reform. This policy obviously entailed various advantages for the small ruling elite of the country, not the least of which was the fact that without revolutionizing the landholding system in the rest of the country it was nevertheless possible to offer the marginal peasantry the hope of acquiring a plot of land in the "uncivilized and empty" Amazonian forest. The results of this procedure were especially noteworthy in two fields. On an ideological level, an image was fostered of the rich and fertile forest, uninhabited and open to men of initiative. This image is a part of the widespread system of national stereotypes and allows the tropical rainforest to be visualized as a land of conquest, a kind of internal colony that may or may not attract the attention of the politically dominant sector, according to the national and international economic interests of the moment. In the socio-economic field, Peru initiated a series of relative improvements to the highway infrastructure, notably the so-called "peripheral highway", the costs of which were not justified by the benefits received, since the land brought under cultivation was of poor quality and therefore did not permit the planned concentration of the population. As a result of these policies, in the 50s and 60s large population movements took place from the Andes and, to some extent, the coast to the upper Amazon forest areas in the eastern foothills of the Andes, which in most cases were already inhabited by indigenous people. More than 23% of the population of the tropical forest areas of the departments of Pasco, Junín and Cuzco, according to the 1961 census, were immigrants from other parts of the country. Numerous groups of Yanasha,<sup>5</sup> Ashaninka and Matziguenka indigenous were living in these areas, who were forced to withdraw from their territory as the State had no declared policy of protecting their rights. Thus at the extreme ends of this chain of economic and political events we see, on the one hand, indigenous societies in the involuntary role of a marginal and dominated people and, on the other, a political option which, in the last analysis, is subject not only to national but also to international economic conditions.

### Historical Notes. Penetration and Settlement

At this time I think it convenient to introduce an historical dimension to my analysis, since the present situation of the Amazon indigenous peoples is above all else the

result of a process of submission to the dialectics of national and international politics and economics. In adopting this perspective, I do not mean a history of events but rather a general outline of the conditions which, over the course of the centuries, have permitted a certain social and economic structure in the Peruvian Amazon.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, colonial Spain was not particularly interested in the Amazon forest. Spanish soldiers, missionaries, "encomenderos" and explorers penetrated east of the Andes through the mountain passes and settled along the great navigable rivers, thus displacing the indigenous population, which was itself settled on strips of rich alluvial land appropriate for slash and-burn cultivation. This phenomenon, in the case of Peru, has been studied with precision by Donald Lathrap (1968, 1970), who demonstrated with archaeological evidence that before the arrival of the Spanish the banks of the navigable rivers were densely populated by indigenous societies basing their economy on the cultivation of the alluvial soil, fishing and the hunting of mammals, animals that in the tropical forests are only abundant in the vicinity of watercourses. Alluvial soil, the fertility of which is renewed by yearly floods and which therefore permits the stable settlement and a certain degree of concentration of an agricultural population, constitutes a mere 3% of the total area of the Peruvian Amazon (Meggers 1958; see also the soil evaluation studies of ONERN, the Peruvian National Office of Natural Resources Evaluation).

Thus the mere occupation of these riverside areas by Europeans led to ethnic displacements and resettlements that had repercussions on the ecological, economic and social equilibrium of the indigenous societies affected. In part, these communities abandoned their river settlements and withdrew towards the headwaters or towards inter-fluvial higher ground, poorer in soil and fauna resulting in a worsening of their economic, technological, social and cultural situation.

In order to understand correctly the present condition of most of the indigenous societies of the Peruvian tropical forest, one must realize that all of them, to a greater or lesser extent, directly or indirectly, have undergone this process of ecological deterioration and marginalization. This process was aggravated in the 18th century when missionary activities intensified and, in some cases, developed into a veritable uprooting, removal and resettlement of whole indigenous people, such as the Yine<sup>6</sup> and the Cunibo of the Urubamba, Tambo and Upper Ucayali rivers, organized by the Franciscans and the Jesuits at the end of the 17th century. Immediately after this intensification, the tribal groups reacted and organized their response: sometimes violent, sometimes involving a cultural retreat to nativistic and messianic positions (Varese 1968b, 2002a: passim), which crop up at regular intervals to this day.

### The Republic

In 1824, Simón Bolívar promulgated a decree that was to *de facto* dissolve the indigenous communities of the Andes in that it permitted any member of a com-

munity to sell the communal land he held in usufruct. This measure was the result of an ill-conceived liberalism. Communal land was sold for small amounts of money by indigenous who thus contributed to the formation of many of the large estates held by whites and mestizos. Shortly thereafter, the dispossessed indigenous peasants began looking for land in the Amazon forest, initiating a long process of penetration and settlement on the part of Andean indigenous, especially in the upper *montaña* - precisely in those areas, marginal with respect to the alluvial riverside areas, where many tribal groups had already concentrated and were surviving.

The penetration of Andeans into the upper rainforest was no novelty: the so-called "vertical economy" of the valleys of the Eastern Andes is certainly a phenomenon of pre-Hispanic origin (Murra et al. 1966). What was new was the permanent rather than seasonal settlement of the peasants and the population pressure which began to be felt in these areas. This pressure increased to the extent to which the formation and consolidation of large estates - *haciendas* - took place in the Andes and on the coast at the expense of indigenous communities.

During the terms of office of presidents such as Ramón Castilla, in the middle of the 19th century, and Nicolás de Piérola, at the end of the 19th century, the expansion of the internal frontier was reactivated and "the mystique of the conquest of the forest" began to grow - a mystique which was revived a century later by President Fernando Belaúnde. These were also the years when the coffee plantations of the upper forest were formed, the years when the State handed over a large part of the area of the Upper Perené River to the Peruvian Corporation, whose concession included lands inhabited by numerous groups of Yanesha and Ashaninka. The indigenous communities of the upper Amazon were faced with two types of threat: the invasion of *white-criollos* with the accompanying seizure of indigenous lands, and the demand for indigenous labor by the new landowners and by rubber gatherers. Both threats induced a series of social, economic and cultural changes in the local indigenous communities, the members of which were grafted onto a system of relations of dependence, and were either transformed into wage-earning agricultural laborers or moved into more isolated regions.

To sum up, starting in the second half of the 19th century, two types of economic phenomenon occurred in the Peruvian tropical rainforest, the origins of which were related to the national and international situation, and which had a radical repercussion on the situation of the indigenous people. On the one hand, the whites' agricultural frontier on indigenous territories was established and consolidated; on the other hand, another more dynamic and deep internal frontier was extended through the demand for rubber. Both these phenomena deserve a broader study than the few words which I am able to devote to them in this article. Nevertheless, I should like to expand on the type of frontier which

these socio-economic processes impose, since both of them continue to exist and presuppose a distinct kind of stimulus for the indigenous societies.

The expansion of the internal frontier imposed by the extraction of rubber, and currently imposed by the production of wood, hides and animals, cannot be considered as a demographic frontier but rather an economic one, with repercussions on the types of settlement and dispersion of the indigenous and rural groups of the tropical forest. Extractive expansion, unlike the establishment of farms and cattle ranches, does not aim specifically at the occupation of indigenous territory for the permanent and decisive establishment of human nuclei. The frontier which corresponds to this expansion is always economic and not demographic. Many of the areas which were exploited 20 or 50 years ago have now regained their character of primary "virgin" forest. When the resources are exhausted, the expansion front withdraws and completely disappears. The same thing is happening at present<sup>7</sup> with the exploitation of wood: when all the timber-yielding trees of an area are cut, the small demographic frontier consisting of the foreman and his laborers retreats and disappears. Only in some cases when the area of extraction is situated near a highway or has good river communications with a center of population can it be taken over by agriculture or cattle-raising, in which case a permanent demographic frontier is established.

Extractive activities have not produced a working class, and even less a social class with class consciousness. They have contributed and are contributing to the de-tribalization of indigenous people through a process of proletarianization and ethnic disintegration or dissolution which furnishes the labor market with a cheap source of labor, highly mobile from the geographic point of view, subject to temporary work based on contracts, the "barter-credit" system or day labor and who, in many cases, abandon land which is suitable for agriculture.

On the contrary, the agricultural system, the typical form in the upper rainforest, sets up a permanent demographic, economic, ideological and cultural frontier. In this case, the white-mestizo society appropriates the indigenous territory and, if possible, also indigenous labor through de-tribalization. The fundamental difference between this situation and that occurring under the extractive process is that here the indigenous communities have almost no possibility of keeping their territory. In all the forest areas where agricultural and cattle ranching systems have been consolidated, the indigenous people have been de-tribalized and absorbed as agricultural laborers, or have retreated to marginal areas, abandoning their land to the expanding white society. In some cases, a few local indigenous groups have kept pockets of land of a few hectares within regions totally occupied by settlers, but the land which they have succeeded in saving is so reduced in area that their entire economic and social system has had to be modified and adapted to a situation of dependence on - and symbiosis with - the settlers.

### The Contemporary Situation (circa 1970)

I shall now attempt to analyze the situation of the indigenous tribal peoples in terms of the structured system of social and economic interrelations which they have with the white-mestizo Peruvian society. More than 70% of these ethnic communities maintain permanent relations of interaction with members of the rest of the country. 35% of the ethnic communities maintain sporadic relations but, directly or indirectly, and to a greater or lesser degree, all the indigenous societies are linked to the Peruvian economic system. In fact, even the figure of 35% for groups which have no direct relations with white-mestizo society must be interpreted, since this percentage is calculated on the basis of entire ethno-linguistic groups, which means that while some local groups (communities) remain relatively isolated, others of the same ethno-linguistic group are linked to some sector of the national society. An extreme case which can serve to illustrate this is that of the Matsés<sup>8</sup> of the area of the Blanco and Yaquerena rivers who, in spite of the fact that they have rejected all forms of contact in recent years, are actually in a sense under the tutelage of the Summer Institute of Linguistics-SIL through its linguists, who are subjecting them to a system of technological dependence by creating needs they cannot satisfy with their own resources.

### Definitions

The various ethnic groups of the Peruvian tropical rainforest present a great variety of social and cultural situations, with respect both to their traditional structures as well as the social and economic changes, modifications and restructuring as a result of contact and interaction with various sectors of white-mestizo society. This circumstance makes it difficult to set up a simplified classification, a difficulty which is increased by the almost total absence of research in the field. In this sense, even terms of common use in professional literature, such as "tribe", should be questioned as to their applicability. Let us take an example.

The Ashaninka represent a population of approximately 45,000<sup>9</sup> people who occupy a vast area of the Central Forest region (*Selva Central*) (almost 100,000 square kilometers), including quite different ecological zones and various economic micro-regions with very distinct social compositions of mestizo population and with different degrees of highway communication with the rest of the country. The area occupied by the Ashaninka is neither continuous nor compact; other tribal groups and other non-indigenous are interspersed within it, ranging from small Andean settlers to large estates (haciendas and livestock ranches), passing through a whole scale of local merchants, woodcutters and missionary organizations. In this case, the use of the expression "Ashaninka tribe" would

lead to false interpretations, since the accepted meaning of the concept of the tribe alludes to at least two characteristics: a certain cultural and social homogeneity and a certain territorial continuity. The historical process which we have briefly referred to above has modified both these characteristics in the case of almost all the groups of the upper rainforest.

I think it is more correct then, to speak of an Ashaninka ethnolinguistic group, which in linguistic terms contains dialect areas, and in social, cultural and economic terms can be subdivided into sectors, above all according to the degree of interaction which each sector (or micro-region) maintains with the white-mestizo society. There are Ashaninka groups who have motor boats and are organized in cooperative forms of agricultural organization, and there are "isolated" Ashaninka who wear clothes made of tree bark. Both extremes can be found within the same ethno-linguistic group.

We can supplement the expression "ethno-linguistic group" with the term "native community". By this I mean a stable social-economic unit, bound to a specific territory, with a type of settlement which can be either nuclear or dispersed, and which recognizes itself as a "community" (social entity), distinguished from neighboring socio-economic/cultural units, indigenous or not. In accordance with this purely operational definition of the native community, we can say that within each ethno-linguistic group there can exist from two or three up to hundreds of communities (or local groups). In a preliminary survey conducted in 1970 in the area of the Upper Marañón, I detected more than 150 Aguaruna communities (Varese 1970). On the other hand, we know that some groups in the Amazonian lowlands total no more than two or three communities, each consisting of a few score families (example: Huitoto and Arabela).

### Sociological View

According to the Peruvian National Office of Statistics and Census (Censo 1970) there were 1,307,156 non-indigenous inhabitants in the Peruvian Amazon region in 1970. My estimate of the indigenous population yields the approximate figure of 220,850 persons, belonging to more than 50 ethno-linguistic groups. This means that the forest has a total of 1,500,000 inhabitants, of which 85% are non-indigenous and 14% are members of indigenous-tribal groups. The inhabitants of the tropical forest represent 11% of the total population of Peru, and its indigenous people 1.5%. According to the 1965 Census, the Amazon tropical rainforest occupies more than 57% of the territory of Peru, with a population density of 2.07 persons per square kilometer. Nevertheless, still unofficial figures from the National Planning Institute indicate that the agricultural land has a population density of 400 persons per square kilometer. This can be explained by the fact that land suitable for agriculture is extremely scarce. According to studies of the Na-

tional Office of Natural Resource Evaluation (ONERN 1961a and b, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966a and b, 1967a and b, 1968a and b, 1968c, d and e, 1970a and b),<sup>10</sup> only 13% of the area of the tropical rainforest can be considered suitable for permanent agriculture. Of the remainder, 28% of the total presents serious limitations for agriculture, 19% is suitable for forestry, and the remaining 40% consists of land which is unsuitable for either agriculture or forestry, consisting mostly of swampland.

These ecological factors explain to a great extent the apparent contradiction between the vast areas of "unoccupied" land in the Peruvian tropical rainforest and the excessive concentration of the rural population in certain areas, especially those situated near the communication infrastructure and populated centers. Likewise one can understand the reason behind the constant pressure which the white-mestizo population has exercised on the land of the native communities, since these communities almost always settled on the lands richest in resources and agricultural soils.

### Geographic Distribution of Indigenous Peoples

If one looks at a map of the distribution of ethno-linguistic groups, one is impressed by the fact that the whole area of the Upper and Middle Huallaga rivers has no indigenous population. This area is one of those which is most densely populated by mestizos: the 1961 census (Censo 1965: T.I.,6) gives a density of up to 8.5 inhabitants per square kilometer for the Province of Lamas, as against a density of 0.7 inhabitants per square kilometer for other areas of the rainforest (Department of Loreto). This great density of non-indigenous rural population corresponds historically to a very early Spanish colonial penetration. The local groups of Jibito, Cholon and Panatahua indigenous were assimilated or liquidated during the first period of colonization. In the area of the Lower Huallaga River, on the other hand, there is one of the most numerous ethno-linguistic groups of the Peruvian Amazon: the Lamista Quechua, probably descendents of the Chanka of the Ayacucho area of the Andes, who settled in this region in pre-colonial times and adapted themselves to the new ecological environment of the tropical rainforest.

The area of greatest concentration of tribal population is the central and southern tropical rainforest. The Shipibo, Yanesha, Ashaninka, Yine and Matziguenka communities total approximately 80,000 persons, almost 40% of the total indigenous population. These areas are those which are subject to the greatest population pressure from immigrants from the Andes who look for land to settle on in a spontaneous manner, without the assistance of the State. The 1961 census (Censo 1965: Vol.2: 111) indicates that, in the tropical rainforest areas of the Departments of Pasco, Junín and Cuzco, 25%, 22% and 20% respectively of the population consisted of immigrants from other parts of the country. This phenomenon is related to the opening of highways for penetration and the concentration of prop-

erty in the hands of a few landowners in other rural areas of Peru. The penetration of peasants from the Andes and the coastal region into what are essentially indigenous territories of the central and southern tropical rainforest, is a process which started more than a century ago and which corresponds, as I have indicated, to the expansion and consolidation of the latifundia system in the Andes and in the coastal region of the country. Moreover, this immigration increased towards the end of the 19th century due to the formation of coffee plantations, which needed a certain amount of stable labor and a large influx of seasonal workers for the harvests. In many cases this labor could not be obtained from the local native communities, who even expressed their opposition to the process of territorial occupation and the recruitment of laborers by the plantations in a violent manner. In 1914, for example, the Ashaninka of the Pichis River expelled all the white-mestizo settlers and the government had to send in troops to regain control of the situation (Varese 1968b: 108).

In other cases the tribal groups retreated in the face of the expansion of the internal frontier and the land which they abandoned was occupied by farms or by landless peasants who worked on these farms as day-laborers. Some native communities remained (as they do today, now that the process is being repeated) in territorial pockets within a structure of land distribution in which the large estate, the medium-sized farm, the timber and rubber concession, the small farm and the minifundia established themselves as forms of landholding that exerted pressure upon the native communities.

The extreme north-eastern section of the Peruvian Amazon, the area between the Upper Marañón River and its tributaries, the Santiago, the Morona, the Pastaza and the Tigre rivers, contains a notable concentration of indigenous peoples: approximately 36,000, or 16% of the total indigenous population, divided into six ethno-linguistic groups. Since the late sixties, the Upper Marañón has been declared an "area of colonization". This type of colonization, carried out under an agreement between the Ministries of War and Agriculture, has resulted in the awarding of family-sized plots to 300 families of Andean and Coastal landless peasants. By the time this colonization is completed, a total of 600 families will have been settled.

What are the implications of this colonization, from the point of view of the Aguaruna and Huambiza indigenous communities directly affected by the arrival of settlers? Inasmuch as this is a case of planned colonization, state control over the location and type of settlement ought to hinder the repetition of conflict situations and of the territorial and social-economic marginalization of the indigenous people. Nevertheless, the operational weakness of the administration, in addition to the limited and false perception and consciousness of the problems of indigenous peoples on the part of local officials, has already given rise to some social conflicts in inter-ethnic relations. The new agricultural system proclaimed by Juan Velasco Alvarado's government through its Agrarian Reform Law does

not recognize large landholdings and regulates the size of medium-sized and smaller ones, so that this area will not witness the formation of large estates. In addition, on the basis of a law promulgated in 1957, the indigenous communities have been able to obtain, in areas where this is most urgent, the delimitation of some "Territorial Reservations" in order to avoid complete despoliation at the hands of unofficial squatters (for further details, see Varese, 1970).

The extreme southern part of the Peruvian Amazon is one of the most interesting areas from a strictly ethnological perspective. Between the Department of Madre de Dios and the three provinces of the Department of Cuzco which include tropical rainforest areas (La Convención, Paucartambo and Quispicanchi), there are nine ethno-linguistic groups totaling approximately 17,000 persons, or 17% of the total indigenous population. The rivers of the Department of Madre de Dios are the least explored in the Peruvian rainforest and still quarter some relatively and totally isolated native communities. The fact that this area has been preserved as a kind of sanctuary for tribal indigenous people is in part due to the fact that there has been little immigration from the Andes or the coast. Madre de Dios, with a population density of 0.2 persons per square kilometer, is the least populated department in Peru.<sup>11</sup> However, this isolation will not last long.

### Social Segments

Summing up the demographic and ethnological figures for the various areas of the Peruvian rainforest, we can attempt a short diagnosis. Assuming the correctness of the 1961 census figures and my estimate of tribal population, we can say that of the 1,500,000 inhabitants of the tropical forest, 220,000 are indigenous, belonging to more than 50 different ethno-linguistic groups. The two population segments (indigenous and non-indigenous) constitute the poles of a system of interrelations. They differ as to ethnic, cultural and linguistic composition, and as to their relative potential access to the means of production in the broadest sense of the word, and to local and national political power. On the one hand we have the various local ethnic indigenous groups or native communities which, culturally and linguistically, belong to larger units that we have defined as ethno-linguistic groups; on the other hand we have the various sectors of the local white-mestizo society in a constellation of relations of interdependency.

The entire population of the Peruvian Amazon can be divided according to a classification which takes into account the occupation of, and thus the possibility of access to, the means of production and power. We do not have, as of today,<sup>12</sup> sufficient data to attempt a classification by class or segment of class. The first rough, tentative subdivision that I can give is the following:

- a) Members of the business sector of the white-mestizo society, resident in the few urban areas: Pucallpa, Iquitos, Tarapoto, Yurimaguas, Lamas, etc. This business sector has access to bank credit and directly or indirectly to local power through institutional and informal channels. They are the owners, the partners or the administrators of the sawmills, the rice mills, the large commercial enterprises and retail stores, the owners and managers of transport networks (through the *regatón*, the merchant who travels along the rivers selling and buying), the medium and small-sized factories, small mining enterprises and, recently, service providers to oil companies. In this category are also included cattle rearers and the owners of large estates, timber concessionaires (who are often the owners of sawmills and large estates) and hide and animal traders.
- b) The riverbank settler population (*riberaños*), composed of small and medium-sized mestizo horticulturalists with limited access to credit. In this category, which from the indigenous point of view could be defined as that of intermediary agent, we find the *regatones*, itinerant merchants who own motor boats, the local outfitters and enlists of labor, the *enganchadores*, who, as outfitters for major merchant enterprises, actually create a network of indentured serfs whose inherited debts cannot ever be repaid. Here are also included timber and rubber foremen, and hunters and trappers. In many cases these activities are not separate. A *regatón* sells commodities, enlists indigenous people into the "barter-credit" system by trading his goods for their harvests, wood, hides and animals. At the same time he owns a little field or farm, *chacra*, which secures his family subsistence and allows him to obtain minor bank credits.
- c) The indigenous peoples, the native communities. As I have indicated earlier, it is extremely difficult to make a valid generalization for this diverse segment of Amazon forest population. In some cases, rare to be sure, there can be seen within the local group or community the beginnings of social stratification: small merchants, the bilingual teacher who has a small monthly income, owners of motor boats who undertake river transportation. What is certain is that the indigenous society, as far as access to local economic and political power is concerned, is always situated at the bottom of the asymmetric pyramid. In the lowland Amazon, close to the major means of communication, the large tributaries of the Amazon River, the native communities tend to be disintegrated and atomized by the excessive demands for labor on the part of the extractive economy while, in the upper Amazon region, the *montaña* or the foothills, native communities tend to cohere and consolidate around their territory which they attempt to defend from invasion, dispossession and devastation.
- d) The last segment of regional society can be characterized by its political and ideological function. This segment can be termed that of "white-mestizo Peru-

vian society communicators". This category includes all the state officials of the different agencies (Health, Agriculture, Education, Justice, Banking system, Mining and Oil industry, Army, Police, etc.) and the missionaries of the various Catholic, Protestant and Evangelical creeds. A large part of this last segment, on the local level, is involved in regional economic and political power. Thus we dare say that a large part of the failed progressive political measures taken in Lima should be attributed to this sector. In this sense, the racist prejudices and ethnocentric attitudes which characterize the relations between this segment of the population and the native communities could well be rationalizations, if one may use the term, responding to other motives: involvement with local economic power and the defense of social and economic privileges.

The relationships between the four large segments which we have classified should be studied in the future by focussing on the system of interrelations established by their differential access to the means of production: land, the natural resources, marketing channels and credit, as well as by their differential access to local and national political power. These structural elements cannot be separated. If, for example, we consider exclusively access to land, we should find that a certain percentage of the native communities has no major problem here. Nevertheless, these same communities who have their own land are in debt to a series of "bosses", *curacas* or "outfitters" for whom they cut trees, trap animals, gather rubber or harvest seasonal products. Either they lose all the profit from their harvests in river or highway transportation, or finally they mortgage all their harvests to a merchant for a few shotguns and some yards of cloth. Thus the different elements which are active in the system of relations between the indigenous tribal societies and the white-mestizo society, whether social, economic or cultural (as in the case of the ethnocentric prejudices of state officials and petty bureaucrats), should be considered as a total, integrated whole: some of them exist as a result of the others. We cannot understand an abuse of authority against an indigenous individual or group, and thus we can not know how to fight it, if we attempt to explain it solely on the legitimate cultural basis of an ethnocentric prejudice and racist discrimination. This is just one aspect of the problem; it is fundamental, but it should be analyzed and classified as a part of the total structure.

### The Challenge and the Measures

At the present time [first half of the 1970s], a massive and radical program of agrarian reform is being carried out in Peru. The Agrarian Reform Law was promulgated on 24th June 1969 with the same main objective as any agrarian reform - to give the land to those who cultivate it. By October of the following year, 2,708,084 hectares had been expropriated, and by the end of 1972, 4,283,354 hectares will have been awarded to more than 150,000 peasant-in-

igenous families. The Peruvian agrarian reform provides for small farms and for medium-sized farms under the joint participation and management of peasants and workers. It sets up in an absolutely preferential manner the cooperativization of the *ex-haciendas* as well as of the peasant communities of the Andes and the Coastal region. The upper Amazon forest, the *montaña*, down to approximately 700 meters above sea level, is included within the jurisdiction of the Agrarian Reform Law. For the lowland Amazon forest, on the other hand, the government has drawn up a bill which was published in mid-1971, and which is now the object of suggestions and comments from interested sectors, especially the indigenous native communities. Likewise, the General Directorate of Peasant Communities of the Ministry of Agriculture, through its special Division of Native Communities, has presented to the government an Amazon Forest Native Communities Bill.<sup>13</sup> These bills are complementary with respect to the indigenous tribal groups; they establish the legal existence and recognize the legal status of these societies (which were not recognized by previous legislation), and guarantee their territorial rights, protecting common and collective property and assuring technical assistance and credits from the State. This legislation extends to those tribal groups which reside in the upper Amazon forest (*montaña*) but are not included within the jurisdiction of the Agrarian Reform Law.

The *Bill of Law on Native Communities*, is basically a legal instrument which aims at making the rights of indigenous peoples of the Amazon region compatible with the general needs of the country through the support of their local organizations, or communities, by means of their representative institutionalization in the eyes of the State. To this effect, the Bill provides for the organization of tribal groups into federative units with stable economic and social bases to be attained through state assistance in the form of credits and technical and administrative aid for the attainment of their rights.

Inasmuch as, according to the government itself, "the nature of the Agrarian Reform does not consist of a simple distribution of land, but rather a transfer of economic, social and political power from the hands of a restricted group to the mass of the peasantry" (*Avances* 1970:1), the measures taken with respect to the indigenous tribal communities cannot be limited to empty words about their rights. There is a clear realization that the objective ought to be the radical restructuring of the economic and power system, and that to attain this goal not only an economic and social transformation, but also a profound cultural transformation, is necessary. To attain these ends, however, it is necessary for the State to assume effective control over the system of socio-economic relations we have sketched above and initiate a process of democratization. Obviously this is no easy task, if one considers problems such as the effective and administrative remoteness of the areas of indigenous occupation, the economic limitations of the State in implementing a policy of action embracing all the areas, and the low

motivation of local officials to modify their attitudes and detach themselves from the sources of local power.

It is obvious that the rupture of the local system of dependency of the indigenous tribal groups will not be able to attain its objectives unless these groups become at the same time organized and politicized. The effectiveness of the process should be guaranteed by means of a mobilization and effective participation of the members of the native communities. In the last analysis, it is the indigenous themselves who are called upon to destroy the old system and build a new one. In this respect, I disagree completely with isolationist protective schemes which seem to harbor an ethnocentric ideology that considers tribal groups incompetent and limited in their possibilities. By this I do not mean that we should put all the indigenous groups of the tropical forest into one boat and solemnly declare that they are capable of facing their situation in modern, political, Western terms. I realize perfectly well that there is a variety of situations, that there are specific cases and priorities; but at the same time, I object to the isolationist artifice, which is fictitious and untenable in the immediate future, an artifice which satisfies our "purist ethnographic vocation" more than it does the legitimate rights of indigenous tribal peoples. On this point I want to be quite clear: in the Amazon forest of Peru there can be no geographic or social isolation for any group. The remaining isolated tribal communities could at any moment fall into the hands of bosses and be exploited or liquidated within a few years, if not months.

On the other hand, the experience of countries such as Brazil has demonstrated that the artifice of the indigenous parks or reservations, in which indigenous society is maintained in antiseptic social and cultural conditions, does not offer sufficient guarantees of stability. A simple decree, in the so-called national interest, can destroy the result of years of effort. This is being proven in the case of the Xingú Park. But the most dramatic point is that the isolationist solution renders the indigenous society incapable of facing the rest of the country on a favorable competitive footing.

The political organization and enfranchisement of the tribal communities, within a legal framework which will guarantee their territorial and cultural rights, as well as their rights of self-government and self-administration, seems to be a possible option in the present situation in Peru. For this line of action, anthropological and sociological studies of the tribal communities, and in general any research which rebounds to the benefit of the indigenous societies, broadening their awareness of their situation and problems, attains an influence and a significance more profound than the mere scientific vocation; it is that type of knowledge for action which is demanded of science with ever greater insistence.

More than fifteen years after the enactment of the Law of Native Communities, two anthropologists writing a book on the Ashaninka asserted the following about the Law and its application:

*The statute recognized "native communities" (comunidades nativas) as social units with a high degree of autonomy, including a legal right to maintain local customs. More important, native communities could seek land titles, which were to be inalienable and held collectively by community members. As soon as the law went into effect, employees of the government's social mobilization agency, SINAMOS, traveled to Ashaninka villages to explain how indigenous people could begin the complex process of laying claim to their lands ... In the first years after the law was in effect, the government titled Ashaninka communities at a brisk pace. As of 1976, thirty-four communities had received titles to territories varying in size from 188 hectares to more than 10,000. (Brown and Fernández 1991: 206)*

## Notes

- 1 For these five initial paragraphs I am paraphrasing the "Introduction to the English Edition" of my book *Salt of the Mountain* (2002).
- 2 Native Communities (*comunidades nativas*) was the official name given to the indigenous communities of Peru's Amazon region by the government in the 1970s in order to eliminate use of the derogatory term "rainforest tribes" (*tribus selvícolas*). [Ed. note]
- 3 The counter-coup was in 1975 and General Velasco Alvarado died in 1977. [Ed. note]
- 4 The first indigenous organization to be established was the "Amuesha Congress" in 1969, which was later to be replaced by the "Federation of Yanesha Native Communities" (FECONAYA), still in existence to this day. During the first half of the 1970s there appeared other organizations such as the "Campa Congress", which was to later give rise to both the "Coordinating Body of the Native Communities of the Central Forest" (CECONSEC) and the "Apatyawaka Nampitzi Ashaninka Pichis" (ANAP), the "Aguaruna Organisation of the Alto Mayo" (OAAM) and other Shipibo organizations which, in 1981, gave rise to the "Federation of Native Communities of the Ucayali" (FECONAU), still in existence today. [Ed. note]
- 5 In referring to this people, Varese is using both the name historically given to them by outsiders, *Amuesha*, and their proper name, *Yanesha*, which means *we as members of a group of people* (Richard Chase Smith, pers. comm.). As in the case of the Ashaninka, it was agreed with the author to keep only the latter name. The same logic has been followed with the term *Machiguenga*, replaced by *Matziguenka*. [Ed. note]
- 6 The term *Piro*, an external name, has been replaced by *Yine*, which is what the members of this people call themselves. [Ed. note.]
- 7 This assessment by Varese, made 35 years ago, is still fully valid today. [Ed. note]
- 8 The term *Mayoruna*, a name given by outsiders, has been replaced with *Matsés*, as this is what they call themselves. [Ed. note]
- 9 The demographic estimates given by the author correspond to the early 1970s, that is, 35 years ago. We have reproduced them here but updated calculations are given in the Postscript by Alberto Chirif in this chapter. [Ed. note]
- 10 This public department was replaced in November 1992 by the current National Institute for Natural Resources (INRENA), which is responsible among other things for managing national protected areas and production forests. [Ed. note]
- 11 The gold rush that erupted during the 1970s changed this reality. Population density in Madre de Dios is now 1.26 persons per square kilometer and that of Tambopata province, where the region's capital is to be found, is 2.01. (*Perú, Compendio Estadístico*. INEL, 2005). [Ed. note]
- 12 I am referring to the early seventies.
- 13 I was the director of the *División de Comunidades Nativas de la Selva* (Division of Native Communities of the Amazon Rainforest) until 1973 and the major proponent of the Bill, finally enacted as Legal Presidential Decree no. 20653 in 1974 and known as *Law of Native Communities*.

## THE AMAZON RAINFOREST: OLD FRONTIERS, NEW ALTERNATIVES (1974)

### abstract

Consecutive Peruvian governments have imagined the Amazon to be an uninhabited region, full of resources to be put to good use. In other words, they have viewed the region as a wild and uncultured area to be conquered and civilized for its labour force. Alongside this, the country has a poor and depressed region, the Andes, where the population has insufficient resources to survive, and no possibility of accessing wealth. The solution, then, is to move these people to the fertile regions to the east of the Andes. This essay\* deals with two areas of this controversy. The first considers the specific environmental conditions of the Amazon region and some of their implications in terms of the social, economic and cultural organisation of the local population. And the second considers the possible alternatives, *almost as a utopian speculation or even as a revolutionary future that is within our reach*, that would enable this part of the country to be perceived and constructed in the mould of what the revolutionary process was then aiming for in Peru. Colonization in Peru, at least since the first half of the 20th century, has had the clear political aim of drawing attention away from the need to radically restructure the country's unfair agrarian system. Colonization was considered an alternative to the process of land redistribution. The great promoter of Amazonian colonization in Peru was ex-president Fernando Belaúnde Terry (1963-1968 and 1980-1985) who, to this end, planned the so-called "Rainforest Highway" and built sections running from north to south, while horizontal highways connect it with the Pacific coast. For those responsible for this process, the Amazon region was a domestic colony or "internal Third World" and they used this basis to falsely justify geographical/territorial aspects such as soil fertility, inexhaustible resources and an absence of population. In this same logic, the nature of the indigenous peoples inhabiting the region, their economy, their forms of organisation and their culture were also falsified. This essay systematizes the progress made in our knowledge of the slash-and-burn system and the balance this establishes in its relationship with the environment. What governments had previously considered to

\* This essay was originally published in Spanish under the title "La selva: viejas fronteras, nuevas alternativas", *Revista Participación*, no. 5, Year III (18-31), Lima, 1974 (Varese 1974c). It was written in the midst of the Peruvian Revolution, headed by General Juan Velasco Alvarado (1968-1975). This political process created the conditions in which some of the country's oldest and most inflexible social and economic structures could be analysed and re-invented, which explains the optimistic tone of the essay.

be the primitive practices of ignorant villagers, far removed from the progress of modern science, began to demonstrate their rationale and their high degree of adaptation to fragile ecosystems such as the Amazon. These studies also highlight the wealth and diversity of indigenous peoples' knowledge. The official calculations of the region's demographic density are also questionable, not taking into account the real capacity of its different ecosystems.

"Utopias are often nothing but premature truths."

Lamartine

If the current rate of demographic growth continues, by the year 2000, within 26 years, Peru will have close to 30 million inhabitants - give or take a million.<sup>1</sup> Faced with facts like these, it has become commonplace for policy makers to state that the vast region of Peru's Amazon forest almost magically holds the solution. The Amazon basin, we have been repeatedly told, is the natural escape valve for the problems stemming from the excess rural population and the shortage of viable agricultural land in the rest of the country. Besides, they insist, the Amazon, covering 60% of the national territory, is inhabited by only around 1,500,000 people,<sup>2</sup> little more than 10% of the total population of Peru. The series of deductions derived from this premise has corrupted and continues to corrupt the way in which public opinion, influenced by diffuse and unverified technical statements, views the issue of the rational integration of this area of the country.

In this essay I will touch on two areas of the controversy: first, that of the ecological conditions specific to the tropical rainforest region and some of their implications in terms of the social, economic and cultural organization of the local populations and, second, the possible alternatives, almost as a utopian speculation or more as a revolutionary future that is within our reach, so that this half of the country can be perceived and built in the form of the anticipated model of the Peru that the revolutionary process is aiming for. In addition, although it is true that no international financial institution invests in utopias, it is true that a revolution should be a program for a utopia, and socialism should build its consciousness on this promise.

### Ecology and Ideological Framework

A particular social and economic structure introduces a system of permanent and mutual interaction between cultural and ideological areas and their material base. In other words, our condition as a colonial country before and as an underdeveloped country after, organized within a mercantile-capitalist system, has

been historically consolidating a national culture and ideology that is colonized, dependent and alienated. It is based on and within an ideology that says we have to interpret reality and act upon it. In this sense, the revelation of a distorting and falsifying ideology organized, consciously or unconsciously, for centuries by those sectors of society interested in maintaining the *status quo*, is an indispensable instrument for allowing change in the course of history. Ideologies tend to impregnate all of those categories of thought and knowledge, and the objective world thus becomes an "ideologically objective world". This statement is valid even when referring to aspects as apparently incontrovertible as "scientific knowledge". Centuries-long conditions of colonialism and dependence not only create the social, economic, political and legal order that is appropriate for its purposes, but also develop a whole ideological system that is coherent and concordant with these purposes, a justifying rationality that includes popular knowledge as well as scientific and technical creations. A colonized mentality is also a colonizing mentality, and the ideology of the colonizer is shared, in great part, by those who are colonized. In the same way that we can state that the model for colonial economic exploitation is one in which the mother country visualizes and uses the colony as an area of resource extraction, one also finds the core of the country in the same relation with peripheral areas, in this case, the Amazon forest. The pattern has been pointed out too many times already: the exploited-exploiter, the colonized-colonizer. For a country in search of its independence and its own autonomous model of development, it is important to strive to remove ideological ballast that inevitably forms an inseparable part of the collective perception.

In the recent history of Peru, the Amazon region has constituted a kind of decoy used by the less progressive sectors, a facile artifice to wave in front of the dispossessed peasant masses. Behind the enthusiasm for the "march to the East", for the conquest of the Amazon, for the incorporation of the "rich and uninhabited" areas, for the "colonization and civilization of our Amazon", there looms a worrisome shadow of a colonialist conception of the largest part of the national territory. Even more disconcerting are the underlying developmentalist assumptions that have been implemented and perfected through several governments and that remain uncritically in force at different levels of the political administration. To stimulate the displacement of excess landless peasants toward Amazon areas that are supposedly empty and free offered several political advantages, perhaps the most important of which was to deflect expectations among the peasants and in the country, drawing attention from the fundamental need for a radical restructuring of the unequal and unjust agrarian system. A country that does not want to confront its agricultural problems with revolutionary measures will propose "agrarian reform" as a process of occupation and colonization of its peripheral "empty" regions. Brazil offers us an eloquent example of this practice and perspective, in which the political equation being sold to the public is that agrarian reform equals colonization of the Amazon.

In the case of Peru, the timid agrarian programs carried forward from previous regimes brought the same basic concept of new areas conquered through a costly effort to provide road infrastructure. The Amazon highway (called the Rainforest Marginal Highway, *Carretera Marginal de la Selva*) and all its propaganda, with its ideological and technological justification, aimed at convincing public opinion, constituted the indispensable framework for imposing a false agrarian solution that naturally had the full support of the international financial institutions, which are politically and economically controlled by the United States. Yesterday in the timorous government of President Fernando Belaúnde Terry; today in Brazil, with thinly disguised sub-imperialist ambitions, international bodies finance million-dollar expenditure on constructing highways to penetrate the Amazon. These are programs that firstly benefit the lending organizations and their members, as much in purely financial terms as for the technological demands they create and, second, contribute to maintaining the false image of economic growth and of an ever fleeting future full of undefined and vague development benefits. In December 1973, the Trans-Amazon highway was completed, connecting the Atlantic coast of Brazil to the border with Peru. The cost was 700 million dollars. The economic efforts were based on good political justification: to displace several thousand landless peasants from Northeast Brazil and entice millions more to flood to the Amazon region, and to focus popular expectations away from a redistribution of large estate lands to the farm workers. Above all, the most important goal of the program was to open up the vast mining reserves and other resources to transnational corporations.

It has been an obligatory step for all politicians that aspire to appear reformist to maintain and stimulate the myth of a prodigal and pristine tropical rainforest just waiting to deliver her fruits, without any bargaining, to any colonizers with a good enough dose of courage. In the case of Peru, it is clear that the weight of past conceptions and practices, in which internal colonialism is perceived of and conceptualized as the most natural and appropriate way of affirming nationalism and economic growth, imposes an ideology and doctrines that must be adjusted through a global re-design of basic concepts of the nation and its internal economic, ideological and demographic boundaries. Concepts that, in and of themselves, carry a notable burden of colonialism from the moment they admit a dichotomy between the "incorporated social space" and the "territorial space as yet not integrated", the administrated areas and the "*terra incognita*". Of course, this is a fundamentally economic marginalization and, to understand it, one must look for the culprit in the centralized, capitalist model of economic and political power and not in the constantly cited geographic, demographic or, worse still, cultural reasons.

An adulterated collective consciousness that has adjusted the perception of a national interior region such as the tropical rainforest to being that of a domestic colony - a kind of internal Third World - does not stop at falsifying the

geographic-territorial aspect but also includes the native human groups of this space, their organizational forms and their cultural behavior, especially those that correspond to their relations with the environment. I am referring concretely to the inability of Peruvian nationals to understand, and eventually make theirs, the Amazonian indigenous peoples' thousands of years of experience in ecological adaptation. Ecological and technological adaptation that has permitted these communities to flourish and develop, notably up until the European invasion, and to survive afterwards in spite of the constant and systematic attempts at domination and exclusion on the part of Peru.

I am interested in demonstrating that the ruling socio-economic system, by having established a special and exclusive type of relationship with the natural environment of the rainforest, has been concomitantly conditioning our collective perception of the medium itself, thus blocking all possibility of understanding native ways of relating to the environment and also impeding the rethinking and reinventing of our relations, as a society, with the Amazon forest. This act of reinvention becomes even more indispensable as we decide to abandon the inefficient *extractive-mercantile-capitalist* mode that has characterized the economic structure of the Amazon region, seeking instead a viable application of the new Peruvian social program for this part of the country. In this new, creative effort, it is of the utmost importance to consider and understand the success of the native model of ecological adaptation and critically analyze the failure of the "European" model of occupation and exploitation of the tropical rainforest - successes and failures that, as we will see, are more intimately tied to the general mode of production to which each model is tied than to virtues or defects of specific technologies and stages of cultural development. In order to understand this point, we need to analyze the complex processes and techniques developed by the indigenous communities of the Amazon in order to manage, maintain and reproduce the highly successful sequence of balanced ecosystems in which they have lived, produced and reproduced for millennia. Such an analysis of indigenous success must be contrasted with the complete failure of the national community's system of land occupation and use, resource exploitation and agricultural production.

The most outstanding characteristic of the slash-and-burn cultivation system, as it is practiced by the indigenous people of the tropical rainforest, is its capacity to maintain the general structure of the pre-existing natural ecosystem. An ecosystem can synthetically be described as "a system of biotic and environmental interaction" (Allee et al. quoted in Duncan 1969:458; Geertz 1969). More than a modification of the environment, the native system of use and cultivation seeks an integration of the cultivated lot with the environment, more than a re-creation of the landscape, it seeks an imitation of this (Geertz 1969:6). A small farm, a field for tribal cultivation, starts by imitating or copying the forest around it through the degree of generalization of the cultivated species. This means that on a small

indigenous farm one finds many types of plants for food and other uses all together in an apparently irrational disorder and with a relatively limited number of each species. Cassava, corn, beans, peanuts, sweet potatoes, bananas, plantains, *sachapapas*, chilli peppers, papayas, tobacco, *achiote* (annatto), etc., are planted without any apparent rationale or structured architecture. The natural tropical rainforest is a *generalized ecosystem*, that is, an ecosystem in which there is a great and highly diversified variety of species found in dynamic equilibrium. The opposite, a *specialized ecosystem*, is that in which a few species are concentrated in a high number of individuals. An extreme case is the Andean plateau or steppe (*punas*), characterized by a very specialized and uniform community of plants with very few species.

Most of the recent human uses of natural habitats consist of changing generalized ecosystems into specialized ones (Geertz 1969). We say recent uses in a relative sense, since it is clear that only a certain type of economic development requires establishing intensive cultivation or monocultures. The establishment of a specialized ecosystem has no place in the domestic mode of production or a subsistence economy characteristic of the indigenous forest communities. In this sense, the indigenous people of Peru's rainforest are connected typologically with thousands of other human communities of the tropical rain forests around the world who establish the same kind of ecological relations with the environment. Thirty-six million square kilometres of the world's surface are covered with tropical forest and, within this area live 200 million people that practice a kind of slash-and-burn agriculture which, *grosso modo*, repeats the same general pattern (Conklin 1963). The extreme efficiency of this farming system is based on a habitat use that does not greatly modify the index of plant diversity but rather maintains the model of its natural composition, substituting only a selection of plants of interest to humans. This is essentially the introduction of functional plants that are of human value in the pre-existing niches of the biotic community. (Geertz 1969:8). Clearly, this produces an alteration of the original ecosystem, but it is produced by a systematic substitution that tries to reproduce the original pattern.

The development and perfection of this essentially mimetic type of agriculture and use of natural resources does not correspond to mere accidental circumstance, it is not the lucky result of chance but rather a rational application of skills and experiences, a *science* in the full sense of the word. Anthropology and human ecology have been clarifying these aspects in recent years and it appears with increasing evidence that the rationality of indigenous slash-and-burn cultivation corresponds to an extreme and refined knowledge of the environment, its vegetable and animal resources, the biological and seasonal cycles, the climate, soils, and other components of the broader universe. The Ashaninka of the Central Forest region, for example, classify more than 70 varieties of *ivenki*, a plant that for academic botany is only one: *Cyperus piripiri*. Ethno-botanist Brent Berlin,

in a tour of only a few days in 1970, was able to collect from among the Aguaruna of the Upper Marañón River some 40 varieties of edible cassava (Varese 1970:77). Anthropologist Harold Conklin (Geertz 1969:8) found that, in a parcel of land of less than one hectare being cultivated by the Hanunóo of the Philippines, there were 40 different types of food plants, and the same group classified 1,600 types of plants, of which 430 were not cultivated. In many cases, native classifications appear to be more refined than those ones used by systematic botany.

When stating that the slash-and-burn cultivation practiced by the indigenous people is an imitation of the original forest, we are implying that native ecological knowledge includes a complete understanding of forest cycles. There is a full awareness on the part of the indigenous people of the paradox of the tropical rainforest: a very thin layer of fertile soil constantly threatened by erosion and washing out but which is capable, however, of sustaining abundant vegetable and animal life through rapid and close cycles in which matter and energy are constantly recycled and transformed. More importantly, there is an awareness of the fact that, to avoid exhausting the soil, it is indispensable to maintain this cycle precisely via all those practices that the Peruvian experts define as primitive, counter-productive and ignorant. These "primitive" practices can be summed up as follows: 1) The size of the plot should be limited, and this should be surrounded by forest, so that the temperature of the plot is kept relatively low in order to retard the biochemical processes of bacterial proliferation and a decrease in fungi, which causes "laterization" or mineralization of the soil; 2) The felling and burning of trees has not only a clearing purpose but, fundamentally, constitutes a process of transferring the rich nutrients stored in vegetation to the soil; 3) The biological regeneration that takes place in the cultivated plot through the process of secondary succession is helped by the practice of not cleaning the field: nothing is removed from the parcel except the edible parts of the plants; 4) On the cultivated plot, the same type of "architecture" of the original forest is reproduced: abundance of shade, presence of tree stumps that retard erosion with their roots, accumulation on the ground of decomposing bio-materials; 5) Indigenous cultivators foster the proximity to and concurrence of a great variety of cultivated plants with different growth cycles (three to eighteen months for corn, beans and cassava, and up to 25 years for fruit trees) and different requirements for nutrients from the soil. All of these major characteristics are summed up by a specialist as follows: indigenous slash-and-burn cultivation is a system in which "the natural forest is transformed into a harvestable forest" (Kampto Utomo quoted in Geertz 1969:14).

The ecological relationship we have outlined has allowed the native communities of the Peruvian Amazon to live and prosper for millennia, perfectly adapted to an extremely delicate and difficult environment. The process of territorial marginalization and exploitation suffered by these communities since the European invasion has damaged this equilibrium: however, the majority of indigenous people that survived

the colonization have readjusted in a constant effort to re-establish the ancient equilibrium. This is true even in cases when the indigenous communities were pushed out of the biologically rich riverbank and driven onto inter-fluvial lands with poor depleted soils and environments grossly poor in natural resources.

It is clear that an ecological relationship such as that described is coherent with a domestic mode of production that supposes a compliance with some minimum requirements. First, a relatively low demographic density and concentration are necessary for the rotation of the cultivated fields and their corresponding fallow periods which, in the forest, fluctuate between a minimum of 20 and a maximum of 150 years. A simple mathematical model of this problem was created a few years ago by Robert Carneiro (1960) and in it he shows that up to 1,500 people could reside permanently and in a stable manner in the same tropical rainforest space if they practiced indigenous slash-and-burn cultivation within a domestic mode of production or a subsistence economy. Other indispensable conditions for the stability of this ecological system is that the society that practices it must not be stratified into sharply marked social classes. The weakness of the market and the inefficiency of trading intermediaries with the regional and national market are also concurrent conditions.

The European invasion of the tropical rainforest of Peru, and later economic development during the colonial period and the years of the Republic, structured two main, socio-economic sub-systems: one that is capitalist-mercantile extractive, and one that is capitalist-mercantile agricultural. Both sub-systems coexisted and coexist today, and the greater or lesser relative importance of one or the other at certain moments in our country's history should be analyzed, keeping in mind the dependence and subordination of the regional and national economy with regard to the colonial and imperialist mother countries. Rubber is the most significant example of how, around 1880, a regional economy that was eminently mercantile-agricultural suddenly turned into the mercantile-extractive. Towards 1915, with the end of the rubber "boom", the primacy of the mercantile-agriculture sub-system was re-established and coffee plantations began to replace the rubber barons.

The oscillation between one sub-system and the other has continued up to modern times but it is important to note that neither of the sub-systems has ever ceased to exist. Both always coexist with varying degrees of relative importance. In order to have an idea of the volume of money that a primary extractive activity implies in the Amazon, we can give the example of wildlife exploitation. It is a significant example because there is a widespread belief that the exploitation of wild animals and furs is not of major economic importance in contemporary Peru. In the five years between 1964 and 1968, furs and live animals from the forest were exported to a value of US\$3,117,470 (Ponce del Prado 1973). These are official figures that do not take into account the high percentage of live animals and furs smuggled out, mainly across the border with Colombia and Brazil.

The capitalist-mercantile system (in the two variations indicated above) naturally develops and sustains itself on a type of ecological relationship diametrically opposed to that described here earlier. Further, there is an unsalvageable incompatibility between a capitalist economic structure and maintaining the ecological equilibrium of the tropical rainforest. The capitalist-mercantile ecological relationship inexorably imposes and spreads the *specialized ecosystem*, because its economic rationality demands mono-culture. The rainforest, therefore, is substituted by the plantation or the cattle ranch. Monoculture or pasture - specialized ecosystems - substitute the forest and the subsistence economy of the family farm - generalized ecosystems. The forest becomes an obstacle, an enemy, and is exterminated, erased, uprooted and burned, only in small part to be put to good use. In its place, a specialized ecosystem is supposed to be instated in the exact image of the coastal plantation or Andean *haciendas* and ranches, laying the foundations for an inevitable ecological failure: the beginning of desertification or savannization, the transformation of the tropical rainforest into a "Venezuelan Guajira" (Salazar 1973). When the "rationale" of the dependent, capitalist national market so orders, there is a change in the regional economy towards the mercantile-extractive sub-system (rubber, timber, furs, oil, minerals, etc.) and, in this case, together with the specialized ecosystem (the plantation, the cattle ranch or the eroded scrub-land that they have left in its place) that serves a permanent economic base, appears its plain and simple destruction: ecocide. It is estimated (Bueno 1973) that each year in the tropical rainforest of Peru, some 20,000 hectares of forest are liquidated, burned, transformed into smoke by irrational clearing that serves as scant support for the extractive activities and the basic subsistence of the logging teams and workers of other extractive activities.

"The post-European occupation of the Amazon has been a disaster stemming from a growing incompatibility between this kind of culture and the environment and condemns the non-indigenous population to a desolate and hopeless existence in which physical survival is the principal concern" (Meggers 1971:160). This cultural-anthropological argument is valid as long as, within the concept of culture, one includes the mode of production as a determining principle. This is not just a dysfunctional incompatibility, a lack of adaptation of the culture to the environment, but rather the inevitable result of the mode of social and economic organization of the whole of national society. It is the underdeveloped capitalist arrangement that inevitably proposes an economic relationship and consequently an ecological relationship in terms of highly specialized, destructive, expansionist ecosystems. The devastation of the forest, its transformation into non-farmable savannas, the extermination of the fauna, the ecocide and the resulting permanent situation of ethnocide are not inevitable results of the process of modernization in countries like ours. Rather, they are the concurrent structural conditions of the capitalist mode of production, of its political organization, its ideology, its "science" and techniques that alienate, rationalize and justify as inevitable

the ecological human disaster, in the name of a rationality imposed by the whims of the market laws.

Furthermore, it is clear that the close interdependence that exists between the socio-economic structure and its supporting ideology promotes a generalized perception and rationality, even at the popular level, that is compatible with the premises and goals of the system. As a consequence, the Amazon forest is visualized by the public as an enemy that must be destroyed and substituted by a "domesticated" and civilized new environment created by the market economy's rationale and needs, with its exploitative and dysfunctional technology. Here, an ancient discourse that reaches into the depth of Europe's Middle Ages is shared by modern entrepreneurs, politicians, technicians, bureaucrats and migrant Andean peasants sent to "colonize" the Amazon. The tropical rainforest of the Amazon becomes the dark, medieval, European forest of fairies and witches, demons and monsters, symbols of anti-culture, fearsome mystery and negation of civilized life, unequivocally the opposite of the cultured community of well-cultivated land and a domesticated environment free from untamed animals and plants. This diffuse imagery, so pervasive in our national culture, conditions our collective actions and public policy, giving further support to irrational and destructive territorial occupation. I am arguing that there is an objective incompatibility between the current capitalist mode of production in agriculture, animal husbandry and forestry, and well balanced and (re)productive ecological relationships between human communities and the tropical rainforest. This incongruity is not only structural and technological but is rooted deeply in the cultural history of Euro-American agrarian civilization and its more recent adaptation to the market economy.

### In Search of a Socio-Ecological Rationale

All that has been said thus far could give the impression that I am proposing the complete Indianization of the various communities of the Peruvian Amazon and a return to agro-ecological production practices and ecological relationships of the kind maintained by the indigenous communities. This impression is correct, but only in part. In the search for a rational, ecological and social model for the Amazon forest region, indigenous societies have a great deal to offer us. However, I think that at this juncture it is a good idea to point the discussion toward an essential aspect of the problem: that of the real vocation of the forest and consequently that of the region's real carrying capacity in terms of demography and productivity. All natural environments have a main vocation and, within that, there is a point at which rational use is surpassed and the ecosystem begins to deteriorate, sometimes violently quickly and beyond rehabilitation. Peru's economic and political elites have looked at the rainforest mainly as either a potential agricultural and ranching space or an area for indiscriminate extraction or

draining of natural resources. The forest has always been seen as the only obstacle to such enterprises. One might say that people have always looked at the soil that spreads out beneath the trees, but rarely has there been a full awareness that without the trees the soil would turn very quickly into clay.

### First Simulation

A simple mathematical model can prove the falseness and deceptiveness of pinning all our hopes on the farming potential of the Amazon forest and its consequent carrying/receptive capacity in terms of migrant peasants. The following simulation is an estimated projection based on 17 evaluation studies of natural renewable resources that were carried out in the upper and lower Amazon regions by ONERN (National Office for the Evaluation of Natural Resources) up to the month of August 1971. ONERN conducted the evaluation studies based on three criteria defining the areas to be studied: 1) Potential areas for farming development; 2) Areas that show good characteristics for agriculture; and 3) Areas that could receive peasant migrants as agents of its colonization. It can therefore be deduced that the 17 studies were carried out in the areas most apt for farming use. In the simulation, I am only taking into account the *evaluation of soil potential*, reducing it to five types instead of eight. I am starting from the following hypothesis: some minimum soil quality is necessary for farming; if these conditions are not met, it is not possible to have any kind of continuous farming or ranching.

The simulation is based on the following premises:

- 1 The 17 studies conducted by ONERN covered 18% of the total land of the upper and lower Amazon regions of Peru.
- 2 The values established by ONERN in the 17 studies are extendable by hypothesis to the whole of the Amazon, since the choice of study areas was made by looking at the most obvious areas for potential farming development. It is clear that the 17 areas studied by ONERN concentrate the best quality of resources and, for this reason among others, they were chosen for evaluation. It is therefore legitimate for our simulation to extend the values of the quality of the detected soil to the rest of the Amazon basin.
- 3 All areas of the Amazon that have good quality soil for farming need to be connected to the market by means of ground, river or air transportation. In this last case, the products to be grown would need to be sufficiently economically viable to permit them to afford such heavy transportation costs. It is clear that the condition exposed in this point is the hardest to fulfill.

- 4 The limits to private property and the system of land ownership would reproduce *grosso modo* for the Amazon the same model established by the agrarian reform law for the rest of the country.

The method that I have followed for the simulation is summed up as follows:

- a) Taking the sum of all the absolute values and their respective percentages established by ONERN in their 17 studies.
- b) Projection of these absolute values and percentages to all the 76,400,000 hectares of the Amazon.
- c) Division of the total absolute values (the whole rainforest) according to the type of soil for an average number of hectares per family (according to the model established by the agrarian reform law).

**Table 1 - Demographic carrying capacity of the Peruvian Rain Forest**

Amazon Soils	Type of Use/ Carrying Capacity	Total Has	%	Has per family	N° of Families	N° of People (5 people/fam)
Soil 1	Intensive Agricult.	2,292,000	3%	20 Has	114,600	575,000
Soil 2	Permanent Agricult.	9,932,000	13%	40 Has	248,300	1,241,500
Soil 3	Cattle	19,100,000	25%	200 Has	95,500	477,500
Soil 4	Forestry (Reserve)	14,516,000	19%			
Soil 5	Non Usable	30,400,000	40%			
<b>TOTALS</b>		<b>76,400,000</b>	<b>100%</b>		<b>358,400</b>	<b>1,792,000</b>

As can be seen clearly in table 1, the demographic carrying capacity in terms of farming is dramatically low: the region, in a situation of optimal use, can support 1,800,000 people dedicated to agricultural and cattle activities. Given the huge overpopulation existing in Peru (counted in millions) and the negative correlation between arable land and people, it is illusory and irresponsible, at the very least, to continue to use the argument that the tropical rainforest is the escape valve for agricultural development and can play host to the surplus of landless peasants in the Coastal and Andean regions of the country. I must add that the simulation maximized the data to benefit an optimistic viewpoint of the forest's potential. Further, one must not forget that one and a half million people currently live in this region of the country and occupy a great deal of the most fertile areas. Although it is true that the demographic density alleged by official statistics for this region is 2.07 people per square km, it is also true that this statistic simply divides the area by the population. A more realistic approximation esti-

mates some 400 people per square km of farmland. This means that the Amazon population is concentrated in pockets in those few places that, because of favorable natural resources and relative accessibility by road, are apt for survival.

### Notes for a Utopian Simulation

The question that arises now is more provocative: what is the Peruvian rainforest ecosystem's vocation? Is it possible to fit in alternatives that go beyond the indigenous economy, the domestic or communal mode of production and, at the same time, safeguard the balance and productivity of the ecosystem? An answer to these questions can not be found only in terms of ecology but inevitably calls for some consideration of the entire system of social and economic organization of the region. Just as it would be incorrect to propose an analysis of the ecological relationships between our national society and the Amazon region without taking into account the exploitative character of the capitalist mode of production, it would be impossible to propose an ecological alternative without rethinking the essential characteristics of the social and economic structure of the region. In the first place, the character of the ecosystem itself proves that the vocation of the Amazon forest is integral. That is, for the rainforest to continue being productive, it must be maintained as such, not transformed into something different but utilized as is with the least possible change in its original structure. The Amazon basin must be transformed into a "harvestable forest". This statement does not in any way imply proposing a conservationist, obstructionist, anti-development solution but rather it forces us to rethink the development of the tropical rainforest in its own terms. The true wealth of the Amazon rainforest, its permanent and renewable wealth, is the forest itself and specifically the process of photosynthesis that is produced by the interaction of the total and integrated biomass: trees, animals, water and soil. It is this process of continuous, renewed, inexhaustible (if one knows how to preserve it) photosynthesis that constitutes a usable wealth. There is in the Peruvian Amazon a volume of wood that would allow the country, establishing a careful policy of timber use, to provide 25% of the world's annual demand for wood and by-products (Bueno 1973). However, the irrational, exploitative use of this resource, as is being practiced currently, will inevitably produce a new ecological disaster, this time irreparable. It is not difficult to rationalize the use of the forest in such a way that it continues to constitute an infinite, renewable resource, but it is a problem of political will. There is no doubt that the extractive capitalist system, with its exploitative and destructive character, will exhaust this resource within a few years as it has done with some of the country's other resources, leaving infertility and poverty in its wake.

The integral vocation of the tropical rainforest ecosystem demands a model of social structure that fulfils some of the requirements indicated elsewhere in this

article for the domestic or communal mode of production. Again, it is a problem of political will. First, it is necessary to think in terms of production and housing units in which a viable relationship is maintained between the number of people and the area to be used: the "tribe", the community, can reach 10,000 or 20,000 people but, as the number of people increases, so will the problems that arise from the peasants' need for mobility between residential units and productive fields. The second "tribal" or indigenous condition is that there be no private system of tenure over the resources and lands. A social and economic rationale of such a land tenure system is found in the current national project of agrarian reform and social property. Two other concomitant conditions are needed: a) the adoption of a "soft technological style" that avoids the abuse of petrochemicals and other "hard" technologies that may impact on the delicate equilibrium of the forest; and b) the rationalization of the market by introducing incentives to shape production and commercialization. Obviously, such conditions imply harmonization between the units of production as well as an active intervention of the regional and national governments through incentives.

Respect for the integral vocation of the Amazon ecosystem and the consequent integral use of the forest offers the possibility of notably augmenting the rainforest's carrying capacity. A unit of social property that uses the forest rationally, manufactures products, primarily *in situ*, organizes its transportation, assures enough farming production for self-sufficiency, installs small auxiliary units for primary transformation and does all this via labor intensive soft technology, is in a position to absorb a greater population than any conventional farming practice.

The proposal, then, is to radically reinvent social life and, in the Amazon, the Peruvian revolution can do this: perhaps not today, but tomorrow. I would also mention that the local oligarchy, relatively powerful economically though small in number, no longer has anything to offer except for the resistance expressed in their manipulation of a stagnant, old boys' network and the continuing, permanent ability to vegetate while exploiting loggers and peasants through the usurious sale of merchandise and the appropriation of products. On this path to reinventing the future there are still a few obstacles: centuries old and prejudiced ideas that have rarely been reanalyzed, that are accepted uncritically as obvious. I will note a few.

### Nationalizing the Indigenous People

A recurrent obsessive idea among Peru's elites has revolved around the issue of "national security" in the Amazon, understood as the physical occupation of the national territory by military garrisons combined with planned migrations and placement of colonists from the rest of the country in critical areas or along national borders. This fear of territorial emptiness, or an alleged vacuum of Peru-

vian citizens, is a product of distorted knowledge and a false anthropological concept of the Peruvian Amazon region. In fact, the supposedly empty zones are generally actively occupied by local inhabitants of two types: riverbank dwellers (called *ribereños* in Peru) dedicated to extracting and gathering products from the forest and small farming, and indigenous people's villages. In most cases, this territorial occupation can mean a weak economic frontier that depends on the few urban centers in the forest (loggers, hunters, chestnut gatherers, rubber workers, merchants, etc.) and, in others, it can be a true demographic frontier. An example may be illustrative in this respect.

The region of the Upper Marañón River, which borders Ecuador, was considered in the 1940s and 50s to be barely Peruvian, extremely vulnerable in terms of national security. The measures that were undertaken to correct this situation resulted in a program of colonization carried out by the Peruvian army and the Ministry of Agriculture, put in charge of road construction and farming programs respectively. The construction of an access road and the spontaneous or state-planned settlement of migrant peasant populations on family plots along the highway were the model followed in this case. Since then, some hundred Andean and coastal families have been settled in the area as part of the colonization programs. Other people have migrated spontaneously to the Upper Marañón, attracted by the opening up of lands that were supposedly "freely available" and had agricultural potential. In pre-Revolutionary times, when the false equation – agrarian reform equals colonization of the Amazon – had complete validity, a planned displacement of surplus peasant population to non-conflictive areas (in this case from the regions of Cajamarca, Jaén and Piura) had the complete political support of successive governments. However, this was a regressive and short-sighted policy that ignored an incontrovertible fact: some 23,000 members of Aguaruna and Huambiza communities had lived for centuries throughout the entire and supposedly empty area of colonization. The immediate result of this policy was soon apparent: a long series of conflicts and tensions between the invading colonists and local communities transformed the area into a hotbed of widespread discontent with a very high social and economic cost. A sober and dispassionate evaluation of this experience gives a negative balance: the colonization was not a success and, what is worse, a highly conflictive area had appeared on the social map of the country. The conflicts mixed cultural incomprehension, the different interests of the groups, the resentment of those who felt invaded in their own country, and the bitterness and disappointment of the invaders who were exiled from their homes to strange and inhospitable lands. The problem is too complex and has too many angles to be dealt with in a few lines here (see Varese 1970) but the aspect that I want to point out on this occasion is important for the meaning that it may have within these notes on a utopian simulation.

It is clear now, in the light of five years of revolution that, being Peruvian, being a citizen of this country, having the right to full participation within national society, is not a function of being placed in the upper section of the vertical coordinate, a placement by class, or on the horizontal-geographic coordinate through relative distance from Lima, the center of the nation. The indigenous people of the Amazon basin, the native communities, the carriers of other cultures and languages, in spite of being historically suffocated – as we all are – by the secular weight of capitalist exploitation, have as much right as any other national group to actively participate in the life of the Republic. Perfectly adapted to their environment, totally or nearly self-reliant in terms of their internal economic circuit, fully organized socially, the indigenous communities can join in, with full recognition of their distinct rights, the national political life. Ignorance of the existence and creative potential of 23,000 indigenous people in the Upper Marañón River was the logical consequence of an absurd, pre-Revolutionary political will and conscience. The contemptuous principle of colonizing lands by taking people (evicted from their own communities) to territories that had already been perfectly well inhabited for millennia, was based on reactionary and colonialist conceptions of both the national territory (one supposes that there must be an internal Third World, a possible colony), and the national population. The supposition is that a peripheral zone must be developed (read: "civilized") either because it is not densely inhabited or because it is inhabited by populations that are culturally incapable, civilizationally disabled. The task of cultural unmasking can turn out to be painful, as it deals with old ideas breathed in history and literature books, movies and stories. These ideas were passed down to us from colonialist times, the Spain of the expulsion of Moors and Jews and the invasion of the Americas, the Rome of the conquest of the Gauls and of the Germanic forests. The fundamental argument of colonialism and us, as colonizers of the Amazon region, is the weight of our power, the ability to impose ourselves. Today there can be no doubt that the most economic and rapid way to nationalize and consolidate the frontier area of the Upper Marañón river and transform it into a fruitful region for the country, would have been through actions oriented toward the local native population. The shortest path to guaranteeing the nationalization and sovereignty of this zone would have been to create a focal point of social justice, of support for the communal and federative organizations of the indigenous people – a much less costly choice and with better chance of success, as much in social and political terms as in economic, due to the evident total adaptation of the native communities' culture to the environment.

A popular adage says that one's homeland is where one is best off, and this truth is valid for the indigenous people and the *mestizo* riverside populations of the frontier areas. In a sense it would seem urgent to establish a policy especially favorable and supportive of indigenous and mestizo communities in potentially vulnerable frontier areas. It is with these communities that we urgently need to

establish areas of high social justice, where the state makes itself present in the best and most effective manner; because it is obvious that if one is exploited and poor, if injustice is a daily occurrence, if discrimination and abuse become the norm, little or nothing is left of the sense of nationality and belonging to a larger and shared collectivity. I am reminded of what an indigenous Bora person of the Putumayo River told me when he described how it had become impossible for his community to continue holding their seasonal festival-ritual for the ripening of the *pijuayo palm* fruit, because a Christian missionary, with the help of ineffable local authorities, had forbidden it in the name of who knows what mysterious theological arguments. The Peruvian Bora then had no choice but to cross the river into Colombia to where friends and relatives commemorated the memory of the origins of time, when some less authoritarian, more comprehensive divinity wanted to share this food with humans.

The Matsés people of the upper Yavarí River were contacted a few years ago from the Peruvian side and "became Peruvians". Today they constitute the few Peruvian guardians in a territory that is almost totally uninhabited. On the other side of the Yavarí River, there are some Brazilian bosses that are trying to attract the Matsés into their net of exploitation in order to transform the group into slave-laborers. This would mean, in fact, the possibility that this portion of national territory, its resources and population would be lost to Brazil. Along the mid and lower Yavarí River, some Peruvian bosses, possibly connected to the sawmill of the Brazilian town of Petropolis, are trying to do the same: trap the group in the system of enslavement and above all have free access to the area. Fortunately, the government, through the Iquitos agrarian area, has reserved more than 340,000 hectares of land for the Matsés indigenous. Still pending, however, is the guarantee of an operative and not only nominal nationalization of the area, which will only be achieved rapidly and safely by reinforcing and supporting this indigenous community. This means offering them guarantees over their territorial possessions and resources, providing them with health and technical assistance, and establishing with them an initial policy of protection that will later become a relationship in which the Matsés, as a Peruvian indigenous people, would be incorporated with full political rights in the democratic and participatory process of planning and executing public policy, like any other social unit of Peru.

This alternative for the Peruvianization of these border areas is clearly less costly, faster and more consistent with the "new democracy of full participation" proposed by the revolutionary government of Juan Velasco Alvarado than with the old colonialist idea of the hungry peasants taken, almost by pushing, to areas that are inhospitable and strange. An option like this should admit one bold premise: the conviction that any human group is susceptible to acting rationally and therefore to fully and consciously participating in the construction of the new Peru we are all seeking. There is no contradiction between a tribal society, an

indigenous community and revolutionary development. There is, however, a contradiction between indigenous culture and the exploitative organization that capitalism establishes, since this organization of capital, labor and technology requires a dismantled, detribalized proletariat, disorganized and submissive, to be used as a semi-enslaved labor force. A tribal indigenous community can well be a subject of development without necessarily ceasing to be its cultural self, without having to lose either its ethnic identity or its cultural and political project. An Amahuaca person, for example, can go on being Amahuaca and belong to a communally owned and managed Amahuaca enterprise for forest industry production. As such, if he/she is the director, this person will have to speak Spanish and have some knowledge of management and finance of an indigenous enterprise in order to interact with the rest of national society but, at the same time, the individual and the community can go on being Amahuaca and practicing, as he/she/they wish, all that their culture, knowledge and heritage offers.

Colonialism and capitalism have convinced us all (including Amahuaca and anthropologists) that the only way that a tribal indigenous people can be "integrated" into "civilization" is through "acculturation", that is, through the loss of ethnic identity and the acquisition of a national culture - as if to acquire one thing it is necessary to lose the previous. Furthermore, what national culture? Evidently, the culture of misery and deprivation, the culture of proletarianization, of social, economic and political marginalization. Once the Amahuaca person has been transformed into a dependent peon, deprived of his culture and his social and ideological world, of his self-respect, excluded from national society, half-way *criollo* (White) or mestizo, and never the less indigenous for all the effects of discrimination, then he will be an integrated, "civilized" person. What has happened in reality has been his inclusion within the dispossessed, rural proletariat that the local, capitalist system needs to reproduce itself. It is uncritically accepted that this is the only way for a developing national society to integrate its indigenous communities. One consequence of this conception is manifested in the decision by policy makers to disregard and discard the native community<sup>3</sup> as a subject of regional development, and rather to visualize it as an obstacle to national integration. The native community, however, since it stems from the greater socio-economic organization that is the wider ethnic group, should be treated as a political-administrative and production unit. The structuring of various native communities into larger federative units with regional scope and possibly one or more national confederations would constitute the basic model of a multi-ethnic, self-administering policy in which cultural diversity would not constitute an obstacle but rather one more ingredient for collective creativity. The economic, social and political interaction of this federative network with a parallel network, formed by the units of forest industry production of the riverside population and organized as well into federal and confederated levels, would constitute the essential sustenance for the economy and socio-political organization of the Ama-

zon. Naturally, the operation of a model of this kind supposes the realization of some substantial changes in structural order. I will limit myself to mentioning them briefly, leaving their concrete materialization for the moment when the utopia is planned out.

### Restructuring the Model

The revolutionized Amazon could, in part, look as follows to the eyes of a visitor: a certain number (to be defined through simulation modeling) of units of forest industry production, among the riverside populations as well as the native communities, connected by networks of local and regional organizations in which production and commercialization would be planned in coordination with national development plans.

This would assume:

- a) A rationalization of the occupation and use of the territorial space, keeping such variables in mind as communication and the specific eco-productive vocations of the zones and sub-zones. One interesting idea is that expressed by the economist and ecologist Ignacy Sachs (via personal communication) in the sense that the Amazon should have "development preserves", so that the use of the resources is strictly under control and so that there is no possibility of uncontrolled destructive ecological practices.
- b) Second, it would be indispensable to establish a state system of commercialization of materials, technology and necessities for production as well as for commercializing products from the production units. This system is needed until the currently weak market can take over these functions.
- c) In order to fulfill the previous condition, it would be necessary to organize a state-sponsored system of river, air and ground transportation capable of lending its services to all the production units through periodical trips to strategic points of convergence.
- d) Socially-owned transportation companies, owned by the production units as well as by an independent third sector, could take care of remaining transportation.

With measures of this type, we could break down the financial system which, through a long series of links, keeps the majority of the Amazon's population totally dependent on a few regional usurers and merchants. It seems evident that for the rural population of the forest, the tangle of exploitation is found at the level of commercialization and trading of goods and commodities, as well as in the area of transportation. And it will not be through land reform measures alone that we will be able to break this structure of exploitation, although stability and

equality of territorial/land/resource access and use are indispensable first steps.

A qualitative, radical alteration in economic and social relationships in the Amazon region such as the ones outlined here is possible if revolutionary resolve exists. In addition, a revolutionary decision is, above all, an ethical determination. It is only secondarily a technical problem and, as such, is the easiest aspect to work out. A regional project could be created, treating the Amazon as a unit, almost as a country with its own borders, its own demographic reality, its clearly detectable economic trends. A global simulation model could indicate, with a certain accuracy of prediction, the results obtained by the rational application of the potential changes. Today this is within our reach; today in Peru, that premature truth is truer than ever.

### Notes

- 1 I was actually overestimating the national demographic growth of Peru by using a 2.8 growth rate per year. By the year 2000, the country had 27 million people and 28.4 million in 2003 (see: US Bureau of the Census, International Data Base, <http://blue.census.gov/>. Updated in 10-10-2002, consulted on 02-14-03).
- 2 These calculations correspond to the regional population 30 years ago. For current estimates, see table in the Postscript by Alberto Chirif following this essay. [Ed. note]
- 3 By 1974, the term *native community* had become of common use in Peru among specialists and public officials to refer to the indigenous people of the Amazon region. The term was actually "invented" and proposed as official designation for the Amazonian indigenous people by a team of anthropologists working for the Revolutionary Government under my coordination in the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform. At the end of 1974, a law granting territorial, political, and cultural rights to the *Native Communities of the Rainforest* (indigenous people of the Peruvian Amazon region) was enacted by the Revolutionary Government. From then on the term *native community*, as well as the spirit of the legislation, has been adopted by all the indigenous people of the Peruvian Amazon as a banner of common identity and of their struggle for autonomy. [The invention of the term *native* to designate the aboriginal population of the Peruvian Amazon also had political roots. Until the end of the 1960s, all the country's aboriginal inhabitants were called *indigenous* or *Indian* interchangeably although in the case of the Amazonian population, openly offensive terms were used. With the approval of the Agrarian Reform Law, these terms were considered harmful and eliminated from official language, being replaced by *peasants*. In the mid-1970s, as indicated in this note by Varese, the term *native* became established to designate the original inhabitants of the Amazon. However, at the beginning of the 1990s, the *natives* themselves began to use the term *indigenous* once more, the pejorative overtones of the term having been eliminated and under the protection of the growing strength of a national and international movement representing them. Ed. note]

## POSTSCRIPT INDIGENOUS LANDS IN THE PERUVIAN AMAZON (2006)

Alberto Chirif

### 1. The population of the Peruvian Amazon

Opinions on what constitutes the Amazon region in Peru reveal some rather unusual features. If you take it as being the area of the Amazon basin itself, then the region begins more than 400 metres above sea level, which may surprise those who associate it only with dense forests, enormous rivers and diverse wildlife.

In the following table 1, I have combined the criterion of altitude with that of vegetation. In defining the regions, provinces and districts, I have drawn on details provided by two works that have undertaken the exercise of physically locating the region. They are: "Marco Geográfico", by Carlos Peñaherrera, in *La Selva Peruana: realidad poblacional*. Lima: AMIDEP 1985: 15-31; and Frederica Barclay, Fernando Santos, Martha Rodríguez and Marcel Valcárcel, *Amazonía 1940-1990, el extravío de una ilusión*. Lima: Terra Nuova and CISEPA/PUCP, 1991: 30-36.

Table 1 - The population of the Peruvian Amazon

N°	Region <sup>a</sup>	Annual % growth rate (1993-2005) <sup>b</sup>	Province	District <sup>c</sup>	Total population
1.	Amazonas	2.0			450,538
2.	Ayacucho	1.1	Huanta	Sivia	10,479
			La Mar	Ayna	8,457
3.	Cajamarca	1.5	Jaén		220,918
			San Ignacio		148,692

4.	Cuzco	1.3	La Convención		203,238
			Paucartambo	Kosñipata	4,610
			Quispicanchis	Camanti	1,700
5.	Huánuco	1.8	Leoncio Prado		118,437
			Marañón		25,667
			Pachitea		63,744
			Puerto Inca		49,523
6.	Junín	1.4	Chanchamayo		148,487
			La Merced		156,220
7.	Loreto	2.1			943,807
8.	Madre de Dios	3.7			107,664
9.	Pasco	1.4	Oxapampa		84,935
10.	Puno	1.5	Carabaya	San Gabán	12,364
			Sandia	San Juan del Oro	14,888
11.	San Martín	2.7			788,195
12.	Ucayali	2.9			468,922
<b>Total</b>					<b>4,031,485</b>

Source: INEI. Perú, *Compendio Estadístico 2005*. Lima, 2005. INEI. *Censo de Población y Vivienda 2005. Sistema de recuperación de datos*. Censos Nacionales. X de Población y V de Vivienda. 2005. (CD version).

Compiled by: Alberto Chirif, Iquitos, February 2006.

- a Where I have only given the name of the region, this means that the whole of that region is located within the Amazon basin. In contrast, where I only mention one or more districts, this means that only those districts lie within the basin.
- b Years of the last and last but one population censuses.
- c Data on the district level has been taken from the CD *Censo de Población y Vivienda 2005*; the rest comes from the document *Perú, Compendio Estadístico 2005*. This is because this latter document does not break down information by district. It should also be noted that the population data from this latter source carries the annotations: "Projected population (30/Jun/2005)" and "Figures under review".

## 2. Communal Titles

The titling of the indigenous or, as the law calls them, *native* communities of the Amazon began in Peru in 1974 with the promulgation of Decree Law no. 20653, the "Law on Native Communities and Agricultural and Livestock Promotion in the Rainforest and Cloud Forest Regions (*Ley de Comunidades Nativas y de Promoción Agropecuaria de las Regiones de Selva y Ceja de Selva*). This was the country's legislation to recognise various rights to Amazonian indigenous peoples, including that of owning their lands and territories. The name *communities* was given to local settlements that tended to comprise one or more extended families and which, through this law, could now obtain legal status and become endowed with rights.

Why did the law only recognise this right to local settlements or communities and not to wider units such as indigenous peoples? There were various reasons for this. Firstly, because those preparing the law drew extensively on their experience in the area known as the country's Central Forest region, situated in the eastern foothills of the Andes, where foreigners had been settling since the mid-19th century, with Andean settlers arriving from the 1940s on. This situation led the indigenous territories to become divided and to a concentration of people in isolated and often very small areas surrounded by a sea of settlers. The urgency was thus to protect what remained. Another reason was that, at this time, the indigenous organisations were still in their infancy and had not – unlike now – developed a clear rhetoric on issues such as territory and self-determination. A third reason was the influence that the country's long tradition regarding Andean and also coastal communities (called indigenous communities until 1970 and, since then, peasant communities) may have had.

Nevertheless, once they became aware of the limitations of this principle of recognising territories to isolated communities, some NGOs and, later, once it had been established, the indigenous confederation AIDSEP, developed a strategy to ensure that the communal titles adjoined each other, such that the sum of their parts formed large territories.

The first law on native communities was replaced in 1978 with Decree Law no. 22175, the "Law on Native Communities and Agrarian Development in the Rainforest and Cloud Forest Regions". Although the section referring to the communities remained the same, the weight this legislation gave to promoting private capital's access to the region's land and forests tipped the balance in this latter's favour. Despite its amendments, this law remains in force and continues to be the principal instrument through which the Amazonian indigenous can claim their territorial rights.

**Table 2 - Number and size of titled communities**

Region	Province	Indigenous communities	
		Number	Area titled (hectares)
<b>Amazonas</b>			
	Bagua	62	394,315
	Condorcanqui	99	859,685
	<i>Subtotal</i>	161	1,254,000
<b>Cajamarca</b>			
	San Ignacio	2	116,843
	<i>Subtotal</i>	2	116,843
<b>Cuzco</b>			
	La Convención	58	717,641
	<i>Subtotal</i>	58	717,641
<b>Huánuco</b>			
	Puerto Inca	14	85,638
	<i>Subtotal</i>	14	85,638
<b>Junín</b>			
	Chanchamayo	50	25,909
	Satipo	117	560,123
	<i>Subtotal</i>	167	586,032
<b>Loreto</b>			
	Alto Amazonas	186	2,037,808
	Loreto	75	738,366
	Maynas	112	1,220,771
	Ramón Castilla	41	156,276
	Requena	7	457,325
	Ucayali	30	80,031
	<i>Subtotal</i>	451	4,690,577
<b>Madre de Dios</b>			
	Manu	8	111,059
	Tambopata	12	114,026
	<i>Subtotal</i>	20	225,085
<b>Pasco</b>			
	Oxapampa	106	423,930
	<i>Subtotal</i>	106	423,930

<b>El Dorado</b>	4	5,486
Lamas	9	13,984
Moyobamba	10	75,322
Rioja	4	26,189
San Martín	1	4,200
<i>Subtotal</i>	28	125,135
<b>Ucayali</b>		
Atalaya	108	1,032,858
Coronel Portillo	85	381,387
Padre Abad	7	186,712
Purús	28	341,513
<i>Subtotal</i>	228	1,942,470
<b>TOTAL</b>	1235	10,167,351

Source: IBC database, kindly prepared by Carla Soria.  
Compiled by: Alberto Chirif, February 2006.

With few exceptions, community titling has been promoted by NGOs and by AIDSESEP, who have channelled international donor funding for this purpose. However, as titling is a state responsibility (initially through the Ministry of Agriculture and now through the Special Land Titling and Rural Land Registry Project - PETT), these institutions have worked on their titling programmes in agreement with the latter.

Table 2 shows the lands that have been titled to communities over the 32 years since the first law was passed, indicating the region and province, and the number of communities and lands titled.

### 3. Communal Reserves

The communal reserves were created by means of Law no. 21147, the "Forest and Forest Wildlife Law" dated 1975, with the aim of protecting the wildlife and plant resources that formed the diets of neighbouring populations.

In 1997, the "Law on Natural Protected Areas" no. 26834 included communal reserves as one of the categories of Protected National Areas. This legislation defines them as follows:

Art. 22, f:

Communal Reserves: areas devoted to the conservation of forest flora and fauna, in the interest of local rural populations. The use and marketing of

resources will be undertaken according to management plans, approved and supervised by the authority and implemented by the beneficiaries themselves. They may be established over lands that are largely for agricultural, livestock or forest use or protected lands or wetlands.

In 2005, after a long debate between AIDSESEP representatives and the National Institute for Natural Resources (INRENA), and following consultations with the indigenous communities, the document "A Special Regime for Managing Communal Reserves" was approved, the aim of which was to "regulate the administration and participatory management of Communal Reserves between INRENA and the peasant and native communities belonging to the indigenous peoples and the local organised population" (Art. 4).

The following table 3.1 gives the communal reserves created to date.

**Table 3.1** - Communal reserves for indigenous and riverine communities

N°	Name	Indigenous people	Area (hectares)	Location	Date of creation
1.	Yanesha	Yanesha	34,745	Pasco	24/4/1988
2.	Tamshiyacu Tahuayo*	Riverine	322,500	Loreto	19/1/1991
3.	El Sira	Ashaninka	616,413	Huánuco, Pasco and Ucayali	23/6/2001
4.	Amarakaeri	Amarakaeri	402,336	Madre de Dios	11/5/2002
5.	Ashaninka	Ashaninka	184,468	Junín and Cuzco	14/1/2003
6.	Machiguenga	Matziguenka	218,906	Cuzco	14/1/2003
7.	Purús	Cashinahua	202,033	Ucayali and Madre de Dios	20/11/2004
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>1,981,401</b>		

Source: INEI, Perú, Compendio Estadístico. Lima, 2005: 36-37.  
Compiled by: Alberto Chirif, February 2006.

- a This was a Protected National Area created by means of regional legislation based on a provision contained in the 1990 Environment and Natural Resources Code. It was created during the short life of the regional governments established at the end of the APRA government (1985-1990) and eliminated by Fujimori's self-coup in 1992, the year in which the stated Code was also mutilated. Among the articles abolished was that which enabled the creation of regional Protected National Areas. Nonetheless, this power has now been returned to the regional governments by means of the Law on Protected National Areas, effective since 1997.

Table 3.2 refers to proposals to create new communal reserves. In three cases (Güepipi, Santiago Comaina and Pucacuro) they have already been declared reserved zones, and this constitutes the first step towards creating a Protected National Area. After such zones have been established, studies are undertaken to

allocate them to one of the categories stipulated in the law. The difference in area declared as a reserved zone and the likely area of the communal reserve is an indication that only part of the former will become a communal reserve and that the rest will obtain another category established by law (national park, national reserve, etc.). This same clarification is valid for the column on "requested zones", which have not yet been declared reserved zones.

**Table 3.2** - Proposals for new communal reserves for indigenous communities

N°	Name	Location	Indigenous People	Created as reserved zones			Requested zones	
				Date	Area (hectares)	Probable area of CR	Area	Probable area of CR
1.	Güepí	Loreto	Piojé	3/4/1997	626,971	350,000		
2.	Santiago Comaina	Amazonas	Awajun and Wampí	6/7/2000 <sup>a</sup>	1,642,567 <sup>b</sup>	95,000 <sup>c</sup>		
3.	Pucacuro	Loreto	Quechua	8/4/2005 <sup>d</sup>	637,919	637,919		
4.	Matsés	Loreto	Matsés				391,592	391,592
5.	Ampiyacu, Apayacu, Algodón, Medio Putumayo	Loreto	Huitoto, Bora, Ocaina, Quechua, Yagua				1,974,888 <sup>e</sup>	700,000
<b>TOTAL</b>					<b>2,907,457</b>	<b>1,082,919</b>	<b>2,366,480</b>	<b>1,091,592</b>

Source: Chirif, Alberto, "Hacia una visión compartida sobre ANP en la región Loreto" (working document); and personal communications from Dora Ramírez (Proyecto Secoya/IBIS), Renzo Piana (IBC) and José Álvarez (IIAP).

Compiled by: Alberto Chirif, February 2006.

- This reserved zone was initially created on 21 January 1999. Eighteen months later, it was extended to include the Cóndor Range, the western slopes of the Campankiz Range (both areas in the Amazon region) and the eastern slopes of this latter mountain range, up to the right bank of the Morona River (Alto Amazonas Province, Loreto Region).
- Part of this area will be handed over to the communities as extended titles.
- At the time of writing this document, the indigenous communities were in discussions with the state regarding the creation of another communal reserve, covering around 400,000 hectares, in the Campankiz mountain range.
- On 18 August 2005, a new ministerial resolution clarified the prohibition on establishing new settlements in this reserved zone along with the inclusion of new members on the committee responsible for producing the categorisation proposal. This resolution, however, did not change the initial area at all.
- Part of this area will be handed over to the communities as extended titles. Although the figure is not official, it is estimated that the area will be approximately 100,000 hectares.

#### 4. Territorial Reserves

Territorial reserves for indigenous peoples, or segments thereof, who are in a situation of initial or sporadic contact with other members of national society are provided for in the first and second laws on native communities. The latter stipulates that the state must establish a provisional territorial area in accordance with their traditional natural resource use, until their situation as a community is established (second transitory provision). It is thus understood that the territorial reserves are areas of a temporary nature and that they do not grant ownership to the indigenous people living within them (their status of being in initial or sporadic contact does not enable them to obtain legal status and become subjects of law). The reserve is thus under state ownership.

Table 4.1 shows the territorial reserves declared to date.

**Table 4.1** - Territorial reserves for indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation

N°	Name	Indigenous People	Area (hectares)	Location Rivers / region	Year created
1.	Kugapakori - Nahua	Yora and Nanti (Matziguenka)	443,887	Headwaters of the Ticumpinía, Mishagua and Camisea (Cuzco and Ucayali)	14/2/1990
2.	Mashco Piro	Mashco Piro (Arawak)	(768,848) <sup>a</sup>	Headwaters of the Purús and Curanja (Ucayali)	1/4/1997
3.	Murunahua	Morunahua and Chitonama (Pano)	481,560	Rurúa and Mapuya rivers (Ucayali)	1/4/1997
4.	Isconahua	Iscoaquebu	275,665	Headwaters of the Abujao, Utuquinía and Callería (Ucayali)	1/6/1998
5.	Madre de Dios	Arawak and Pano groups	829,941	Headwaters of the Acre and Shambuyacu	12/4/2002
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>2,031,053</b>		

Source: Benavides, Margarita. SICNA/IBC. www.ibcperu.org

Compiled by: Alberto Chirif, February 2006.

- This territorial reserve has disappeared as such as it is located within the boundaries of the Purús national park. For this reason, its area appears in brackets and is not considered in the overall total.

To date, it has not been possible to ensure that the territorial reserves form areas offering the indigenous peoples living in them real guarantees over the lands they occupy. Thus, for example, oil, mining and forestry concessions have been superimposed on many of them, or they have in practice been occupied by people wishing to extract a variety of resources. On this issue, see the section on "Current Situation of the Reserves. Theory and Practice" in the book by the anthropologist Beatriz Huertas.<sup>1</sup> The indigenous Amazonian confederation AIDES-EP has presented a legal proposal to Congress relating to a "special regime to protect the indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation or initial contact". Concretely, this initiative proposes institutionalising issues relating to these peoples (the National Development Institute for Andean, Amazonian and Afro-Peruvian Peoples - INDEPA - will take on the role of protecting their rights), prohibiting settlement on the territorial reserves by populations different from those already inhabiting them and vetoing any attempts to allocate all or part of the area in resource extraction contracts, among other things. Nonetheless, this proposal continues to view the reserves as being temporary in nature, until their inhabitants (or a part thereof) decide to form a *native community*, at which point they will become subject to the provisions of the relevant law.

The following table shows the proposed new territorial reserves, although the situation of some of them is uncertain as they overlap with other territorial zoning proposals for the creation, in some cases, of communal reserves and, in others, national parks.

**Table 4.2** - New territorial reserves proposed for indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation

N°	Name	Indigenous people	Area (hectares)	Location
1.	Cacataibo	Uni	110,690	Ucayali
2.	Alto Tapiche	Panos	Uncertain <sup>a</sup>	Loreto
3.	Napo Tigre	Huaorani?	Uncertain	Loreto
4.	Yavarí Mirí	Panos	Uncertain	Loreto

Source: Huertas, Beatriz, 2002: 110-111 and Chirif, Alberto, "Hacia una visión compartida sobre ANP en la región Loreto". Working document.

Compiled by: Alberto Chirif, February 2006.

a The area of this and the two following proposals is uncertain because they are superimposed on other initiatives and even, in one case (Napo Tigre), on an already created reserved zone (Pucacuro). The promoting organisations are currently coordinating to harmonise their proposals.

## Note

- 1 Huertas, Beatriz, 2002: *Los Pueblos Indígenas en Aislamiento. Su lucha por la sobrevivencia y la libertad*, (Lima: IWGIA) 111-123.

## BURIED GODS: THE POLITICS OF INDIGENOUS RESISTANCE (1987)

### abstract

The "buried gods" are, for many indigenous peoples, a symbolic way of expressing the movement of their own traditions and power into hiding as a response to invasion.\* In this sense, the imposition of the Spanish *Conquistadores* is not seen as a defeat but as a transitional stage towards a new internal reconstruction. The buried gods thus represent a strategy of temporary concealment. The author illustrates this by referring to the myth of Inkarrí, the different versions of which all concur on one point: after his capture by the Spaniards, Inkarrí was dismembered and buried in different places. And yet his body has begun to recompose and, once this is complete, he will rise again from the earth and the Inca society will be reborn. Heroes that do not die but simply pass into clandestinity exist in a number of different societies, such as that of the Ashaninka, where the rebel leader Juan Santos Atahualpa was never defeated and his disappearance *into smoke* merely heralds his future return. Or the Aymara, with Túpac Katari, who is remembered for saying *you can kill me but I will return and I will be millions*; or the Mixe, who believe that Cong Hoy, defender of their people, born in a cosmic egg, will recompose within a cave or lake before returning to earth. These symbolic forms not only give meaning to the current situation of domination experienced by so many indigenous peoples but also offer the spiritual and political hope and strength to await their rebirth. Studies conducted into messianism in America bear witness to hundreds of rebel movements throughout the centuries stretching from the Conquest until modern times. Such forms of resistance imply that the peoples must be seen as actors with a position and awareness of their future, which means that any analysis of their economic and political exploitation and oppression must focus not only on external factors but also on an internal analysis of their own economic system and its ethics, based on relations of reciprocity and the *right to subsistence*.

\* This essay was originally published in Spanish and in the Tzeltal Maya language in *El arreglo de los pueblos indios: la incansable tarea de reconstitución*, ed. Jacinto Arias Pérez, 1994 (Varese 1994b). An early version was published in Italian: "Il re inca fatto a pezzi" in *Prometeo, Rivista Trimestrale di Scienze e Storia*, anno 5, no. 17, March 1987.

### Resistance, Utopia and the Underground

Throughout the Andean world, there where the "*Runa Simi*" - the language of the people - is the vehicle for knowledge, for the memory and the future of millions of indigenous people, a thought symbolized in myth runs through the popular consciousness. "It is said that only the head of Inkarrí exists. It is growing from the head toward the body. It is said that it is growing from the head toward the feet. Then, when the body is complete, Inkarrí will return. He has not returned yet, but he will return to us". So wrote the indigenous Quechua Mateo Carnaso in 1973 (Pease 1973).

Inkarrí was killed by the Spanish invaders; his severed head was buried somewhere, his body dismembered and dispersed across the Andes, each piece sepulchred in a different place to avoid his reconnection. In other versions, the body is thrown into a pool: "Those men that had come, those troops, wrapped the head in newspaper and then - they say that over there, on the other side there is a pool...well, they took his body over there" (Ossio 1984). The last governing Inka, Atahualpa, executed by the Spanish in Cajamarca at the beginning of the 16th century, is confused and coincides in the collective memory of the Quechua people with Túpac Amaru, the indigenous rebel and revolutionary of the 18th century who was quartered by the Spaniards in the Plaza de Armas in Cuzco. Further to the south, on the Bolivian highlands, the Aymara peoples assimilate their ethnic heroes into a single symbol: "You can kill me, but I will return, and I will be millions". It is told that this was said by the 18th century Aymara rebel Julián Apasa Túpac Katari - a premonition that has now been adopted by the indigenous movement of Bolivia.<sup>1</sup>

The collective consciousness of the return and the accumulation of strength, of the secret, slow and difficult re-composition of the social, cultural and spiritual indigenous body is not exclusively limited to the Andean ethnic groups but rather is found too in other areas of America's indigenous world. In the Amazon forest of Peru, the same symbol appears in various ethnic contexts: the figure of the founding Inka (or equivalent), cultural hero obliged to hide in the underground or in the underwater world of rivers and lakes, reappears among the Shipibo and the Cashinawa. For the Ashaninka the heroic divinity is Pachakamaite, lord of all cultural goods, isolated from his people by the Peruvians, who have constructed palisades and obstacles that impede the reunification and rebirth of the Ashaninka people in communion with their divinities (Varese 1973b).

The other hero of the Ashaninka people, Juan Santos Atahualpa, Apo Capac Huayna, a Quechua revolutionary who, in the mid-18th century, organized an extensive and victorious rebellion against the Spanish and did not die but rather disappeared in a cloud of smoke, returning perhaps to the enclosure of the original cosmic egg to which some Amazon versions attribute his origin. Since then,

Juan Santos is somewhere to be found in the forest, awaiting a heroic Ashaninka who will rescue him and restore him to history. Other Ashaninka assure that, just as with the god Pachakamaite, the white Peruvians, the Wiracochas, who keep him prisoner, have also chained Juan Santos to the end of the rivers. Only a shaman, a *sheripiari* or the spirit of Tobacco, prepared to withstand a long and dangerous initiation pilgrimage, will be able to bring Juan Santos back to his people and rekindle the interrupted struggle for liberation.

Further to the North, in the Sierra Madre of the northern region of the state of Oaxaca in Mexico, thousands of kilometers away, the Zapotec people reinterpret official Mexican history, recovering and re-identifying in a heroic tone a character who objectively did not stand by his indigenous origins. Michael Kearney (1972) relates it in this way:

*In another era, more ancient, Moctezuma brought here the royal crown. Immediately the Spanish took it to Spain. This is why Benito Juárez went to Spain, to bring it back with him to his people. However, he was not to succeed. When he arrived in Spain, the army arrested him and brought him before queen Isabela to be interrogated, and there Juárez explained his reasons. She asked him if the crown really belonged to Mexico. Juárez answered: "Yes, it is from my people; it belongs to the Indians". Then the military men and the nobles agreed that they would try on the crown and that this would remain with the person who could put it on his head; Juárez was to be last. All of the Greats of Spain tried to lift it, but nobody could. It came to Juárez's turn...he lifted the crown, put it on his head, and walked in front of the Spanish demonstrating that the crown belonged to the Indians. The Spaniards assured him that the crown was his and that he would be able to take it with him, but instead they poisoned him. He came back a cadaver. Now Benito Juárez is at the bottom of the little lake of Xelató waiting for the right moment for his return and the restoration of ancient indigenous order.*

In the same mountain chain, further south, the Mixe know that in an underground place in the Cempoaltépetl mountain, in a cave or in a lagoon, king Cong Hoy, valiant defender of his people, also born of a cosmic egg, is "recomposing". His return is drawing near as long as the Mixe people are loyal to his final rallying cry: the organized Mixe will never be defeated (Barabas and Bartolomé 1984; Vásquez 1982).

Assassinated and dismembered, indigenous cultural gods and heroes, hidden in the underground or underwater world and consecrated to a slow, difficult and secular process of re-composition, symbolize the cultural response encapsulated in an ideological synthesis of the events unleashed by European invasion and subsequent colonialism. The cohesive and synthetic force of the symbols mobilized by indigenous societies to give meaning to their own defeat and to introduce, at the same time, the expectation and hope of political rebirth, goes beyond

immediate meanings. Inkarrí, Pachacamaite, Cong Hoy are not only hero-gods that were overthrown and taken apart by foreign domination, allegories for a culture and a cosmos torn apart by invading armies that "wrap heads in newspapers" and make the bodies of their victims disappear; these characters also contain the most powerful symbolic sense of utopian hope for an indigenous rebirth founded on ethical principles that are their own, autonomous, radically separate from colonialists' expectations.

Peruvian historian, Franklin Pease (1973) formulated the suggestive hypothesis that the term "inka" in "*Runa Simi*" contains notions more ancient and profound than the habitual reference to a particular, historical moment of the Andean social organization under the state of the Tahuantinsuyu. In other words, the Inka state of the four corners of the world, the *suyu*; that of the two directions of the universe *hanan* and *urin*, partial creator of the indigenous society into a dualistic structure; that of the four ages separated by periods of chaos and the transformation of the elements (water, fire, stone), until reaching the stage of humanity. Inka is an Andean category that expresses archetypal conditions and principles: "Inka is the originating model of all beings", according to the concise and elegant definition that an indigenous peasant from Canas delivered, some years ago, to the Quechua poet and writer, José María Arguedas. To the archetypal category contained in the Inka lexical segment has been added the suffix "ri", which could be the contraction of the Spanish word for king (*rey*, according to the current interpretation) and/or the root of the Quechua verb *rimay* (meaning *to speak* and *word/verb/noun*). In this case, the sense of the expression *Inkarrí* would contain "the originating model of all living beings" and the verb, the word, the discourse. Inkarrí, pulled apart and buried, hidden in its slow re-composition, is the ancient and the new order, the primordial cultural discourse, the word of the origins and the foundation of the rebirth.

### History Denied

Dismemberment of civilization, utopia and secrecy mark the thoughts and historic memory of the indigenous peoples and constitute the ideological and spiritual structure of secular forms of their cultural resistance and of the cyclical manifestations of their ethnic nationalism. Five centuries of exercise of colonial power testify to innumerable indigenous rebellions the historiography of which, dominated by colonialism, has only begun to be re-written.<sup>2</sup> I want to point out, based on some brief examples extracted precisely from this historiographic development, certain tendencies of the indigenous peoples' resistance that seem to reveal cultural constants of long historical duration and great spatial coverage. Constants that are manifested in the responses of indigenous ethnic groups which, from a strictly ethnographic taxonomy perspective, should be considered distant

communities separated by substantial differences in civilizing processes and cultural styles.

In the years immediately following the Spanish invasion of Mexico, the Mayan people of the Yucatan peninsula initiated a series of actions of opposition and resistance that in many cases led to armed insurrections, and whose ideological sustenance was the reconstitution of the pre-colonial social and cultural order and a return to the sanctity of the world, that is, the purification of nature, which had been contaminated by the foreign oppressors. In 1546, the *Chilam* (diviner-prophet) Anbal mustered a coalition of Mayan peoples and, on the Mayan calendar date of the Final Death (November 9, 1546), started a war of liberation that was to kill the invaders, end their domination and purify the land contaminated by elements brought by the Europeans (Bartolomé 1984; Barabas 1987). The Spanish and their captured Mayan slaves were sacrificed, as were the poultry, plants and all other animals brought from Europe.

More than two centuries later, in 1786, the Totonacos of Papantla, in southeastern Mexico, initiated a rebellion against the Spanish authorities in defense of their trees, threatened with felling and destruction by the Spanish *Alcalde Mayor*. "The trees give people shade and help them to persevere; they are useful for tying up our animals, they protect our houses from fires; and the branches and leaves are food for the animals" (Taylor 1979: 137).

Some years before, in 1742, thousands of kilometers away in the central Amazon region of Peru, a Quechua messiah had called for the rebellion that would mobilize thousands of indigenous Ashaninka, Quechua and a dozen ethnic groups from the Amazon and highlands, and would keep Spaniards and Peruvians out of the region for almost 100 years. Among the various revolutionary demands and proposals of those insurgents were some that would today be called social ecology: the right to live in dispersed houses and to continue the rational use of the tropical rainforest; the elimination of pigs, as they were considered damaging to crops and dangerous for human health; the right to free cultivation and use of coca, the "God's herb"; the reestablishment of the right to make and ritually drink *masato*, the fermented cassava drink that has a fundamental nutritional function (Varese 1973b; Zarzar 1989).

In the second half of the 20th century, in 1973, among the Chinantec people of Oaxaca (Mexico), a desperate, messianic movement exploded to resist and oppose the construction of a hydraulic dam that would flood their territory and force them to be expatriated to distant lands (Barabas and Bartolomé 1973; Barabas 1987). In defense of their ethnic territory and the ecological and sacred integrity of their environment, the Chinantecs relied on a diverse range of strategies: from the use of legal and bureaucratic negotiations and the search for allies with poor, *mestizo* peasants, to the mobilization of shamans "caretakers of the rays" and the boundaries of ethnic territory, to send their *Nahuales* (the rays) to kill Luis Echeverría, the president of Mexico at the time (Barabas 1987: *passim*). The

entire Chinantec messianic movement based its social and cultural legitimacy on the appearance of sacred manifestations of the Virgin of Guadalupe and the "Great God, the Engineer" and a series of collective rituals in which certain environmental or eco-cultural units (the river, the hill, the tree trunk, the spring, the cave, the path) were once again reinforced ideologically and physically through ceremonial sanctification and cultural re-signification.

In March 1984, the indigenous representatives of five national organizations of the Amazon countries of Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Brazil and Colombia established an international indigenous organization, COICA (Coordinating Body of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin).<sup>3</sup> COICA's objectives are essentially ethno-political: to represent the indigenous peoples of the Amazon before national governments and international bodies, to reinforce the unity of all the indigenous peoples of the region, to defend the ethnic values that belong to each people as a means for the autonomous development and defense of indigenous rights over their own territories and to self-determination. In October 1989, a commission of five members of COICA went directly to the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the European Economic Community to lay out their environmentalist agenda for social and economic development for the Amazon region (COICA 1989). In the document addressed to these financial and development institutions, as well as the "Environmental Groups" of the United States, COICA accused them of having marginalized, in true colonialist style, the main subjects of Amazonian development: the indigenous peoples.

*The Amazons that are burning at this moment are our life. We are pleased that the environmentalists are sitting at the bargaining table with the chiefs of the governments of South America, the international financial institutions, and the lumber and rancher magnates. But it is time that the indigenous peoples of the Amazon - the peoples that have lived there for centuries - were also seated at this table. (E. Nugkuag, Boletín de Prensa de COICA, October 19, 1989)*

*We, the indigenous peoples, have been an integral part of the Amazon biosphere for thousands of years. We have used and cared for the resources of this biosphere with the utmost respect because it is our home, and because our life depends on it. Our accumulated knowledge of the ecology of our home, our way of life, in concordance with the peculiarities of the Amazon biosphere, our reverence and respect for the forest and all of its inhabitants, plants and animals, are the keys to guaranteeing the future of the Amazon basin, not only for us, the indigenous, but for all of humanity. (COICA 1989)*

The examples, selected almost at random from among a widespread multitude of historic and contemporary events, aim to call attention to the fact that the resis-

tance of the indigenous peoples of America to colonization, exploitation and political and cultural oppression, seems to have been permanently informed by a social interpretation which, in contemporary terms, could be defined as that of ecological economy or eco-nationalism. Marked in the first centuries of colonial occupation by intense sacred hermeneutics tied to non-Christian,<sup>4</sup> ideological and spiritual concepts, this ecological cosmology of "use value" resists being penetrated and supplanted by the cosmology of "exchange value" that corresponds to the expansion of the capitalist market economy. With this affirmation, I do not mean to be excessively naïve in my analysis and place myself in the camp of a presumably neo-populist anthropology that has been criticized by some orthodox Marxists (Díaz Polanco 1978) for wishing to see in the indigenous communities a sort of citadel of uncontaminated, pre-capitalist economic forms. Rather, I wish to regain for the discussion on the permanence and historic reproduction of Latin America's indigenous ethnicities this dimension of social and cultural reality that has been sensibly analyzed by James C. Scott in the case of the peasantry in Asia (Scott 1976, 1985). In other words, a theory of economic exploitation and ethno-political oppression of indigenous peoples cannot entirely concentrate on an analysis of external factors of exploitation and domination, meaning by this the global context of the dominant society and the forces that condition the indigenous responses, but rather that the study should include the internal analysis of the means or "modes" of the indigenous economies, of their "moral economy" based on the logic of reciprocity and the "right to subsist". Moral principles that permeate the whole social life of pre-peasant and peasant indigenous communities, and even of post-peasant indigenous people when, expelled from their community by poverty, they reconstitute themselves as urban sub-proletariat or transnational migrant workers in the United States (Arizpe 1978; Kearney 1990; Kearney and Nagengast 1989).

I believe that a historical re-reading of the numerous indigenous social movements that paid attention to forms of internal resistance based on the political economy of reciprocity and of the ecological treatment of the cosmos would reveal a true process of parallel social lives only partly joined to each other, in which the indigenous people and the dominant national society are reproduced on the basis of contradictory cultural principles that are negotiated over and over again, occasionally in a violent way, when indigenous society, trapped by the oppressor, can no longer avoid an open confrontation and opts for the alternative of desperation and fighting.

In this sense, the violent confrontations and rebellions synthesize and heighten in heroic episodes the other struggle, that which is expressed in everyday forms of opposition to external interventions: the stubborn insistence on culturally reproducing themselves as indigenous people not assimilated by the principles and modalities of the economy of "exchange value", removed from the logic of accumulation, committed to the mandate of reciprocity, loyal to the duty of ceremonial squandering, to the equalizing social generosity that defies

internal differentiation, and to the accumulation of the "fund of power" (pointed out by Maurice Godelier) obtained via the squander that impoverishes in a strict economic sense but enriches and capitalizes in social, political and moral authority. "Almost inevitably", states Marc Bloch, "destined to be defeated and eventually massacred, the great insurrections were always too disorganized to reach a lasting result. The patient, silent struggle carried forward stubbornly for years by the rural communities would achieve more than these flashes in the pan" (quoted in Scott 1985).

It is no wonder, then, that the epistemological confines created by the hegemonic disciplines themselves through a long history of gazing through imperial and colonial eyes, even if dissident, have conspired to make the daily forms of resistance of the indigenous peoples almost invisible by eminently favoring the perception and analysis of instances of intense and open opposition, the social movements at their peak of confrontation. With this, the indigenous peoples endure that process of *essentialization* pointed out by James Clifford (1988), in which the cultural and class "other" is generalized by the social sciences through a process that transforms it into a paradigmatic entity of facile taxonomy and rapid comprehension and manipulation.<sup>5</sup>

This anthropological *essentialization* of the historical subject, transformed into an ethnographic object for scientific-intellectual consumption, once again deprives the subordinated indigenous people of their autonomy, relegating them to the passivity of the descriptive analyses in which two types of epistemological solutions recur. On the one hand, the construction of typology that turns to atemporal qualifiers of the indigenous societies, analyzed as presumably archetypal cultures (traditional is the preferred term), static, "cold" (in the old terms used by C. Lévi-Strauss), true to loyalties and identities that are primordial. One is all the more indigenous if one manifests a greater adherence to the presumed, atemporal and static culture. Ethnicity, in this case, is assimilated into conservatism and all social, political, cultural initiative that departs from the static state and introduces external and "modernizing" elements produces the other epistemological solution: the indigenous people are "de-Indianized", deprived of their ethnic specificity, transformed into an economic category and assimilated into the analytical paradigm that corresponds to economics.

### Indigenous Political Mobilization and Anthropological Hegemony

Over the last four decades, a political movement of the indigenous peoples of Latin America has been gaining strength. The indigenous political voices have begun to make themselves heard once more with frequency and vigor in the concert of the discussion of social and historical sciences traditionally monopolized by the academic elite and by the intellectuality of the hegemonic culture. This is

a process of re-appropriation of the historical initiative, clearly tied to the vastest ethno-political mobilization of the colonized peoples to have exploded in the Third World in post-World War II decades.

Only a few social scientists have been particularly sensitive to the emergence of these voices which were, up until now, relatively invisible;<sup>6</sup> other intellectuals have tended to misinterpret the indigenous social-political movements by using analytical keys based on the predominance of economic categories and the delegitimation of social manifestations that require risking cultural criticism. The result has been an impoverished and distorted reading of indigenous political responses, a process of permanent interpretive transformation of the indigenous people into generic *campesinos/peasants* and the disqualification and ignorance of the indigenous initiatives, in particular when these are generated among non-peasant tribal ethnic groups or, at the other extreme, among proletarian sectors of the indigenous peoples.

Only on a couple of occasions has the indifference of anthropologists and social scientists toward a social movement that represents millions of people and hundreds of ethnic groups recently been shaken up.<sup>7</sup> The first was in 1981 when the Miskito of Nicaragua began an uprising against the Sandinista government and launched a series of military operations supported substantially by the government of the United States. The military offensive brought this practically unknown indigenous group to the world's attention. On the second occasion, during the same period, anthropological tranquillity was challenged once more when the cryptic guerrilla forces of "*Sendero Luminoso*" (Shining Path) burned the election booths of the Andean village of Chushi and proclaimed its intention to destroy all of the Peruvian state. Making intentional use of the well-known myth of Inkarrí, which proclaimed the Andean resurrection after the cataclysm of the conquest and colonial domination, the insurgents chose the 199th anniversary of the execution by the Spanish of the Quechua rebel, José Gabriel Condorcanqui, Túpac Amaru II (Starn 1990). Starting with this initial symbolic action, an uncomfortable and certainly undeniable undertone of Quechua-Andean culture was evident in some of the *senderista* demonstrations.

The tragic decade of sociology of terror and death that followed the start of Sendero Luminoso's activities was to confirm that this was an ethnic war: a war between indigenous *campesinos*, proletarians, rural and urban *mestizos* against urban *criollos* ("white" Peruvians), these latter perceived as part of an oppressive state system. Undoubtedly a class struggle in the most orthodox sense, but at the same time a class struggle that was permeated, formed and mobilized by ancient ethnic grievances. The war between guerrilla and military forces cost more than 20,000 deaths and disappearances, the majority of whom were Andean Quechua, according to what can be deduced by reading the family names of the dead and disappeared that Amnesty International publishes. The tortuous attention received by both political movements from social scientists and the shaky recogni-

tion of their indigenous character (even now intensely debated in the case of Sendero Luminoso) are, in my opinion, indicative of what could be called a neo-colonial anthropological epistemology: a kind of "pre-Copernican" spirit that insists on revolving around theoretical and analytical definitions that are essentially ethno-centric and Eurocentric. The indigenous peoples of Latin America still share with the *campesinos* the weight of Marx's unfortunate dictum on the "sack of potatoes" and their political and cultural inefficiency to organize themselves and fight for their rights to political and economic self-determination.

The complexities of contemporary explanations of these ways of thinking argue that if an indigenous movement is politically well organized in terms of rationality and Western "logos" and its ideological propositions are sufficiently derived from the Euro-American, Western scientific tradition, then obviously the movement is no longer indigenous but rather it has become an integral part of the generic movement of the popular classes in spite of its objective ethnic composition and its declared ethnic identity. Within this logic of intellectual construction, indigenous societies are "anthropologized", therefore "essentialized" in their exemplary characteristics (Clifford 1988; Said 1979), then they are placed in different taxonomic compartments that constitute the field of the ethnographic activity, a discipline notoriously impermeable, to say the least, to political considerations.

The next step in the procedure consists of dichotomizing the social "continuum" between the indigenous ethnic groups and the non-indigenous cultural sectors, separating them by ethnic boundaries to which attributes are ascribed together with specific references of ethnic identity. For years, the supposedly unidirectional crossing of these ethnic boundaries from the indigenous ethnic group to the generic-*mestizo* national culture has been the most important objective and concern of applied anthropology and development. If the obstacle to modernization of the indigenous peoples and their assimilation into national society are these imaginary borders of identity and cultural loyalty, then let us help them to bravely jump these hurdles that separate civilization from barbarity through education, school and training for development. The cultural and social dialectic, however, is much more complicated. Culture, as has been argued in a Gramscian way by the English historian E.P. Thompson (quoted by Rosaldo 1989) and by the Chicano anthropologist Renato Rosaldo, is a "field of contention, a disputed domain" in which constant negotiations occur between individuals and the rest of the same ethnic group as well as between the latter and other societies. Ethnicity, cultural identity and the struggle to maintain social-political and ethnic autonomy can therefore be better understood in terms of flexible horizons rather than rigid boundaries. Indigenous ethnicity, in as much as it is a growing situational phenomenon, is constructed and reconstructed socially in a permanent process of dialectical negotiation.

For this reason, Guillermo Bonfil Batalla's proposition (1983) seems to be particularly pertinent in sustaining that, when indigenous societies appropriate external cultural elements (generally from the dominant society), and symbolically reinterpret them as *authentically indigenous*, what they are doing is "nationalizing" or "Indianizing" the component, putting it within reach of the collective body as an indigenous cultural resource. It is, in a word, a process that we could call allomorphism, in which the element adopted is socially perceived and imagined as different from the original.

### Ecology, History and Indigenous Resistance

Two disciplines seem to have demonstrated more sensibility than anthropology and other social sciences in relation to the indigenous political emergence. On one hand, I am thinking of the historians who find themselves involved, through an epistemological mandate and the necessities of method, in a distant temporal approximation and, as a consequence, in a factual treatment that neither questions nor radically confronts the cultural – and therefore ethical – premises of the analyst. A great many of the works compiled by Steve J. Stern (1987) in the Andean case are illustrative in this respect, although it could be asked why Stern himself and several of the authors avoid the use of ethnic denominations or the terms "indigenous" or "Indian", preferring that of generic *campesino/peasant* when referring to indigenous societies. One cannot help but suspect that, in the case of historians as well, economic analytical categories predominate. *Campesinos/peasants*, consequently, as a social and economic mode or organization, have become a dominant interpretive framework, displacing other factors of ethnicity and of collective identity to secondary levels.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, I see that the ecologist approaches of a recent generation of biologists and economist-ecologists, especially in the case of studies on indigenous people in Mexico, have been able to recount more sensitively the struggles of these peoples in the defense and preservation of their autonomy, concretely by focusing on indigenous resistance in the field of ethnic and ecological knowledge transformed into political strategies.<sup>9</sup> I believe that the encounter between the bio-ecologists and the various manifestations of the culture of indigenous resistance, in its modest, daily strategies of use and defense of their territories and resources as well as the direct verification of the overwhelming, ecocidal arrogance of the dominant societies, have enabled them to see and understand the subtle and tenacious political quality of the indigenous people in those manifestations that James C. Scott called the "weapons of the weak" (1985) and which have escaped socio-anthropological attention an infinite number of times. Finally, environmentalist concerns have become (perhaps only through imitative osmosis) part of the cultural interests of Latin America's middle classes and, as a con-

sequence, it was to be expected that a rediscovery of the "noble savage" turned "noble environmentalist" would occur sooner or later.

The paradox in this story is that, precisely over these last 20 years, the anthropology of the metropolis has become increasingly involved in an effort to define the ethnicity and formation and use of categories of identity and their meanings for the political and economic dimensions of social organization (Williams 1989). So while the anthropologists are trying to untangle a complex network of theoretical and methodological problems derived from a redefinition of the borders between the traditional areas of study (the domestic units, the rural community, the indigenous region) and the redefinition of the analytical contexts (world economy-politics in interdependence with the rural *campesino* community), the indigenous peoples of Latin America are once again fully entering the political scene as politically militant ethnic groups, although few in the field of the hegemonic social sciences seem to want to realize this. And it is that anthropology, like all social sciences, is not only a field of study but also a field of social struggle (Bourdieu quoted in Kearney 1990). Therefore in it, in its epistemological and methodological definitions, in the choice and definition of the "object" of study, in the paradigmatic construction of the "other", is expressed – in spite of themselves – the hegemonic project of class and of ethnic group of which they form a part.

In July 1990, representatives of 120 indigenous nations met in Quito to celebrate the Continental Meeting "500 Years of Indigenous Resistance". The Declaration of Quito begins with these words: "We the American Indigenous have never abandoned our constant fight against the conditions of oppression, discrimination and exploitation that were imposed on us because of the European invasion of our ancestral territories". The meeting was held a few weeks after the conclusion of negotiations between the government and the Ecuadorian indigenous organizations that managed to call a truce to one of the strongest Latin America indigenous uprisings of the past few years. According to independent analysts, it was the most important popular mobilization in the country of the last decade (*Andean Report*). More than 100,000 indigenous people participated in a mobilization that lasted several weeks and kept the highways to Quito and other cities around the country closed to all access. Territorial recovery and control, self-determination, economic-political autonomy and indigenous self-government were the central demands of the uprising and were taken up again in the Continental Meeting (Resoluciones de Quito 1990).

An analysis of the long conclusions and resolutions of the Meeting reveals that the political platforms of the hemisphere's organized indigenous people have a substantial background similarity with the demands that have constituted the focus of indigenous struggles for the last five centuries:

- Recovery and recuperation of territories lost because of the colonial and republican occupation;
- Defense and recuperation of the natural resources and environment destroyed by mercantile exploitation;
- Right to maintain, re-establish and develop indigenous economies based on community solidarity and principles of reciprocity;
- Respect for the sovereignty of indigenous nationalities, right to self-determination and political autonomy;
- Right to the full use and development of indigenous languages;
- Right to the use and development of one's own culture, forms of spirituality, scientific-intellectual development without oppressive and authoritarian interference from Christian evangelization and colonizing educational systems.

The organized indigenous recognize that the struggle "... has acquired a new quality in recent times. This struggle is less and less isolated and more organized. Now we are fully conscious that our definitive liberation can only be expressed as the full exercise of our self-determination. Our unity is based on this fundamental right ... without indigenous self-government and without the control of our territories, there can be no autonomy... (In) our general struggle strategy (we seek) the full exercise of self-determination through the indigenous peoples' own governments and the control of our territories... (for this) it is necessary to have an integral and in-depth transformation of the state and national society; that is, the creation of a new nation".

The spiritual basis for the indigenous resistance, insurrection and autonomous political project is found in conceptions of humanity and nature that are essentially community oriented. "We do not feel we are the owners of (nature): it is our mother, not merchandise; it is an integral part of our lives; it is our past, present and future. We believe, in this sense, that what is human and the environment itself is not only valuable for our communities or for American indigenous peoples. We believe that this way of life is an option, an alternative, a light for the peoples of the world, oppressed by a system sustained on domination over men, between peoples, on the domination of nature; a system where individuality comes first, where the rights of the people are empty declarations that are incoherent with that which is practiced ... because, for the capitalist system, diversity, common good, solidarity, autonomy and self-determination only represent obstacles to exercising imposition, exploitation and domination" (Resoluciones de Quito 1990: 6). "In light of these reflections," continues the document, "we wish to look at the history of our peoples ... the history that intends to hide the invaders, despising and denying our cultures, treating them as archaic and backward, to justify the invasion, the genocide, the permanent pillaging over 500 years, and denying their historical responsibility" (ibid.).

The continental indigenous resistance movement is disinterring its gods. It is taking utopia out from underground, from the secrecy to which it had been relegated during centuries of oppression. The spiritual sustenance for these political and cultural actions is centered on a moral system that favors the principles and norms of reciprocity above those of individual accumulation and an ecological concept of the cosmos and of nature above a vision eminently utilitarian and exploitative and pillaging. This system of moral economy and ecology grants to the collective and individual right to subsistence an essential, undeniable and non-negotiable civilizing role. Rooting the indigenous cultures in a normative system that assumes reciprocity and sharing in the social and ecological spheres as the central axis of the political-cultural platform and project itself, reveals an idealist and, why not, utopian tone. From there, I believe, comes the challenge and the objective difficulties of establishing a political strategy of convergence between indigenous peoples and the progressive sectors of non-indigenous society. This alliance, however, is not only possible but also inevitable. It implies a re-appropriation of the political and cultural space by the indigenous societies that were forced underground and by non-indigenous sectors deactivated by authoritarianism, skepticism and despair. A process of cultural creation – and therefore political inventiveness – believes in a future scenario in which diversity and the right to be different will be as important as the right to equality.

## Notes

- 1 On the importance of the symbols and ideology of the Incas' return in the indigenous rebellions of the 18th century and in the indigenous movements of the end of the 19th century and contemporary ones, see the book edited by Stern (1987), especially the articles by Campbell, Szeminski, Flores Galindo and Albó.
- 2 See the study by Barabas (1987) who analyzes 56 indigenous rebellions of a messianic nature in Mexico between the 16th and 20th centuries; Taylor (1979) studies 142 Indigenous rebellions over a period of 131 years in only three regions of Mexico: Mexico Valley, the Mixtec Highlands and the Oaxaca Valley. For a rewrite of the history of the indigenous people of the Andean and Meso-American regions see also Carmagnani (1988); Castillo Cárdenas (1987); Rappaport (1990); Wankar (1981).
- 3 COICA currently groups together nine national organizations representing Amazonian indigenous peoples. They are the Amerindian Peoples' Association of Guyana (APA); the Inter-Ethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Forest (*Asociación Interétnica de Desarrollo de la Selva Peruana* - AIDSESP), established in 1980 and comprising six regional organizations, 40 federations and some 1,000 communities; the National Indian Council of Venezuela (*Consejo Nacional Indio de Venezuela* - CONIVE), established in 1989, which groups together 60 organizations representing 32 indigenous peoples; the Confederation of Indigenous Nations of the Ecuadorian Amazon (*Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas de la Amazonia Ecuatoriana* - CONFENIAE), founded in 1980, made up of 13 ethnic organizations from the country; the Indigenous Confederation of the Bolivian East, Chaco and Amazon (*Confederación Indígena del Oriente, Chaco y Amazonía Boliviana* - CIDOB), established in 1982 and with its headquarters in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, made up of 34 indigenous peoples from the country's lowlands; the Coordinating Body of Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazon (*Coordenação das Organizações Indígenas da Amazônia Brasileira* - COIAB), founded in 1989, has 75 member organizations representing 165 indige-

nous peoples and more than 200,000 persons; the Federation of Indigenous Organizations of Guyana (*Fédération des Organisations Autochtones de Guyane* - FOAG), the origins of which can be traced back to an organization established in 1981, groups together six indigenous peoples with an estimated population of 15,000 individuals; the Organization of Indigenous Peoples in Suriname (*Organisatie van Inheemsen in Suriname* - OIS), set up in 1992, now groups together nine indigenous peoples with a population of 25,000; the Organization of Indigenous Peoples of the Colombian Amazon (*Organización de los Pueblos Indígenas de la Amazonía Colombiana* - OPIAC), established in 1995, represents 52 peoples grouped into 14 regional organizations with a population of over 75,000. [Ed. Note]

- 4 Regarding this, see the excellent historical study by Marcello Carmagnani (1988) on the concepts and uses of ethnic territoriality among the indigenous peoples of Oaxaca (Mexico) in the 17th and 18th centuries.
- 5 The Palestinian-American intellectual Edward Said (1979) made an extraordinary analysis of this process of imperial construction of the cultural other for the case of Eastern societies. It seems that an analogous, historical-cultural critique in the case of the indigenous people of Latin America has begun to be generated in a fragmentary way; see the works of G. Bonfil Batalla (1981) and Wankar (1981).
- 6 In particular, I am thinking of the seminal work of Guillermo Bonfil Batalla (1981); the work of Xavier Albó (1987) on the indigenous people of Bolivia; see also the study on the Guatemalan Mayas by Herbert, Guzmán and Quan (1972); the documents of the First and Second Meeting in Barbados (Dostal 1972, Barbados II 1979); Barre (1983); Mejía Piñeiros and Sarmiento Silva (1987); Rodríguez and Varese (1981a, 1981b).
- 7 The census analyses carried out by Mayer and Masferrer (1979) and Rodríguez and Soubié (1979), indicate that the indigenous population of Latin America in 1978 totaled 28.5 million people spread over more than 400 major ethno-linguistic groups.
- 8 The Andean bibliography that bears witness to a greater sensibility of historians to the question of ethnicity and "Indianness" of the historical subject is highly abundant. Suffice to cite only a few of the most relevant texts: first, the founding works of Murra (1975, 1978); Flores Galindo (1986, 1987); Ossio (1973); Pease (1973); Stern (1987). For the case of the Andean forest of Peru, see the study by Zarzar (1989) on the pan-indigenous rebellion of Juan Santos Atahualpa in the 18th century as well as the new revision on the same insurrection by Stern (1987) and my own work from some years ago (Varese 1973b, 2002a). For the case of Meso-America there are also important historical works in this line, to cite only a few: Barabas (1987) has conducted a detailed and fundamental study of religious ethno-history and anthropology of the Indian resistance movements in Mexico over four and a half centuries of colonial occupation; see also Carmagnani (1988), Farris (1984); Taylor (1972 and 1979); Whitecotton (1977), among many others.
- 9 See Altieri et al. 1987; Caballero and Mapes 1985; Martin, 1987; Posey 1984; Toledo 1976, 1980, 1982; Toledo, Carabias, Mapes and Toledo 1985.

## MESO-AMERICA



Photo: WICIA archive

## CHAPTER II

## DIALECTIC DENIED (1976)

### abstract

Abuse of the concept of culture by North American anthropological functionalism and culturalism has hindered and prevented attempts to give content to the expression.\* Different conditions later led to a denial of the concept of culture as a topic of interest to the progressive sector of anthropological thought. The many definitions produced by functionalism and culturalism revolve basically around the concept of human conduct, and thus the main aim of anthropology would seem to be to describe, classify and analyse such conduct. For this anthropology, culture is virtually any intellectual expression, technique or creation, and all learnt behaviour. *In this box of surprises we find the Carthusian order, the stone axe, the silence of John Cage and my decision to abandon the necktie.* For its part, a dogmatic Marxist interpretation sees culture as a simple phenomenon of superstructure, and this tends to exclude the valuable dialectic relation that can be established between different ethnic groups as an alternative to the homogenization caused by the elimination of conditions of exploitation, which are a part of the economic structure. It is noteworthy that some Third World countries that have opted for socialism are practically demonstrating that ethnic diversity offers fundamental contributions to different national problems. This suggests that a dialectic of ethnicities is richer and more creative than mono-ethnic forms of nation-state organisation. This concept contrasts with the homogenistic desires of the centralist nation-state, as in the case of Mexico and most countries of Latin America, which ignore ethnic and linguistic diversity. The states have silenced indigenous peoples' attempts to claim their own rights, given that they see all forms of ethnic affirmation as a threat to the authoritarian and centralist visions they have been promoting since the wars of independence. The homogenization advocated by the nation-state has led to a manipulation of the concept of national culture, with the practical aim of concealing and displacing displays of local culture. This concept claims to be the sum total of all a country's cultures but is in actual fact the imposition of one culture over all the others, given that reality shows that many of a country's ethnic identities do not have the capacity to broadcast their cultural message beyond their own ethnic boundaries. In all other respects, states limit the scope of the concept of culture to out-of-context artistic expressions such as handicrafts and folklore. Strengthening local identities through the use of language in schools, the local toponymy and relations with political, judicial and administrative authorities are proposals for a Utopian construction.

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The idea of having to face an audience made up mainly of historians and of historians of ideas has been worrying me a great deal in these last days of motley, shapeless, cornered thoughts – thoughts waiting for the fulfilling act of writing. For an incredulous anthropologist faced with what should be the most important concept of his discipline, the pivotal category of his science, the theme of this symposium implies a decision that borders on the field of ethics. To have to disinter the cultural theme in a context of confrontations over the different meanings of the idea of a national culture means admitting that what seemed like a problem solved and destined for the deepest archives of our consciousness is, in reality, an unresolved proposition, a suspended judgment. If this meeting were exclusively among anthropologists, we would take the definition of culture as a given, we would discuss in a kind of meta-language, properly fulfilling that which George Steiner pointed out, that a great deal of Western thought is "...a constant repetition via allusions and variants, of an established repertoire of motive: a thought *about* previous thoughts" (1973: 194), in the majority of cases without the initial premise being specified. Perhaps Montesquieu's aphorism is truer than it first seems: "... *autrefois on estimait les hommes; à présent, les livres*". Not the ideas, rather the books, the commodities.

On a theoretical level, the principle according to which the world is human only as long as it is meaningful, and in which the elements of the form of expression correspond to the form of the content, is very clear to me. However, faced with the expression *culture*, a kind of defense mechanism – undoubtedly derived from a reaction to the abuse of this concept on the part of North American anthropological functionalism and culturalism – has blocked and hindered every attempt to track and give content to the expression. I admit the influence of a certain vulgar Marxism, of a sort of kitchen dialectic in this position that condemns the opposing argument to non-existence via magical voluntarism more than by the logic of the argument. Through a kind of pendulous opposition, the anthropological tendency that we would broadly define as socialist has been separating itself from its speculative concerns and the study of the topic of culture. With this approach, beside putting future historical projects in danger, they are also orphaned by all definitions in respect to topics as fundamental as linguistic and cultural autonomy and liberty, the possibilities of intellectual and aesthetic creation outside of centrist control, the total access to the means of production and of intellectual and creative dissemination. But let us look at the conditions that have led to this negation of the cultural concept as a topic of interest to the progressive sector of anthropological thought.

For the functionalist current of anthropology, dominant in the so-called "Western" world, culture continues to be the central theme of anthropology. And culture is fundamentally a description, a reconstruction after the fact of the processes of human behavior. The hundreds of definitions of culture that have pro-

duced functionalism and culturalism revolve basically around the concept of human behavior as exclusive and unique in the world as we know it (Arensberg 1972) and, as a consequence, the main purpose of anthropology would be to describe, classify and analyze such behaviors. Even such elaborate anthropological expressions as the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss in some way date back to, and are connected to, this concept when they try to construct models that are reflections of the structure and process of behavior, whether that is expressly social (relations, social organization) or mental (myths, categories of knowledge). This functional-cultural tendency has been trying for years to structure a global model of analysis that would allow the establishment of some laws or general constants regarding human behavior. In the purest tradition of Anglo-Saxon empiricism, these anthropologists are accumulating thousands of data points from different social areas of the world, and they are comparing these with the help of computational techniques (the *Human Relation Area Files* program, for example). To this taxonomic proposal – at the very least of naturalist derivation from an epistemological point of view – anthropology of the Anglophone tradition has emphasized the analysis of social relations rather than the more static manifestations (culture) of these. Both foci handle the category of culture in such a broad and inclusive way that, from the analytical and operational point of view, this is a kind of box of odds and ends, without a doubt attractive and full of surprises, but not very practical. For this kind of anthropology, culture is practically any expression, any technical or intellectual creation, all learned behavior, all human activity. In this box of surprises we find the Carthusian order, the stone axe, the silence of John Cage and my decision to abandon the necktie.

When anthropology began to broaden its spatial and social horizons, it discovered an incredible variety of human creations that did not correspond to any of the examples and experiences known in the so-called "Western" world. An instrument that produces sound through water and wind. Or music? The border that we thought was so sure and firm began to crumble, distance itself or twist ambiguously from Schönberg to Cage, from an Amazon musical bow to an Australian bull-roarer. Audio instrument, musical tool, reproduction and summary of the sounds and silences of the jungle, scarecrow, vicar's voice of a more obscure level of reality; what was the purpose of this object? In which of the musicologist museums should it end up? The thousands of other objects, facts, institutions, languages of the colonial expansion began to act as a phagocyte for scandal and the use of good metropolitan consciences finally caused a problem of categorization, and the inclusive and generous concept of culture managed it all. The Voltairian definition of civilization, antecedent and product of the great bourgeois revolution, was popularized, de-Europeanized and, finally, displaced from anthropological language. This is stubbornly resisted in France and perhaps Italy, but not for defining those sectors of society which, because of living in the city, *in civitas*, boast of a patrimony of intellectual knowledge and customs (behavior)

more refined than that of their country compatriots, but rather for defining even tribal societies of the Amazon forest. The anthropologist, Alfred Métraux, would call it *The Civilization of the Tupi-Guaraní*, almost in homage to Montaigne and the Jesuit Lafitau who saw in the American tribal peoples the paradigm of civilized society; *Tupi-Guaraní Culture and Society* the Anglo-Saxon functionalist anthropologist would answer; *The Social Formation of the Tupi-Guaraní* the anthropologist in the Marxist tradition would conclude.

What is certain is that the democratization and forced de-Europeanization of the concept of culture, carried out by a sector of the science that the Marxists define as bourgeois, helped to partially solve, on the level of Third World consciousness, the intellectual identity crisis created by colonial expansionism. Ours is also culture: the music, our semantic universe, our philosophical speculations, our myths, our own struggle to get rid of a false consciousness. Interestingly, however, the central socialist countries continue to work with a concept of culture that is restricted and in some measure elitist. The culture as a super-structure phenomenon, linked to a determined mode of production and to a determined social and political organization (organization of consciousness as well), is destined to be modified with the changes that come about in the economic and political structures. As a consequence, the peripheral and regional ethnic societies, as soon as they enter the socialist construction circuit, will abandon their traditional forms of expression in order to become integrated in the socialist culture, in the proletarian culture. But the facts have not been and are not so simple: in practice, the ethnic groups (and I use the term in place of local cultures) have expressed sovereign will with notable force – for example, throughout the so-called socialist construction in the Soviet Union – demonstrating much more autonomy than would be attributed to them based on a rigid application of the Marxist hypothesis of super-structure. Bastide (1975:82) refers to the case of the *Kolkhoz* and *Sovkhoz* of the Republics of Central Asia in which the lineage structures reappeared with their allies, conflicts and consequent fragmentation of the productive unit into numerous dwarf *kolkotzes*.

I wish here to emphasize that a dogmatic interpretation that wishes to see culture as a plain and simple super-structure phenomenon tends to exclude the very valuable dialectic relationship that can be established between different ethnic groups instead of a homogenization produced by the elimination of the conditions of exploitation that are part of the economic base or structure, homogenization which, in fact, historically never happens. The fact is that there are countries in the Third World that have opted for a socialist path, a peripheral socialism that is demonstrating, in practice more than in theory, that the various ethnicities have fundamental contributions to offer to specific national problems. That is to say, a dialectic of ethnicities (a dialectic of cultures to continue using a sacred term in anthropological use) is richer and more creative than the mono-ethnic forms of organization of the nation-state, just as has occurred in Latin America or

the formulae of the so-called democratic centralism of socialist countries that are, in fact, authoritarian in their practices and Euro-centric in their premises.

I will try to enunciate what is understood by "dialectic of the ethnicities" and the way in which this dialectic has historically been blocked as much in Mexico as in the rest of the Latin American countries that present a multi-ethnic social composition. This historically permanent blockage clearly does not in any way imply the definitive liquidation of the possibility of re-establishing a unified, multi-ethnic coexistence within the construction of a national autonomous project.

In Mexico, as in the majority of other Latin American countries, national independence only appeared to signify an option for the constitution of the new state: in the beginning, this could have been organized in several ways but, in reality, it could only be set up as a nation-state with pretensions of homogeneity and centralism with regard to its linguistic and ethnic structure. In the words of Lucien Goldman (1969), one could say that the "possible consciousness" of the American *criollo* bourgeoisie, "Independentists", did not allow for any other alternative than imagining a nation-state within the Napoleonic conceptual and historical framework.<sup>1</sup> The ensuing liberal ideology, with its enthusiasm for the ideas of a democratic federal republic (in the case of Mexico), governed by representative institutions, a secular society, "a nation of small property owners, *campesinos* and master artisans; with the free play of individual interests" (Brading 1973:158), frustrated all possibility that the *indigenist* rhetoric that had, for better or worse, been transmitted from theologian to intellectual and from these to all politicians since the Conquest, could be cemented in a small number of political achievements that would guarantee a margin of autonomy for the indigenous peoples. The long series of wars and conflicts in the 19th and early 20th century over the problems of decentralization and federalism and the church-state relations concluded in what someone called a Solomonic compromise: "the principles of federalism and decentralization were crowned with victory and stood out in the legal text, while the federal government returned, through a series of mechanisms, to practicing a centralization of power even more extreme than that which existed in colonial times" (Borah 1975:26). It was clear besides, for the representatives of the new order, that the elements implicit in an ideology even vaguely *indigenist* represented a danger to the recently gained stability.

Starting in the 1840s, the two largest sectors of the Mexican population – the indigenous people on the one side and the Hispano-Americans and *mestizos* on the other – began to confront each other in open war: the Maya of Yucatan, the northern tribes, the Sonoran Yaquí (Yoeme), the Cora of Nayarit, the inhabitants of the Chiapas Highlands, Guerrero and the Sierra Gorda threatened the stability and the integrity of the nation more than once. *Indigenism*, even in its most rhetorical form, in fact represented, in the eyes of the leading and liberal classes, the threat of a war of castes. This kind of historical bad conscience became installed with such force in the Mexican ideology and leadership that it is easy to trace it

even today to the radical refusal on the part of official *indigenists* to propose any alternative that would signify greater autonomy for the indigenous peoples. Ethnic autonomy, and any other kind of grassroots autonomy, carries with it the risk of centrifugal dissolution, a risk too great for an authoritarian and centralist concept of the national state.

The intervention in the 1930s by Vicente Lombardo Toledo and some theoreticians of the Mexican Communist Party in favor of a policy of small nationalities, on the basis of Soviet experiences, did not help the cause of the Mexican indigenous peoples. The proposal was ill informed and saturated in populist rhetoric and extreme historical simplifications that could be easily disputed by the still dominant arguments of the national anthropology of North American derivation.

G. Aguirre Beltrán writes in 1970 in reference to the old Lombardo Toledano position:

*It would be interesting if our blindness should carry us to the point of conceding a Mayan nationality to the ethnic groups of the Yucatan peninsula in order to allow the "divine caste"<sup>2</sup> to rule as it pleases over the Indians, without the brakes that the values of the national society represent. (Aguirre Beltrán 1976:77)*

It should be more than clear that the Leninist arguments (Lenin 1951, 1969) were not precisely meant to favor the local bourgeoisie or facilitate a national independence that would allow them specifically to exploit their countrymen but quite the opposite, to support the autonomist desires of the masses as a means to break down the classist structure of the region and/or ethnic group in question. In Leninist theory, ethnic autonomy never meant the autonomy of the ethnic bourgeoisie. It is evident that this is not just a hermeneutic lapse. The controversy has lost its initial sparkle but the fact that it continues to concern a politically important sector of Mexican anthropology indicates that the argument has not concluded.

*Indigenist* rhetoric can be an integral part of the ideological creation of state nationalism but, as soon as this rhetoric becomes an argument with subversive powers that threaten the stability of the mono-ethnic national state, it becomes necessary to trot out the efficient mechanisms of ideological and administrative centralism that have been on the continent since Spanish colonialism. The "patrimonial state" flourishes again with all its power of conviction. A threatening *indigenism* does not fit with a state nationalism that has its roots in liberal, nineteenth-century ideology and in the Napoleonic concept of the nation, heir to the great bourgeois revolution that wanted to make a group of heterogeneous ethnicities, languages and aspirations into a nation based on a vague and momentary political solidarity. In this sense, *indigenism* had its space in the independent Spanish America: the *criollo* and the indigenous were the new and old justification for autonomy. Saint Thomas and Quetzalcoatl combined to blindly jump over the centuries of Spanish colonialism and construct an independent national

state, but designed for the use and consumption of the ruling class of *criollos* of the Americas, not for the indigenous peoples. It is no accident, for example, that in the literature of the so-called precursors of Peruvian independence, references to the indigenous rebel José Gabriel Condorcanqui Túpac Amaru II are scarce and memories of two other fundamental indigenous revolutionaries, Manco Inca and Juan Santos Atahualpa, are nearly non-existent. It is true these are all *indigenist* and anti-Spanish symbols, but also symbols of dangerous ambitions to gain ethnic autonomy that were incompatible with the projects of the *criollo* bourgeoisies. And those who dared to use these symbols were not playing fair. Carlos María de Bustamante, in the mid-19th century, wrote with alarm that General Lobato was inciting the indigenous,

*Making them believe that they are the lords of all of the Americas and that the white man should reinstate their occupied lands. Guerrero has followed this maxim, passing himself off as a descendent of the kings of Texcoco... it was much feared that the Indians excited by Guerrero would form a party whose result would be a war of castes and colors... (Bustamante quoted by Brading 1973:209-210)*

Nor are people playing fair today when they dare to formulate the possibility of a pluralistic social project for any of the nation-states of Latin America. They are breaking the rules because they reintroduce into the political debate a dimension that Tirios as well as Trojans considered discarded a long time ago, that practitioners of so-called democratic centralism, as well as the different shades of bourgeois solutions, had considered definitively over. These utopian Rousseauians,

*...apostles of a return to the past [...] protest violently against the assimilation of communal and tribal dwellers into capitalist society divided into classes and contest their acculturation and integration based on the category of nation that they assign to the tribes and communities of origin, for those that ask for political self-determination and cultural autonomy. They propose a dispersal of miniscule nations, each with its particular ethnic economy, culture, language and identity, federated in a multi-national state. (Aguirre Beltrán 1976:215-216)*

These scandalous proposals imply integral, grassroots self-management, the right to practice politics, in its broadest sense, as a daily activity and not as a cyclical, vicarial event. They are scandalous, because they essentially imply the subversion of power relations, the world upside down – a difficult inversion because it would have to happen above all on an ideological level and would have to break the social molds of knowledge to open up the social conscience to the impossible, the dimension of realism *par excellence*, to use the words of Che Guevara. This is what Antonio Gramsci alluded to when he said that the problem of

knowledge was the problem of liberty (Gramsci 1973:140). Once again, this can not be about hermeneutics, but rather something deeper: a perception of class and ethnicity, a perception of the “possible consciousness”?

In Mexico, as in any other Latin American nation-state with a multi-ethnic composition, all discussions about culture must become discussions about cultures, in the plural. This statement can extend partially to the class-based composition of the dominant ethnic sector that we can call Mexican (in an exclusive sense) and not indigenous. There is an ideal culture and model of national society or, better said, of the dominant sector of national society, and there is a series of class sub-cultures in dialectic relation to each other and the bourgeois cultural model. The description is dangerously clear and simple, but I am proposing it for an operative reason: it serves to contrast the culture of the Spanish-speaking majority with the other cultures of the country that can not be defined simply as sub-cultures but rather must be accepted as at least semi-autonomous cultures. The criterion of greater or lesser ethno-cultural autonomy can be established in various ways but the most practical indicator, the pre-eminent “synthetic indicator” (Salvi 1973, 1975) is language. All social groups that handle their social relations and their relations with the world through a language other than Spanish must participate in a culture differentiated from the national one. Clearly the presence of a greater or lesser degree of bilingualism complicates the use of language as a synthetic indicator of ethnicity, that is, the belonging to a cultural universe and differentiated semantics. It complicates but does not invalidate the criterion.

As a result, when speaking of national culture one is using a dangerous euphemism that hides certain dimensions of the problem. In the first place, national culture is the dominant culture, it is the culture of the dominant sector of society. In this sense, national culture is the inevitable ideological expression of the bourgeoisie that appropriated the economic and political power within the nation. National culture is the explicit ideological dimension, permanently recreated, of the political program of the dominant class. Within this perspective national culture, more than a concept with its own essence, would be an expression of different political positions and projects at different times and strategic moments. Naturally, as much as an ideological dimension is a total social product, one could say it receives contributions from all of the social sectors and classes of the national community. Almost all, because a large part of national ethnic groups, the indigenous, can not distribute their cultural message beyond their own ethnic borders. The fact that afterwards, for example, the popular contributions are given back to their creators in the form of consumer manipulation only shows the capacity for intentional use by the social sector that controls the means of creation, reproduction and cultural dissemination. Umberto Eco (1974:14) has indicated an angle that seems fundamental at this level: the conveyor of a message makes an effort to articulate in a way that receptive mistakes and variations affect

the meaning as little as possible, but even then it may happen that the message does not completely master the code. This permanent risk of having the receiver lose the original meaning explains the efforts of the "popularizers", those overcrowders of popular culture, to constantly update the codes: the ante that is at stake, the demobilization of popular sectors, is too important.

In this way, it is legitimate that we ask to what extent the national cultural concept itself is more of an intentional, political design by the elite class that owns the means of production and cultural communication and dissemination than an organic social product, sociologically representative of the creativity of a people. And to cite only a couple of examples: the popular theater of the Mixe or the literature and poetry of the Zapotec of the Isthmus do not enter into the circuit of what is understood and defined as the national culture of Mexico as the two indigenous peoples lack access to the means of cultural reproduction and dissemination. Not only that, but the condition by which Mixe and Zapotec could become cultural producers within the Mexican nation is that they de-culture themselves, that they abandon all creative originality, from their language and their worldview, to become part of a style that has been previously defined and delimited by the dominant class of Mexican society. In order to gain the possibility of expressing their culture, the indigenous peoples must cease to be.

There is now a point that should be clarified again: I am using the expressions *ethnicity* and *culture* as equivalents. The synthetic indicator of an ethnic group *ergo* a culture, is the language. The loyalties of a social group toward its semantic universe, the individual solidarity toward those who share the same semantic universe, is the operating definition with which we can manage an anthropological concept as over-used as culture. I doubt that it is necessary to insist too much on the fundamental value of language as a defining element of ethnicity. It is a particular aspect of the general theme of human language as a differentiator between man and the rest of the known universe: the unique capacity of man to define himself and define "otherness" in linguistic terms; the necessity that man has to define his existence through the security that other entities have received his linguistic signals; and

*[t]he capacity that man has to articulate a future time – capacity that in itself constitutes a metaphysic and logical scandal – his ability to dream of the future and his need for that, his ability to hope, make man a unique creature. (Steiner 1973: 80-83 passim)*

And if all this is true on a general theoretical level of language, it is more so on the level of specific theories of languages. For Marx, language was "the immediate reality of the thought" and, in *The German Ideology* (1970), he states that language is not the expression of consciousness but rather consciousness itself. All acts of knowledge, all cognitive processes, are essentially linguistic acts. Lenin

asked himself: "History of thought? History of language?". A cognitive process does not occur in a vacuum but rather within a specific linguistic framework, of a particular vernacular idiom, that is, within a given ethnicity. Hence, any attack on, all discrimination or limitation against, a language is an attack on the ethnic group, on the cultural, cognitive and programmatic possibilities, on the historical projects of a people. Hence all authoritarianism and totalitarianism attacks the languages and, as a last resort, the liberating possibilities of the language. Mussolini had to create a counter-language to impose a false ideology; Francisco Franco combated all rights to the national languages of the Spanish territory; Stalin got rid of all the poets who, like Osip Mandelstam, contested his right to exclusive use of the language. Mexico, like the greater part of the continent, more simply denies elemental, idiomatic rights to its national ethno-linguistic groups, in the hope, with no historical or empirical basis, that they will one day disappear unnoticed.

To safeguard the linguistic rights of an ethnic group does not mean, as some indigenist politicians of both North and South would argue, blocking and reducing its speakers to an experience that is limited and frozen but rather the contrary: starting from a concrete basis that will favor full personal and collective development.

*Languages are dynamic entities, in constant development, that go hand in hand with experience, conditioning them and being conditioned by them. All social and cultural progress, to be authentic, can only be carried out through the language around which it was formed, historically a community: otherwise it will be an artificial experience, imitative, imposed from above and, in most cases, incomprehensible. (Salvi 1975:17)*

What does it mean to respect the linguistic and, ultimately, cultural rights of an indigenous people? It means, basically, to promote and enforce a legislation that permits each indigenous community, in their own territory (or social place), to use their native tongue in schools, in toponymy, in the relations of citizens with political authorities, with the judicial system and the public administration. It means guaranteeing each indigenous people the self-administered use of the means of mass communication in their own language; it means not only allowing but encouraging intellectual, university, editorial, creative, theater and performing arts activities, in the ethnic language... Utopias? Yes, in as much as one is not prepared to admit that the scandalous reality of Latin America has made us insensitive to the point of not allowing us to imagine different futures and of obstructing our sociological and political imagination. We take for granted that the individual and collective destiny of millions of indigenous people is to continue to feed the dominant classes and produce pathetic works that we call "crafts" and "indigenous folklore", when their true essence is that they are the clearest expression of a culture of deprivation, oppression and exploitation.

It appears clear then, that the basic conflict between the national culture and the culture of the indigenous peoples could be understood at first glance through their linguistic situation. This is, I repeat, the use of a synthetic indicator that allows the perception, the identification and the definition of the problem in an immediate way. As a result, this path makes it possible at the same time for the ethnic categories to be strategically used by the peoples that struggle to make their own historical social project viable. But it is also clear that operational or strategic use of the synthetic indicator should not impede the analysis and creative use of the sociological, economic and political dimension that lies below the category of ethnicity or culture.

At the risk of irritating the hagiographers, one can paraphrase Marx's statement in *Das Capital* about the relationship between things in reality expressing a relationship between men, in the following way: the relationship between ethnic groups (cultures and semantic universes) expresses relationships between men, but through the mediation of things. What I mean is they are not two ideological systems, two semantic worlds that confront each other directly when a *ladino* of the Chiapas Highlands interacts with a Tzeltal, but rather that mediation through things is established. Both cultural representations demonstrate their own particular mode of social organization, both social consciousnesses as determined by two specific and differentiated existences, both consciousnesses defining themselves through their social relationships. In relationships, as we know, people not only produce but reproduce the conditions of their existence: they produce work, the means of production, and reproduce the relations of production. By this we mean that relationships between ethnicities, between different cultures, are relationships between men, mediated by things, products, commodities. We must remember that reproduction of the conditions of the two ethnic existences (we have to define these two situations, which are differentiated semantically and socially), happens through an internal, ideological mediation that harmonizes, to put it one way, all those elements that could be interpreted as conflictive, or to use an orthodox expression, as contradictory.

Indigenous *tequio*, or community work, is evidently a form of additional work that a Zapotec *campesino* must give to the community. This is frankly additional work that does not provide any immediate personal benefit, but is a kind of forced labor imposed directly and which, in some cases, does not even benefit the community but rather the national community in that area. Such is the case of road improvement projects that only result in savings for the vendors who come to the indigenous communities to extract surplus from farm production (see Marx 1972-76, 2: 14-15). One more example: a form of matrimonial *guelaguetza* that is common among the Zapotec consists basically of a system of reciprocity of services and products (mainly foods) on the occasion of a wedding. What interests us here is to point out only one aspect, since the institution is fairly complex, and I am not sure I am qualified to explain it precisely. This interesting aspect is

that, looking at it objectively, the institution tends to be a "savings" mechanism for internal consumption in the community. Since the possibility of household accumulation is very slight, the matrimonial *guelaguetza* acts as a diaphragm that moderates and in part prevents the families' small savings from being exported out of the community to be spent on consumer articles produced elsewhere. The mechanism works only partially, but it works.

I have cited the above examples because they indicate two aspects of the topic we are discussing. On the one hand, they confirm the dehumanizing function, if we can use this broad term, of the false ideology that interferes in society's phenomena of social production. They also demonstrate that the phenomenological approach of the empiricist-functionalist anthropology only explains the surface of the facts, the same surface that is shared with the official vision of society that it is studying. On the other hand, the same examples minimize the cultural obsessions of anthropology since it is neither the marriage *guelaguetza* nor the *tequio* in itself that defines ontologically the Zapotec, their ethnicity. The two institutions are part of a concrete historical formation, they are communal and, in some cases, ethnic strategies that will vary in the future as if they were not always the same in the past. One indigenous community will use an institution, adapt it, transform it into a strategic resource, toss it out or, within the group, some sector will appropriate it for their own benefit. The institution itself does not define the culture but rather a historical moment of it, a moment in its complex development as a social formation.

There remains the unsettling fact that an indigenous people (and ethnicity) is a phenomenon of historical "long duration" with a history that goes back to an era before the formation of social classes and, in the few cases that we know, has survived the socialist experiment coexisting actively and antagonistically with it.

Ethnicity predates classes and survives them. I would add to this point an element as a proposal for discussion. The phenomena of ethnicity seem to be much more connected to the linguistic dimensions than to the social and economic dimension. Ethnic groups survive many historical changes, many modifications of economic, social and political structures, show an amazing ability for adaptation, for life, for autonomy. Zapotec, Quechua, Maya, Basque, Aymara, Roma have gone through social formations of different types. However they are still historically present as definable units in ethno-linguistic terms. By proposing the linguistic consideration, I am thinking of it in its broadest and deepest sense, thinking of the semantic universe to which a language refers, a universe with a diachronic profundity and a dynamic of adaptation that allows reality to be reordered and reclassified according to one's own internal design. In this sense, I think that idiomatic structure plays a role as a *referential matrix* for an ethnic group and perhaps it is this existence of a *referential matrix* for the ethnicity itself that allows the ethnic group, the specific indigenous people, to have historical continuity. This lends a consistency that goes beyond a certain number of social and

economic specifications related by a determined moment of its development as a social formation.<sup>3</sup>

If this nexus were provable, there would be still be the unsettling question of linguistic entropy that George Steiner pointed out when he asked:

*Do the great languages, perhaps, wear out? Do the great languages lose the speed and precision in creative reflexes? Do windows close on their communities instead of opening? In languages, is there... a vital cycle of prodigious growth, sure maturity and gradual decline? (Steiner 1973:182)*

These are disturbing questions because they invert the argument that we anthropologists normally have: it is possible that societies and cultures (ethnicities) die when the use of their language atrophies (ibid.:183) but not the other way around.

Fortunately, and all the more anguishing for the promoters of all kinds of authoritarian centralism and mediocrity-causing assimilationisms, the majority of Mexican indigenous peoples show no signs of entropy. This statement can be proven on a statistical level as well. As long as one agrees to concede a certain magnanimity of inventory toward the concrete fact that if some indigenous peoples do not grow at the same rate as the national average it is because of a certain dose of hunger that does not exactly facilitate a healthy demography, and not because they are "assimilating" and abandoning their ethnic specificity.

We have attempted to show the disguising nature of the functionalist use of the concept of culture. Because it is too inclusive and generalizing, it makes it difficult to perceive the character of the social product of cultural phenomena and the possible classist use of these in complex and multi-ethnic societies and this leads to an ignorance of the creative potential of the social dialectics.

The classist use of the cultural dimension is clearly traceable in the organization of the nation and of the Mexican state since its Independence and in subsequent reforms and restructuring. The concept of the nation and the Mexican state sustain themselves on the ideology of the necessity of cultural and linguistic homogeneity, a "mono-cultural" ideology that denies the diversified ethnic and social universe of Mexico and which, as a consequence, blocks the possibility of cultural fertility and hybridization. It is this potential dialectic of the ethnicities that is the best resource available to nations of multi-ethnic composition in order to achieve an original national project that is creative and democratic. The negation of this potential dialectic leads to social sterility and pathology. The great and successful historical projects have belonged to those societies that have been capable of coexisting with diverse elements of the cultural periphery. This statement is reinforced by the observations of contemporary biologists: "life-forms create their environment and, at the same time, are created again by the environment", in the sense that they can continually choose the right answers. What is inherited or learned is not the answer itself but rather the ability to respond ad-

equately to the environmental circumstances (Steiner 1973: 226). As long as the environmental circumstances are of a diversified range and quality, social groups can exercise their creative intelligence, their capacity for imagination and invention. On the contrary, the homogenization of the environment when the gamut of stimuli is reduced, dries up and sterilizes the intelligence of their reactions.

Lastly, it seems important to us to point out the contingent character of the phenomena that are generally defined by anthropology as culture: they are mechanisms of social strategy that characterize a historical period of an ethnic group more than permanently and a-historically represent the group itself. In this line of thinking, it seems that the linguistic dimension has a much more defining and less contingent character. Besides that, language - understood as a *referential matrix* of an ethnic group - acquires a notable operational value in the political strategies of indigenous peoples' ethno-political projects.

Seen from the angle of what we have called the *referential matrix*, the problem of relations with different cultures-ethnicities in today's Mexico takes on a historical dimension that is richer and more provocative. The possibilities for coexistence and mutual fecundity, for intelligent hybridization of the different ethnic groups that make up Mexico, constitute the greatest guarantee that a historical project can be founded upon principles of enrichment with all of the human experience that the country has the good fortune to possess and not on the opposite principle: that of mediocre homogenization, of forced enrollment in a single formula for living, given its last rites only by power.

## Notes

- 1 From the formal point of view, however, the illustrious 18th century ideas of the Bourbons with the emphasis on municipal administration had already found an echo in America. I owe a debt of recognition to the historian Alejandra Moreno Toscano for the information on Severo Maldonado's *Political Constitution Project* (1823), which proposed a pyramidal federative structure for Mexico with a special accent on the "self-administration" of the local bases.
- 2 "La casta divina", the divine caste or *Dzules* are the white Spanish-speaking people of Yucatán who constitute a powerful minority controlling the economic and political power of the region.
- 3 I am conscious of the risk that all of this argument can be interpreted according to the ancient keys of the philosophy of language of J. G. Herder and W. von Humboldt and the ensuing romantic creations about the "Volkgeist" and nationalism as the "theory of semantic fields or concepts" formulated in the first half of the 20th century. For the purpose of these lines of thought, the vision of the world is contained in language: it is precisely the internal form of the language that configures our perception of the world; in this way language constitutes an "intermediate world" that acts as a mediator between beings that speak and the material world. For our particular purpose, we are simply interested in reintroducing the suggestive field of linguistics into the anthropological discussion on culture and the cultures of a multi-ethnic society; the fundamental idea that "language is that in which the experiences and the knowledge of past generations is found enclosed and established", and that language, therefore, "has a radical influence on the way in which we perceive reality and act on it. Language is...a condensed social praxis", and individual praxis (Cf. Shaff 1975 *passim*).

## RESTORING MULTIPLICITY: INDIGENITIES AND THE CIVILIZING PROJECT IN LATIN AMERICA (1980)<sup>1</sup>

### abstract

The emergence of the indigenous liberation movement in Latin America is expressed in important documents such as the declarations of the Barbados I and II meetings, and also in the simultaneous resurgence of cultural, ideological and political expressions of Indianity.\* Despite their importance, these phenomena have been viewed with indifference by most scientists, an attitude caused by a colonialist and imperialist hegemonic vision and practice that denies, ignores or rejects any other societal form. The different ethnicities have been reduced to the generic category of "indigenous". This process has created a convergence among opposing forces as the assimilationist trend of the neo-colonial bourgeoisie is very similar to the integrationism of the political Left. The indigenous movements themselves have criticised the Left, considering that its vertical political system places them in a subordinate position that denies their right to decolonization and to the autonomous formulation of their own social projects. For its part, imperialism makes efforts to infiltrate and demobilise the indigenous movements by injecting funds and technical assistance. The raising of ethnic flags also runs the risk of falling into the trap of excessive patriotism, which in fact has affected some movements in Latin America, due to their almost desperate efforts to reconstruct or even invent their own history of civilization, symbols, heroes and struggles. However, insofar as the indigenous movements are one moment in the social dialectic, they cannot be judged and flatly rejected. This patriotism is understandable when one considers the indigenous mistrust of foreigners, who have historically played the role of dominators and usurpers of their resources and knowledge. In Latin America, in general, the idea of the unity of and a coincidence between the State and nation has been promoted as a self-evident truth, with its origins in the formation of the nation-state as an independent institution of the colonial metropoli, but which prolongs the colonial process through its centralist administrative apparatus. It is based on the fiction that the people form the nation and this makes up the State when, in reality, it is this latter that invents the nation, to which it attempts to give a unity and homogeneity that does not exist. The State not only conceals the nation but all the concrete nations that exist in the country. Statistics are one

\* This text was written as a paper for the ninth World Congress of Sociology (Uppsala, Sweden, 1980). A fuller version of the text was later published in *Latin American Perspectives*, no. 33, IX(2), spring 1982.

way in which the State conceals and denies its ethnic diversity, collecting information and interpreting it by means of a logic that confirms its portrayal of State unity. And yet independent studies have demonstrated the existence of more than 400 indigenous peoples in Latin America and more than 40 million indigenous individuals. This population can be classified into two broad groups. The first corresponds to societies in the Andes and Meso-America who are the descendants of civilizations that had a class structure and state apparatus in common, in addition to their agrarian nature. The second includes pre-Hispanic, pre-colonial, pre-classist and pre-statist societies. These latter are those that are currently experiencing the greatest aggression from the capitalist system.

This title may give the impression that in the Latin American nation-states of this hemisphere there exists a political will to develop a civilizing project that is both autonomous from and an alternative to the imperialist project. Nothing could be further from reality. The neocolonial bourgeoisie or "bourgeoisie of servitude" (R. Flores Alvarado cited in Herbert et al. 1972), which controls the state apparatus has been and continues to be incapable of devising and formulating new global patterns of civilization. By definition, it is a bourgeoisie of vicarious imitators.

It is among the Indo-American and Afro-American masses in the rural sectors and in the proletarian and popular classes that alternative options and civilizing originality is to be found - a result of the very process of exploitation and of the defense mechanisms developed to maintain relative independence from the massive phenomenon of cultural expropriation and ideological penetration taking place within the general colonial process. In this discussion, I am interested in examining the indigenous movement within the general process of continental liberation and, therefore, of the civilizing process.

### Colonial Exploitation and Reductionism

In recent years, a small sector of Latin American social scientists has begun to point out the emergence of what can be considered an indigenous liberation movement on a continental scale (*Declaration of Barbados I*, 1971; *Declaración de Barbados II*, 1977; *Proyecto Marandú* 1975; CADAL 1973, 1977a, b, c, and d; Sanders 1977; Salazar 1977). Simultaneous with this movement, and in many cases the basis for it, there has been a resurgence of a series of cultural, ideological, and political expressions that can be included under the denomination of *indianidad* [which could be translated here as *Indianity*, *indigeneity*] (Herbert 1977), a category that implies yet exceeds in scope any specific indigenous ethnicity. The indifference displayed by the majority of social scientists to this important political

phenomenon should not lead us to minimize its importance and its revolutionary potential. The academic perception of this historical phenomenon is obscured by the discretion and semi-clandestinity in which the indigenous ethnoses and their organizations conduct their political movements and also above all by the deep-rooted colonial attitudes which pervade the thinking and the information shared by the social scientists of our countries.

This phenomenon is related to the old tradition of colonial obscurantism concerning our perception of society and of our own thought. Colonialism is a "total situation" that takes hold not only as a way of partitioning and administering the world but also as a way of monopolizing ideological style and reducing reality to the single dimension of the colonizer. Colonialism and imperialism propose to and impose on the world one discourse, one form of conscience, and one science. Thus restricted, the world and reality appear as the only dimension worthy of being known, and (from a Marxist perspective) the only dimension of transformable reality that may be modified through revolutionary action. All other forms of nature and society are denied, ignored, rejected, or made imperceptible.

The process of reduction encompasses the history, the existence and specific historical projects (ethnic projects) of those sectors of Latin American society that the colonial process, from its inception, has defined as peripheral or classified in a single and distinct category - the indigenous or colonized peoples (Bonfil Batala 1971, 1973). This categorization ignores the hundreds of different and specific historical and ethnic formations that make up the contemporary American landscape and embodies the totalitarian character of the colonial mode of thought which, in many cases, the most progressive as well as conservative sectors of our countries hold in equal regard. The process of abstraction and generalization (all the ethnos, all the social-historical formations, all the various degrees and histories of interrelationships and dependency, are included and disguised under one single category: *Indians*) produces the concurrence of opposites. The assimilationist and integrationist tendencies of the neocolonial bourgeois state (the *indigenist* ideologies and policies) correspond to a revolutionary integrationism (characterized by some indigenous organizations as merely class-bound) of a political left that seems to have been castrated in its intellectual daring by colonialism.

This accusation is not mine but rather comes from the indigenous organizations and their leadership (see *Manifiesto de Tiahuanacu* 1973; *Movimiento Indio Peruano* 1977; Roel 1977; Tumiri Apaza 1978). It is a grave accusation insofar as it alludes to political and strategic policies that cast the indigenous ethnoses into a secondary and subordinate position in the revolutionary process, once more denying them their right to de-colonization, to choose and to formulate autonomous societal projects even though they make common cause in the liberation of other non-indigenous sectors of our societies. The indigenous ethnoses and their liberation movements join in the criticism the world-wide revolutionary movement addresses to an over-simplified Leninist conception of the "working-class

leadership of the party and of the vanguard" that denies the initiative and participation of the masses in political initiatives. The process of revision and criticism on the part of the *indigenist* movement has its risks: already accusations have been made of divisionism, of energy diverted to secondary movements, of populism, of the creation of nonexistent problems (or ones of minimal importance, namely the problem of ethnic and national autonomies), and even of racism (see the debates produced by the Declarations of Barbados I and II in *América Indígena* 1971 and *Nueva Antropología* 1978, and also Tumiri Apaza 1978). These are the risks faced by every liberationist and creative endeavor when it rejects the frozen and rigid past in order to explore new solutions or to imagine future courses not necessarily tied to the historical experiences already carried out by others.

But if there is at least a limited sympathy for this kind of phenomena among the progressive intellectuals of our countries, one cannot say the same about the imperialist camp. We know of at least half a dozen attempts (some of them successful, others not) to infiltrate and demobilize indigenous movements. The attempts range from the organization and convening of extensive congresses and meetings of indigenous movements to the direct and massive penetration of indigenous organizations with funds and "technical" aid.

Among the indigenous movements and organizations, there is a growing understanding that, just as capitalism at the world level has been and continues to be fundamentally colonialist, so too are high levels of colonialism present at the national level. This is manifest in the overall social structure from the time of the European invasion onward. There continues to be a permanent appropriation of resources, labor, and scientific and technological knowledge - all at the expense of the indigenous populations (see the expression of this awareness in the indigenous documents presented to the United Nations in Geneva in 1977). As a colonialist manifestation, its character is all-inclusive, that is to say, it encompasses both the economic and the ideological structure. Both the proletariat, exploited in the mining and industrial sectors, and the landless peasant, selling his labor to the landowner or migrating and taking refuge in peripheral rural areas (displacing and in turn exploiting the local indigenous group) act objectively the same as the "bourgeois working class" of the imperialist countries. Just as the bourgeois working class obtains victories and wage gains at the expense of the peasants and the workers of the colonized countries, so the colonized proletariat and peasantry act objectively against the indigenous.

### The Civilizing Project

The ethno-political movements in the Andean countries and elsewhere in Latin America are going through - and dialectically must go through - a period of chau-

vinism, of rejection or suspicion toward the other exploited social sectors. This is an essential moment of the "actual consciousness" on the road to the construction of the "possible consciousness" (Goldman 1969) which, in the end, may lead to autonomous solidarity and unification with other movements and organizations of oppressed sectors (the case of the Quechua and Aymara organizations in Bolivia; Mink'a, Movimiento Indio Túpac Katari; the Movimiento Indio Peruano; El Poder Comunero [Peru]; see CADAL, 1977c and d).

This ethnic chauvinism is revealed in the almost desperate need to reconstruct, or to "invent", if necessary, its own civilizing history, unearthing its own symbols, heroes, forces of resistance and struggles for collective consciousness and to expose the deceitful, official national history. Such chauvinism cannot be interpreted by academics or party militants as naive, fragmentative and divisive. Nor can indigenous movements be discounted with authoritarian slogans derived from cadre-school manuals or party catechisms. The goals of these movements have more to do with the "civilizing" dimension (Ribeiro 1973) than with tactical and strategic concerns.

Since these indigenous movements represent a moment in the "social dialectic", they cannot be artificially frozen, judged or rejected with no further ado. Every real process of de-colonization must be global and absolute because the phenomenon that it faces is also absolute; that is, it has to aim at the liquidation of the economic, social and political structure that gave sustenance to and enabled the reproduction of the system, and it must break the ideological categories, the thought, the "science", the ethics and the aesthetics that connived, supported and justified this phenomenon. Failure to understand this moment of the liberation dialectic implies a shutting out of history, an ignoring of the dynamics of revolution. Even time must be reinvented along with the calendar, and the names of things. The civilizing essence of every inversion and reinvention of the world must be recognized, along with the generative quality of the revolution, so that its festive character can be restored to everyday living.

In the same manner in which the revolutionary movement of a metropolitan country recreates and enriches the working class culture and submits the bourgeoisie culture to historical criticism, this creative function of a revolutionary culture in the peripheral colonized countries has been carried out with the utmost efficiency by those sectors of the population that have actively maintained themselves apart from, and on the defensive against, the ideological and cultural exploitation of the dominant sectors of society (the alienated representatives of the colonizer's culture). The indigenous ethnoses have been and thus continue to be a reservoir of civilizing alternatives. It is not possible to forget or ignore that other countries of the world provided the initial accumulation for European capitalism and that during this process and in succeeding phases of capitalism, Latin America not only contributed its land, its labor and its resources but it was also deprived of those fundamental civilizing elements that allowed the historical ac-

celeration of the metropolitan countries. These elements were and are still found within the indigenous civilizations. Hundreds of domesticated plants of nutritional, medicinal and industrial use; agricultural and mining production techniques; city-planning practices; ecological knowledge and technology (it is very much in vogue, at the present time, to expropriate this indigenous knowledge through massive imperialist ethnographic investigations); mathematical, temporal and astronomic computations; "para-psychological" knowledge, art, poetry and music. All of this was expropriated while loudly proclaiming the superiority of Western civilization and, in the process, killing millions of people, destroying cities, buildings, libraries, universities, irrigation works, schools, forests and cultivated fields; annihilating thinkers, philosophers and scientists; burning books and codices; leveling buildings and inscriptions; destroying languages; trying to erase every possibility of a collective memory and, therefore, of any projection into the future.

Why should it then be surprising if there is suspicion on the part of the indigenous liberation movements toward non-indigenous intellectuals and the petty bourgeois politicians who propose alliances and schemes, revolutionary formulas, and an imported catechism for their liberation?

We have been making reference to two categories that require some clarification. They are "civilizing" and "Indianness/indigeneity." In the case of the former, Darcy Ribeiro (1973) has used and carefully defined civilizing as a general and specific process and one which refers to sequences of long historical duration, of great temporal depth; to global styles that are expressed in and through a determined ethnos, which are preclusive in relation to others, cohesive and coherent with the passage of time and the commonality of language and culture. Civilization, on the other hand, is the crystallization of the civilizing process. In this sense, that which is civilizing refers to the radically collective character and the great historical length of a determined ethnic style. In the light of these definitions, certain sociological and historical phenomena lose their apparent accidental quality: for example, the instances of ethno-civilizing renaissance in populations that for centuries have remained somnolent, in a kind of historical lethargy or perhaps the most notorious cases being precisely the renaissance of certain European ethnicities, and the ethnicities that make up the American Indianness. This perspective does not imply in any way the postulation of a trans-historical essence (Herbert 1977) but rather affirms the antagonistic centuries-long character of the indigenous resistance.

As far as the concept of Indianness is concerned, we are indebted to Jean-Loup Herbert (1977) for his delineation and introduction to the recent discourse on the phenomena of decolonization and liberation of the American indigenous ethnoses:

*The colonized Indian, as well as his Asian or African counterparts, at the moment of regaining the historical initiative... actualizes his collective memory to build with its*

*regained strength a liberation project. His interested selection, partial to his own history - a distillation of the vision of the defeated - is already proof of the regenerative metamorphosis. That moment of intense mobilization of the symbolic, emotional affective forces - subjective, yet nonetheless real forces - will throw the reinterpreted past and the hoped-for future into tension; this ideological emphasis, in the specific American case, we call Indianity. It is, namely, the individual and collective awareness of the validity of a civilization; a reciprocal focussing of the resistance and of the liberational potential of its process.*

### Sociological and Statistical Falsifications

Census statistics on Latin American Indo-ethnic populations are perhaps one of the areas of social knowledge and information which most clearly shows the reductive and manipulative intervention of the colonial mode of thought. It is a mystification on two levels: first, the state becomes the interpreter of the nation and lies about its own nature; and second, the state decodes the information that has been obtained in such a way that very little or almost nothing may be utilized by the indigenous peoples themselves in carrying out their own social projects.

Let us remember that numerical, statistical and census data in no way automatically enjoys the privilege of scientific "objectivity" or of antiseptic political disinterest. Data is gathered according to a selective plan and on an *a priori* global project which expresses, consciously or not, a determinate economic, social, and political point of view. Human reality, as far as it is socially constituted, includes the ideological and techno-scientific contributions of those minority social sectors that assume for themselves the use of knowledge for the purpose of planning and government. Thus, the official and public statistical language is part of what may be called the "language of power" or one of the forms of political discourse. Nevertheless, as Henri Lefebvre (1976a, 1976b, 1977) has pointed out on several occasions, this language is the least apparent yet most important expression of the state's manipulation of knowledge through a mixture of ideology and knowledge, of representations and mystifications which constrain, if not disallow altogether, the ability for critical evaluation.

In Mexico and in Peru, for example, as in most of the rest of the Latin American nation-states, the official plans for gathering statistics (both economic and demographic) are premised on an axiom that assumes a unity and coincidence - achieved or still to be achieved - between the state and the nation. This axiom had its historical origin in the relatively recent formation of the nation-state as an institution politically independent from the colonial metropolis and in the subsequent prolongation of the colonial process in structuring a centralized and centralizing administrative apparatus. This apparatus is the manager and executor of government measures and, in some cases, is the author and generator of those measures.

Some of the historical and conceptual roots of this axiom reside in the initial and continuous deception - permanently renewed by the initiative of the national bourgeoisie (of the Latin American Republics) at the political level, as well as in the more subtle and sustaining level of culture and morals - that the people have made the nation and that the latter has given rise to the state. Therefore, the state becomes the "mirror of the nation and the incarnation of the people" (Lefebvre 1976a: 16). But has this in fact been the case? The colonial state preceded the nation, establishing its territorial boundaries and socially "inventing" the nation to which it gave, or attempted to give, a unitary and homogeneous cultural content. This fiction reaches its greatest heights when it is able to impose modern European ideology while proclaiming with no further ado that the natural place of the state is the nation: both of them begotten with some pain yet ultimately to be accepted.

But, we insist that in essence the state shaped the nation, and continues intentionally to shape it out of (and we may add, despite) the aggregate of ethnoes and other peoples which, in different political circumstances, would have deserved to be called nations in the classical European sense. The bourgeoisie, as a socially relevant phenomenon, should not have preceded the Peruvian, Mexican or Guatemalan nation-states but rather have emanated from them. The bourgeoisie, thus, took permanent advantage of the state apparatus for its establishment. The national market has been, in any case, a phenomenon of much greater social import and weight than the fluid concept of the nation, which has been but the *a posteriori* operation of an intellectual option.

As a matter of fact, we are facing a concept of the nation that has been defined as "statist" (Salvi 1973); that is, the nation is identified with the state, thus assuming that this momentary relationship of forces is universal and everlasting. This is a bureaucratic, "statist" and static conception that, at the same time, is guilty of voluntarism since it presupposes something that is difficult to demonstrate - namely, the existence of a collective rhetorical will of the majority of individuals who, expressing the desire to live together in the same space, constituted the state. Yet common sense and a bit of history clearly indicate that this collective willingness is a fiction. This is so, at least from a sociological point of view, in the Andean and Meso-American countries, where large indigenous sectors (the most colonized within the colonial framework) not only do not share this supposed will but have, on the contrary, constantly expressed and continue to express their total nonconformity. This ideological and sociological fiction has contributed, from the time of Hegel, to the making of the state into a fetish; in other words, it has transformed this product of social acts - and for this reason a changeable and replaceable institution - into an entity with its own autonomous existence (Marx 1968 *passim*). Free of the social relationships that produced it, and above all that continue to produce it, the state conceals all the productive acts it encompasses (Lefebvre 1976b: 118-164 *passim*). The state not only hides the nation but

all the real, concrete or merely possible nations. Yet, sooner or later, it can no longer mask the development of the existing violent contradiction between the nations (that is the indigenous peoples) and the state.

What is important to underscore here are some of the elements of the historical and ideological context in which social events take place and develop and the supposedly apolitical and non-ideological facts which are the public statistics. Precisely because of the highly ideological content implied or suggested by the official statistics, it is especially important to clarify the implicit assumptions on which they are based. Statistics which in their original design, manner of gathering, processing of analysis and political application, manifest the clear intention of denying the ethnic diversity of a large sector of the population, falsify reality and, in consequence, the country's identity. In addition, and as an important by-product, the false knowledge simultaneously produces a false perception, and the establishment and strengthening of the false collective conscience shared both by the ruler and to a great extent by the ruled.

Yet beyond the sociological and statistical falsifications of the national states, the concrete reality and the evidence remain: in the Latin American countries there are today more than 400 major ethno-linguistic indigenous groups/nationalities that, according to prudent calculations, total more than 40 million people (Mayer and Masferrer 1979; Rodriguez and Soubié 1978). These are facts and an undeniable historical reality that can no longer be camouflaged. For some of the countries (Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador and Guatemala) the ethnic indigenous population constitutes the absolute majority. Some regions of other countries (the southeastern regions of Mexico, the Yucatan peninsula, the Mapuche area of Chile, to name but a few) are overwhelmingly indigenous.

We are thus faced not only with the fact of this flagrant numerical reality but by an act of fundamental civilizing and political import. These various indigenous presences are also taking shape as the presence of Indianity; that is to say, as specific cultural and societal alternatives, and at the same time as the civilizing style for a decolonization which is autonomous and genuinely American. When the indigenous organizations of Bolivia, Peru, and Guatemala propose the re-Indianization of the mestizo and ladino sectors of the population that have allowed them to be overwhelmed by the colonization process, they are in fact proposing a politically revolutionary and radical civilizing style. Re-Indianization seeks the root of its own ethnic history, and the common history of all colonized and subjugated peoples. It questions the centuries of colonialism and the thousand years of previous history. The indigenous organizations have taken it upon themselves to carry out these tasks (CADAL 1973, 1977a, b, c, and d; *Declaración de Barbados II* 1977), giving evidence of a liberationist, decolonizing and anti-imperialist movement which inevitably proposes a radical criticism of the Latin American nations and states as neocolonial expressions and prejudiced instruments of a minority bourgeois sector.

In this sense, the state, in the case of the countries with indigenous majorities, is doubly false: false as an administrative and governing apparatus independently established, having been expropriated by and for a reduced social sector - the dependent or colonial bourgeoisie - and false because its class-bound nature displays and manifests the exclusive ethno-civilizing character of the colonizing population. As such, it is the superstructure that fulfils the function of reproducing the ideological (or informative) system of the culture, language, traditions, ethics and aesthetics of the non-indigenous sector. Since the state does not represent the nation (or nations), it must mystify the history and space of those people whom it claims to administer. It must postulate and impose one history, one language, one ethnicity, one cultural style (even though, it must admit the contradictions between one or several popular and workers' cultures and a bourgeois culture). It must falsify the concrete ideological reality and impair and minimize the multi-ethnic character of the national population (the census and statistical lies). It must continue to invent, in any way it can, a single nation where there are more than one; a unity where there is diversity; a single history and a single language where there are many. Centralism, assimilationism, unitarianism and homogeneity are not mere administrative and governmental goals to the Latin American neocolonial states. After long years of educational imposition and massive diffusion, they have become a style of thought and of knowledge which has turned into the only social framework of knowledge and the only possible cultural model.

Finally, this false nation-state tries to discard and liquidate the peculiarities, the specific ethnicities, the diversity, and all other civilizing alternatives. It assumes the role of sole producer and reproducer of culture; in short, it completes the colonizing chore initiated by the metropolis some centuries ago. Culture, or the "civilizing process", appears as an exclusive form or attribute of the nation-state. All other possibilities for autonomous civilizing development must be discredited (that which is indigenous is inferior since it belongs to an evolutionary moment that has already been overcome, a historical residue, an aspect of anti-development, etc.), or decisively liquidated through violence, repression or extinction.

### **Class Position and Indigenous Ethnos**

Up to this point, we have dealt with indigenous reality within the framework of a dialectic opposition: colonizer and colonized, ruler and ruled. The facts are more complicated. In addition to these colonial coordinates, there remains the complexity of the class structure of the Latin American societies in which the indigenous ethnos are inserted and intertwined. Hence there is the need to dis-

tinguish, tentatively, a minimal typology of the indigenous populations in terms of class position and relative potential for political mobilization.

Let us recapitulate an evident premise: in Latin America the interethnic relationships are always class relationships. In the context of a multi-ethnic social relation, class contradictions, or the antagonistic nature of the interests of different groups, evidence themselves without ambiguities and in full clarity and crudeness. Let me summarize that the difficulty of eliciting synthetic meaning and explicitness, found in interethnic relationships insofar as the class contradictions are contained in them, is due to the extremely complex character of such ethnoses. The whole semantic field can be utilized by members of the dominant class of another ethnos for the purpose of ideological manipulation. The social conscience of the subjugated social groups unambiguously confronts the objective political and economic conditions of exploitation, which cannot be masked or manipulated by the dominant sectors except with great difficulty. In this area, among others, it is necessary to find the causes of the progressive and autonomist tendencies of certain emergent bourgeois indigenous who violently confront the objective conditions of their situation as members of an exploited and dominated ethnos. They themselves find in their own ethnicity a level of consciousness that momentarily puts them in solidarity with the dispossessed sectors of their own ethnic group, in opposition to the oppressing national ethnos. This is even more true where there exists an attempt on the part of the indigenous bourgeoisie to effect an economic (or political) project.

An initial typology of the indigenous ethnoses of Central and South America shows two major groups. The first is the macro-ethnoses concentrated on the Andean region and in Meso-America; the second is the micro-ethnoses located in the rest of the continent but especially in the remaining marginal areas, or in those areas that the expansion of the capitalist frontier has pushed into marginality.

I use the term macro- and micro-ethnoses in a purely sociological sense. Nevertheless, if we assume a historical criteria, it becomes clear that the indigenous macro-ethnoses (Nahua, Mixtec, Zapotec, all the Mayan groups, Quechua, Aymara, etc.) are descendants of civilizations that had in their pre-colonial past two fundamental and common experiences: the presence of a social structure of classes, and the existence of a state apparatus with various degrees of administrative organization, extension and refinement depending on the historical moment and the area. In addition, all these macro-ethnoses were constituted as fundamentally agrarian civilizations which, during the colonial process of de-organization and reorganization, were reshaped into an integrated peasantry within a larger and all-encompassing social and economic entity. In all of these pre-Colombian macro-ethnoses there were governing élites, intellectuals, middle sectors, tribute-paying peasants, etc. After the European invasion, two parallel systems of ethnic institutions were established: on the one hand, an esoteric, clandestine system

that tried to maintain the pre-colonial ideological elements having very little correspondence with the existing economic base and social structure; and on the other hand, a clear system partaking in the diversification process of a larger socio-economic entity (various modes of production coexisting and interacting), suffers the inevitable conditionings of this all-inclusive structure.

From the sixteenth century on, in Central America as well as in the Andean region, *caciquismo* (indigenous elitism) consolidated its position as an intermediate sector between the indigenous population and the Spanish colonial leadership. In many cases, it is possible to trace the origins of the indigenous and mestizo bourgeoisies to these formative years of the colony. What is important in the case of the macro-ethnoses is that the colonial period and the capitalist development of the new nation-states produced a class society in which it is at least possible to clearly identify: 1) a majority social sector made up of a peasantry of small owners or communal usufructuaries;<sup>2</sup> 2) an incipient petty bourgeoisie of merchants, teachers, craftsmen and independent specialists; and 3) a middle bourgeoisie which, in certain cases, could be of ancient aristocratic origin, consolidated around the monopolization of land or, perhaps, of recent formation and economically centered around the control of commercial activities, petty industry, transportation, etc.

The indigenous intelligentsia is a sector or strata that is constantly acquiring greater weight. It is important to clarify that I am not referring to the traditional intelligentsia, which has always existed and enjoys a semi-clandestine life (the traditional medicine men, philosophers, priests, agricultural calendar specialists, etc.) but to a sector of the indigenous people that in most cases has its origin in the indigenous petty bourgeoisie. They are the teachers educated in the Catholic or Protestant missionary schools or trained by the various indigenist institutions. They are the agricultural technicians, the lawyers, the bilingual professors or the fortunate few who obtain a full secondary or university education. Some of the leaders of the most important indigenous rebellions and revolutions of this continent have historically emerged from this sector and, at the present time, continue to provide the leadership of many political movements. To a lesser degree, this strata is also found in the micro-ethnoses and is playing a similar political role.

As far as the indigenous micro-ethnoses are concerned, it is possible to state that the majority have been and continue to be subjected to a constant penetration by the global capitalist system - a penetration not exclusively confined to the area of economics. With increasing speed, even the relatively isolated groups of the marginal zones are being affected directly or indirectly by the capitalist system. In the case of these ethnic groups, which are derived from pre-Hispanic, pre-colonial, pre-classist and pre-statist social formations, the recent historical acceleration is producing a social reorganization that in many cases implies the appearance of an incipient internal class structure. It consists of recent or initial

class formations almost always based on a small strata of merchants and small-town petty bourgeoisie and a sector of "bureaucratic petty bourgeoisie" - teachers, promoters in the service of the state and other minor functionaries.

In Meso-America the classification of macro- and micro-ethnoses leaves the intermediate-size ethnoses, the majority, in limbo. They consist of groups of between 10,000 and 100,000 persons. In general, these indigenous ethnoses display a social structure similar to that of the macro-ethnoses, that is, a fundamentally agrarian economic base, peasant-type social structure, and the presence of small middle sectors. In many cases the commercial and bureaucratic petty bourgeoisie that is found within the territory of these ethnoses is mestizo in composition - made up by the population of the national (regional) ethnoses.

In the northern frontier of Meso-America, in the tropical forests of South America, in the savannas and lowlands of the tropics, we find ethnoses that come from hunting and gathering traditions: classless pre-Hispanic social formations or formations with a barely visible stratification and lacking a centralized or state administrative structure. The colonial reorganization radically influenced these societies whenever it came in contact with them. The nineteenth century as well as the present capitalist expansion have tended to produce two general effects not necessarily mutually exclusive: first, the territorial and social atomization of the ethnoses into subgroups and the self-segregation of the ethnoses whenever territorial space for refuge is available; and second, the tendency toward the proletarianization of the groups. In addition, within one or two generations, there appears a rural proletariat quite similar in terms of production to the neighboring mestizo population, with the exception of ethnic differences caused by the persistence of ideological, semantic-cultural, and linguistic structures, and in some cases of social organization, that correspond to the previous economic base and structure. This would seem to distinguish the ethnic group from the neighboring mestizo populations more in terms of the mode of consumption than in the mode of production.

### Indianness: the Unifying Consciousness

Yet in all of these ethnic groups there is a common historical condition which underlies Indianness as a unifying consciousness assuming and exceeding the local ethnic consciousness. Thus, there is a commonality between the nations that have suffered colonization, invasion, military occupation, territorial and social fragmentation, and the blockade of their civilizing promise. They have been decapitated and broken in their creative potential, in their intellectual endeavors and in their social projects. It is to this common historical condition that the indigenous organizations and liberation movements appeal when outlining a unifying action for all the indigenous peoples of America in their effort to recuperate

and repossess the civilizing space that neocolonial capitalism and imperialism continue to expropriate. The undertaking of the indigenous liberation movements is civilizing insofar as the proposed objectives clearly call for the subversion and radical reorganization of the "national" spaces, the total recuperation of the interrupted history, the "re-Indianization" of vast sectors of the population of the continent - the mestizos - and the unity of the continental indigenous people respecting the differential principles of each indigenous nation. In other words, unity does not imply uniformity. This is the civilizing requirement par excellence, recognizing multiplicity as the framework of knowledge and of existence, and the interaction of differences as the only appropriate environment for the construction of civilization.

### Notes

- 1 As I review these essays, written more than twenty years ago, with a certain feeling of culpability for their anti-imperialist impetus and socialist enthusiasm, I realize that contrary to more recent claims by Western neo-liberal apologists and globalophiliacs, old imperialism and colonialism (metamorphosed into high tech cyber destruction) are alive and well. They are actually very proactive with their unequivocal discourse of precision bombs, surgical strikes, unfortunate collateral damage, and regime change in re-establishing their military power in the core of Islam and the Middle East, Central Asia, Colombia and wherever their engineered free market requires it. It is the 10th day of the US and UK war of aggression against Iraq and writing is becoming an even more painful struggle against rage, exasperation and frustration for having been mute and assaulted in my intelligence by an army of offensive "embedded journalism", vulgar militarized propaganda and obscene pseudo-political reasoning. And as I try to straddle the uncertain boundaries of social science, humanism, human rights and human solidarity, I long for the times when socialist utopia, world peace and the establishment of a just global society seemed to be just around the corner.
- 2 From the point of view of the tendencies in social consciousness and political mobilization, the difference between these two forms of land tenure - private and communal - would not seem too important, although it will be necessary to analyze this further.

## CULTURAL STRUGGLE FOR SOVEREIGNTY IN OAXACA (1985)

### abstract

The nature of indigenous identity is an open issue rather than a definitive and univocal sociological act.\* Ethnicity is a phenomenon that is at once both subjective and objective, a consequence of the historical accumulation of different factors and lifestyles but also the projection of values, ideas and structures that are attributed to it from outside the ethnic group itself. Indigenous ethnicities are capable of adapting dominant structures that are external to their own reproductive pattern, which is maintained over time as a referential nucleus determined by historical conditions of interaction with colonial and neo-colonial systems. These mechanisms form survival strategies for indigenous peoples as culturally diverse entities and explain their current existence, despite centuries of domination and oppression and numerous attempts at assimilation. The text offers some ideas with which to understand the reproduction mechanisms and processes of indigenous identities as differentiated entities in Mexico. Firstly, this reproduction takes place within a framework of conditions that are external to the ethnic community, imposed on them from outside against their will and arising from the context of the unequal development of dependent capitalism, within which the indigenous play the role of reserve labour force linked to the land and the subsistence economy. On the one hand, this economic marginalisation excludes them from commercial agriculture, trade and industry and limits the expansion of the market economy but, on the other, it also enables them to resist and maintain the conditions for their ethnic reproduction, even when this proves incompatible with the stated desires for their national integration. Secondly, the peoples reproduce by means of internal conditions that are expressed in the relations they maintain with their environment, their history, their conceptions and their linguistic systems, which enunciate and reproduce their thought categories. Thirdly, ethnicity is expressed in the way in which a people defines its production and use of surpluses. Almost all indigenous peoples nowadays are linked into the market and the fact that use value lives alongside exchange value represents a contradiction that is not easy to explain. And yet the tension between these two values has gone on for centuries in the societies of Meso-America, and this is why the current reality must not be considered as a transitional stage but as a permanent and structural condition for reproduction of their ethnicity. Cultural independence can be said to exist when a people can juggle the relationship between use value and exchange value without being dominated by capitalism. There

\* This essay was published in 1985 under the title "Cultural Development in Ethnic Groups: Anthropological Explorations in Education", in *International Social Science Journal* 104, XXXVIII(2), UNESCO, Paris.

are two levels of ethnicity or awareness of a people. The first, organic or natural, is a passive awareness of themselves whilst the second, not organic but political, is a class conscience by which the indigenous peoples can relate to other sectors of society and seek to overcome economic, social and political inequalities.

### Ethnicity in Question

In our view, the nature of an indigenous ethnicity is an open question rather than a definite and unequivocal sociological fact; an evolving potential rather than a mould that is set once and for all; a complex of cultural self perceptions and identities, each of which can be retrieved from the depths as circumstances and the needs of the moment require, yet which are essentially collective and shared, and have an autonomous existence independent of the individual will. Nevertheless, ethnicity is a phenomenon of both the subjective and the objective realm. It results from the historical accumulation of various factors, modes of life which may be consciously asserted or not and, at the same time, it is a projection from outside the group of values, ideas and structures that are attributed to the ethnic group, whether it accepts them or not.

In this sense, the nature of indigenous ethnicity is always determined by the historical condition of interaction with the colonial and neo-colonial system and domination by it. But, at the same time, ethnicity is a phenomenon of "long historical duration" covering lengthy periods of time during which different modes of production and forms of social organization have emerged, developed and given way to others, although the people's essential cultural nucleus has not ceased to act as a "reproductive reference matrix". As such, indigenous ethnicity is a phenomenon that is reproduced in two conditioning contexts: the internal, that of its own "reproductive matrix"; and the external, which imposes dominant structures that affect and pervade all the dimensions of ethnicity. The social areas of interaction between the Latin American indigenous peoples and the rest of society have thus become a frontier, a threshold zone, an opportunity for the desire of others to enforce their will and a barrier constituted by the more or less successful cultural resistance of the indigenous. These areas of interaction between the dominant classes of society and the indigenous communities have varied in character throughout the colonial period and subsequent neo-colonial times, which are marked by dependent capitalist development from the ideological-cum-religious imposition of evangelization, accompanied by the destruction and restructuring of the productive, organizational and political system, to the constant penetration, in innumerable ways, of the educational system and the

mass media by the ideology and culture of the dominant class. At such times the force of spoliation and violent oppression gave way to a slow, inexorable, continual process of the expropriation of indigenous direct producers in favor of what Samir Amin calls "permanent primitive accumulation" which, even today, marks the basic relations between indigenous peoples and the rest of society.

In this way, phenomena related to ethnicity, to the specific forms assumed by each indigenous ethnic group, may be understood by considering general concepts which are a matter of history and which have a long time span - analytical instruments that can overcome the limitations of short-term, immediate causality and of interpretations derived from economics. How can we account for the will to live manifested by these forms of cultural diversity when everything would appear to suggest that they may be destroyed or else incorporated into the generic culture of the dominant society within a few decades? How can we explain the incontrovertible fact that there are large numbers of indigenous peoples in Mexico and America, even after centuries of aggression and oppression and decades of systematic attempts to assimilate them? According to the most moderate estimates, based on official statistics, there are approximately 30 million indigenous belonging to about 400 ethnic groups in Latin America (Mayer and Masferrer 1979; Rodríguez and Soubié 1979). Recent demographic surveys show that in 1980 there was an indigenous population of more than nine million in Mexico, and it is likely that by the year 2000 there will be about the same number as at the time of the invasion in the sixteenth century (Varese 1983a: 141-7).

### The Reproduction of Ethnicity

To help the reader understand the mechanisms and reproduction process of indigenous ethnicities in Mexico as distinct social and cultural entities, we shall refer to some ideas set forth in previous works (Varese 1983c).

First, the reproduction of the indigenous peoples (as distinct ethnicities) takes place within the framework of conditions external to the ethnic community, conditions which are imposed on it from outside, against its will, and which arise in the structural context of what has been called the unequal and combined development of peripheral or dependent capitalism. This means that in the areas occupied by indigenous peoples, "pre-capitalist" forms of capitalist production or petty mercantile capitalism coexist with fully-fledged capitalist forms of production. Most indigenous rural peoples are engaged in the first of these forms of production, the rest of the region's inhabitants being directly or indirectly active in the capitalist productive sector (mining and energy industries, those in which capital and management are principally the responsibility of the state, and privately owned agricultural and livestock-raising concerns). Relations of production therefore vary considerably. In rural areas, where indigenous populations

are concentrated, relations tend to be predominantly reciprocal and to involve redistribution within the community; or they may be of a purely mercantile character, as in the case of intra-communal relations in the form of local markets; or, finally, they may be capitalist in nature, as in the case of relations between the indigenous peasantry and the external capitalist commercial sector. Relations of production are different, on the other hand, in areas of capitalist investment where the indigenous communities become part of the permanent or seasonal wage-earning labor force and therefore enter the circuit of fully capitalist relations of production.

The function performed by the indigenous peasant sector in a subordinate capitalist economy is related to the fact that, in peripheral areas, the system as a whole needs a reserve labor force linked to the land and to a subsistence economy. The maintenance of such a semi-proletarian peasantry, with specific ethnic and linguistic loyalties and differences, or assimilated into a generic rural subculture, performs two complementary functions. On the one hand, it means that the salary scale on the labor market is low - equal to or less than the production of use-value in the peasant economy. On the other hand, it implies the permanent availability of a labor force whose members are self-supporting and not dependent on outside employers, and who usually work on their own land to produce and distribute commonly used commodities, even in the worst conditions of constant demographic, biotic and ecological deterioration.

The maintenance and development in local areas of a majority sector of indigenous peasants with a subsistence economy, plus another sector producing commodities, is an inevitable consequence of the law of capitalist accumulation on the periphery of the world capitalist system. It is due to the fact that underdeveloped capitalism needs to maximize its profits by keeping wages down. This, in turn, drastically limits the expansion of the internal market and perpetuates the divisions in society that result in the permanent "ghettoization", marginalization and exclusion of the indigenous peasant sector in commercial agriculture, commerce and industry. But the other side of the coin is the opposition and resistance offered by the peasant sector. The existence of non-capitalist modes of production in the dependent sector of a country also implies the maintenance of the conditions of ethnic reproduction - the reproduction of cultures, organizational forms and ideologies which, despite their economic function in the global context, conflict with the desired national integration and are incompatible with the plan of a dominant national class.

Second, each indigenous people reproduces itself through a number of internal conditions which are basically expressed in the relations of the ethnic group with its spatial environment, its history, its conception of time and, most of all, the linguistic system which orders, expresses and reproduces these categories of thought. These are essentially the spheres of social activity in which the specific, particular character of a culture is manifest. For of course an ethnic group is not only a social entity that is held together and sustained by its relation of depen-

dence on the dominant society, an entity that can be objectively and subjectively defined by the way it contrasts with the society in which it lives; it is basically a relation of the group with the historically constructed environment, enduring and beyond political and economic upheavals which, though they determine its nature, do not define it completely. And, as we have said, it is a particular mode of reproducing known reality by employing a specific language, each new experience being referred to a semantic and structural reproductive reference matrix, which gives continuity and cohesion to a group's system of cognition. An indigenous community is moreover a mode of organizing the production of goods and the manner of their distribution, marketing, use and consumption.

Third, ethnicity is expressed in the way in which people define surplus production and the use they make of it. The socially accepted definition and use of goods, work and time that are not directed towards subsistence and reproduction, together with the other factors we have mentioned, makes up the central core of an ethnic group's way of life and determines its character.

Here, of course, we again encounter the relation between the external and internal conditions of ethnic reproduction. To what extent are internal conditions affected, modified or perpetuated by the action of external conditions? How can we continue to speak of "Huichol ethnicity", for example, if the external conditions of reproduction exert such pressure on the group that it loses all control over consumption of the hallucinogen *peyotl*, thus substantially altering the entire symbolic, cosmological and socio-economic order that is centered around this plant? What is the critical threshold of the economic organization of Zapotec or Mixe peasants beyond which it can be claimed that they have entered into "the logic of capitalist accumulation" and have relinquished all connection with the "logic of reciprocity", of use value and of "anti-accumulation", which is precisely one of the basic characteristics of the reproduction of ethnic specificity? There is no easy answer to these questions. Two points call for discussion: (a) the long historical time-span as a characteristic dimension of the ethnic question; and (b) the question of the contradictory coexistence of use value and exchange value within the ethnic group.

Except for pre-peasant ethnic groups (tribal micro-ethnic groups mostly living in the South American lowlands of the Amazon and other lowland tropical forests) the vast majority of indigenous peoples in Latin America, especially in Mexico, are peasant societies, that is to say societies in the economic system of which a substantial proportion of production meets the needs of internal consumption, while the remainder - which may be culturally defined as surplus production - enters the essentially inequitable commercial exchange circuit through the capitalist market. In both pre-peasant and peasant ethnic groups, a considerable proportion of the activity of society is directed towards the production of use values. Whereas in micro-ethnic groups with a domestic mode of production the production of use value is the main social and economic objective giving shape to the whole; in peasant ethnic groups with a purely petty mercantile economy the

production of use value, that is, the zone of self-sufficiency and reciprocity in services and exchanges, is always in a state of competitive tension with the production of exchange values. Competitiveness grows with the increasing penetration of the capitalist economy. There can be no doubt that this contradictory coexistence of two economic, social and cultural systems, this permanent tension between two loyalties and two forms of identity, is generally characteristic of peasant indigenous ethnicity as opposed to the rest of society.

The presence of this competitive tension between the two values is more than a matter of transformation and transition from one mode of production (domestic, communal, "tributary") to another (petty mercantile production, capitalist production). The ethnic communities of Meso-America are known to have been involved in tributary modes of production for several centuries. Consequently, these communities have experienced the contradiction of the coexistence within each community of the two values, and the need to define the character of surplus production and decide how it should be used: they are part of a complex power game between the demands of the political and ideological center and the needs of the communal or regional productive unit.

The result, then, is not a process of transition from one mode to another, exchange value being slowly but surely substituted for use value until the latter disappears altogether and the complete primacy of the former is established. It is rather a question of the permanent and structural condition of the reproduction of indigenous peasant ethnicity, which centers around the age-old dialectic between the logic of a centripetal value which is shared, collective, equalizing, reciprocal, symmetrical and non-accumulative and the logic of a centrifugal value which is individual, accumulative, differentiating and asymmetric.

We believe that an indigenous society's capacity to maintain this dialectical interplay between the two systems of logic, without allowing exchange value to take over all the spheres of collective life, is the factor that constitutes and expresses the ethnic group's resistance and its style of civilization - its culture and specific ethnicity - which, in the final analysis, is the way in which society has in the past organized and continues to reproduce the utilization of use value and related factors that define surplus production and determine its purpose.

The points we have discussed, therefore, are important not so much for their defining or classificatory qualities but because if the group understands them correctly it can make wise decisions. Insofar as an indigenous ethnic group, acting collectively, handles this relation between use value and exchange value independently, without being dominated by the capitalist culture's hegemony - the primacy of the logic of exchange value - one can say that cultural independence exists, and consequently that it is possible for the group to decide upon an original and sovereign plan for the future.

Regarding the other important point in this discussion - the historical "*longue durée*" (long duration) - we think that consideration should be given both to the

findings of the French school of historiography as set forth in the *Annales* (à la Fernand Braudel) and to the ideas more recently formulated by a minority school of thought in Mexican anthropology (Bonfil 1983). These show that a group's "own culture", that is the culture that it regards as unquestionably genuine and endogenous, is very often merely the "appropriated culture" of a specific point in history, which it has rethought, understood and asserted to be its own. How else can we explain the fact that the compound of age-old elements of disparate origin, which have been put together, which function, and which now constitute the outward, concrete signs of the culture of an ethnic group, are ethnicity itself, the entity to which loyalty is due, the community which acts as a reflecting mirror and in which ethnic identity is reaffirmed?

### Ethnic Alienation

The ages of domination and subordination did not pass without a struggle, and the resistance of indigenous ethnic groups was marked by ambiguity, dilemmas, contradictions and conflicts. Unity is possible, but it remains a challenge to political construction and cultural redevelopment. Every Mexican indigenous people is an objective historical unit which, by virtue of its structures and its political and intellectual organizations, may become a historical and political unit that makes its own decisions. At this point we come to the question of individual and collective consciousness of the nature (cultural specificity), size (in society and in space) and depth (in time) of the people.

One can identify two levels of ethnicity, that is, two levels of the conscious and deliberate organization of an ethnic group. The first level, which is organic (or natural) is that of the ethnic group which recognizes itself and expresses its identity through a corporate consciousness. To paraphrase Marx somewhat freely, we may say that the "ethnic group in itself" defines and perceives itself only on the basis of the recognition of its character, which is different from and contrasts with the other, i.e., the rest of society. This "consciousness of the different self" may or may not be critical, and may be based on a comparison of the nature of the ethnic group's situation with that of other groups that may be in a dominant position. But it is an ideological formulation, an idea, an affirmation, which does not lead to an initiative or a program of deliberate action directed towards the situation itself. It is a "passive consciousness of the different self".

The "active consciousness of the different self" is situated at another level, that of the "ethnic group for itself", which is not organic but political - the group that subjectively perceives itself as different, yet recognizes the inequitable nature of the interethnic structure of which it is part, as well as its class position in relation to the overall social context.

Seen thus, ethnicity is not only an analytical category defined on the basis of the descriptive (and quantitative) criteria used in the fields of anthropology and sociology; it is the very manifestation of the consciousness of the different collective selves, expressed through social forms and phenomena, which reveal the different levels of shared understanding of the relation between diversity (field of culture) and inequality (field of economic exploitation and the class struggle). In this aspect of ethnicity, therefore, we can identify the two extremes indicated: on the one hand, the corporate ethnic consciousness, which is organic, passive and distinct, traditionally defined in anthropology as ethnocentric; on the other, the active, political, militant ethnic consciousness which seeks hegemonic consciousness - that is, a synthesis of plans and programs shared by members of the group. This hegemonic ethno-political consciousness is inevitably class-consciousness: it solves the apparent contradiction between diversity and inequality (Bonfil 1983) and seeks to overcome economic, social and political inequality while preserving the expression and development of diversity on the cultural and linguistic levels.

But this growth of social consciousness and therefore of ethnicity, essentially inspired by local intellectuals and organizations, does not take place without a number of conflicts within the ethnic group. The fact that the indigenous group has been in a permanent colonial relation has brought about the fragmentation of ethnic unity into disconnected, isolated village and communal nuclei, which were for centuries unilaterally connected only with the Spanish administrators responsible for economic extortion and political control. The network of multilateral and complementary ecological and economic relations that connected local units of indigenous communities (bound in polities) vanished as early as the sixteenth century, and a collection of units emerged which lacked cohesion and became progressively "ghettoized" on the cultural and linguistic levels, with increasing dialectalization, until they no longer saw themselves as part of a larger whole. The subjective historical unity of the ethnic group was lost, and with it the group's capacity to affirm itself as a potential unit with power to take decisions. The role played by cultural alienation was of the utmost importance in this long process of political and economic fragmentation by colonialism, which was the lot of indigenous peasants in Mexico and generally throughout the Meso-American and Andean areas. Apart from the dislocation of all the mechanisms which created a sense of economic, political, linguistic and cultural unity on the inter-ethnic and supra-communal planes, the indigenous people of every ethnic group were cut off from the collective memory of their past and left with nothing more than fragmentary and partial glimpses of it, unrelated to each other and constantly invalidated by the imposition of the conqueror's views.

As we know, the task of historical and cultural alienation was eagerly undertaken by the parish priests in the earliest colonial period, carried further by the more systematic work of evangelization and administrative control under the

vice-royalty, and subsequently adopted with equal enthusiasm by the republics, in this case in accordance with secular ideology which posited the need for national homogeneity and integration. The important point here is the basic role that cultural and historical alienation has played, as it does today, in the subjugation and domination of indigenous peoples. Alienation transformed them into a divided and disorganized labor force which reproduced itself for reasons of self-sufficiency, constantly threatened by extreme poverty, within the productive or residential units of the community. Obviously, this process was neither uniform nor constant in time or in space. Some ethnic areas were reduced to subjection from the beginning of the invasion; others, of less importance to the colonial economy, managed to remain in relative isolation. Some indigenous peoples were robbed of their resources and broken up while others were retained as a reserve labor force. But in every case, sooner or later, the imposition of an ideology and cultural fragmentation became the norm in interethnic and class relations between the colonizer's dominant society and the dominated society of the colonized.

This system of economic and political domination and subordination, decay and the loss of cultural and linguistic legitimacy has resulted in the individual and collective formation of a rejected, negated, devalued ethnic identity which, interacting with the external, non-indigenous world, tends to shrink and become clandestine, manifesting itself only in imitative and mimetic replicas of the dominant culture. In this way members of ethnic groups try to reduce the degree of ethnic and racial aggression and discrimination. But, in encouraging such collective practices, they also help to bring about an ethnic culture of subordination, a culture that is fragmented, schizoid and can be used for specific purposes in different areas of social interaction, a culture that is mimetic, imitative, bilingual and cognitively impoverished while the indigenous culture leads a clandestine existence, being used in domestic, communal and ethnic environments. This differentiated, subordinate use of culture has led to the "ghettoization" of indigenous culture and language, a phenomenon marked by voluntary isolation and retreat - although the strategy of clandestinization has been successful as a form of resistance - and at the same time a phenomenon imposed and maintained by the overall structure which isolates the ethnic group and prevents it from appropriating and benefiting from the cultural development of the rest of society. The process of "appropriated culture" noted by Bonfil (1983) is partially blocked by those combined mechanisms of isolation and external domination which produce a culture of resistance by omission.

### **The Critical Step: Active Ethnic Resistance**

What is the sociological and statistical significance of such an alienated culture for an indigenous peoples? Does the rejected culture really affect most of the

members of the indigenous society to such a degree that any attempt at liberation and cultural dissent (unalienation) would presuppose a heroic effort that is destined to fail? Although we distrust statistical figures as applied to political or revolutionary programs, we think it worthwhile to reproduce data derived from a survey carried out some years ago in Zapotec indigenous communities in the southern state of Oaxaca, Mexico (Ayre 1982; Varese 1983b).

### **The Militant Ethnic Nucleus: Beyond a Mere Statistical Verification**

In carrying out a survey some time ago among 3,173 people at different levels of the educational system, who came from twenty Zapotec urban and rural localities in the region of Oaxaca, we were mainly interested in obtaining a representative sample of the type of information and ideology provided by the Mexican educational system. We also wanted to observe the ethnic groups' capacity to resist, and their ability to maintain local lore and autonomous concepts of their own culture.<sup>1</sup> A more sophisticated statistical analysis carried out some time later (Ayre 1982) revealed an important and somewhat surprising characteristic which reappeared throughout the survey. Approximately a quarter of the sample turned out to be an ethnically uncompromising social nucleus loyal to its culture and language and impervious to the attraction and the ideological and cultural penetration of the school system. This discovery was all the more striking because all those interviewed in the sample belonged to the official school system, the curricula, programs and activities of which are governed by the principle of deculturation and the cultural and linguistic assimilation of the pupil. The following is a typical profile of a member of this uncompromising nucleus, as deduced statistically from the sample on the basis of the questionnaire. He is between 16 and 18 years of age, and he thinks that the Zapotec and indigenous peoples enjoyed better living conditions before the colonial invasion, and ought to organize themselves politically in order to rise above their subordinate status and defend their interests more effectively. He is aware that there are a great number of indigenous ethnic groups in the country and that they comprise many people. He is familiar with his people's history, respects its language, and believes that education ought to be bilingual. His most outstanding characteristics are his ethnic pride and militancy and his confidence in the potential of his culture and its traditions.

Clearly, if a more diversified and representative sample were taken of all indigenous ethnic groups in Mexico, this profile would be different, as adults, elderly people and a greater number of women would be included.

What conclusion can be drawn from this survey? We believe an uncompromising nucleus such as this is probably to be found in all the ethnic groups which have survived deliberate or biological genocide, and that this same nucleus is responsible for the group's continued existence. If we consider, moreover, that

the Zapotec people is one of the ethnic groups that has been in contact for the longest time with the rest of Mexican society, with which its relations have been those of inequality and subordination, we may reasonably suppose that this uncompromising nucleus may be of equal or greater statistical importance in other ethnic groups that have been subject to less penetration.

We believe that this nucleus will provide the intellectuals and leaders, who will develop an active consciousness of the different self, a militant ethnic consciousness. It is important to note that this part of the ethnic group is not necessarily or exclusively the most "traditional and isolated" (the part that has a passive consciousness of the different self), but precisely the part made up of people who have come back to their community and who, having reflected upon their own culture and that of the dominant society, are making a determined effort to analyze and compare the two, devising ways of appropriating the foreign culture and adapting their own. These are in many cases people who have lived through the critical generational phase of "nostalgia".

An important role in this area of the ethnic question, but one to which little attention has been given, is that of migrants who leave the ethnic community to go to urban centers or to the United States, then return to the community from time to time, or for good. What effect do they have on the group's identity? What do they do with their savings? Do they spend them on expensive consumer goods, or do they invest in land and agricultural production, or in commerce? What is their attitude towards the ethnic language, the situation regarding ritual and festive events, lavish spending, ritual "squandering" and the external signs of their ethnic culture?

Empirical observation of the lives of intellectuals, poets, artists, militants and political leaders belonging to indigenous communities confirms that people who have returned to their community tend to be critical of the whole state of affairs and keep militant ethnicity alive. This is particularly evident among the more numerous ethnic groups: Nahuatl, Maya, Zapotec, Mixtec, Mazatec, Mixe, Chinantec, Otomí. Professional people who have completed university studies are not necessarily lost to the cause of their ethnic group. Some of them return to their community to play an active role and make an ideological, intellectual, technological or cultural contribution.

Special attention must be paid to those members of the ethnic group who belong to the teaching profession and who, as a rule, suffer a considerable degree of cultural alienation. They have a formal superficial training, undergo an urban type of re-socialization (general secondary education or teacher training) and return to the community with relative financial prestige and power (a monthly salary) and political power (external contacts and knowledge) of which the communal authorities are not fully aware. The most serious problematic aspect about this indigenous group of teachers is the fact that the small amount of formal training they are given is designed to discredit the culture and language of their

peoples. On the other hand, all their combativeness and social nonconformity finds a formal, legitimate outlet that is socially acceptable in trade union activity, which has been to some extent "tamed" by the semi-governmental union structures and ideologies that constitute the dominant tradition of post-revolutionary Mexico.

So the teacher, with a number of noteworthy exceptions, becomes a kind of spokesperson and standard-bearer of cultural alienation. He/she<sup>2</sup> transmits the unjustified cultural prestige of the general ideologized information that makes up school syllabi, and, worst of all, s/he constantly attacks the ethnic community's language, lore, technology and rites, and its organizational and economic systems. The inability of the community's authorities and of its members to exercise real control over the teacher gives the latter a sort of social and cultural extraterritoriality which is envied by some and criticized by others, but in all cases he is estranged from both groups. In the indigenous regions of Mexico, the teacher has no social obligations within the community. He does not perform communal tasks, and does not discharge his financial obligations when absent.<sup>3</sup> He does not assume his responsibilities when the communal assembly has to take decisions but relies on the prestige conferred on him by the fact that the state school system has been operating for fifty years in almost all the ethnic territories, and also on the support of the educational administrative authorities.

### Research, Training and Ethnic Development: An Experiment

In this context of theoretical and factual investigation, a small team of twelve started in 1981 an experimental program in the Northern Sierra Madre of Oaxaca (locally called Sierra Juárez) and in the mountainous Isthmus of Tehuantepec region, among three indigenous ethnic groups: the Chinantec, the Mixe and the Zapotec.<sup>4</sup>

#### The Social-Ethnic Context

Only a few areas of the vast mountainous regions occupied by the three indigenous peoples were chosen for the project. Mainly for reasons of logistics and to facilitate the investigation, three districts contiguous to the Sierra Juárez and a municipality in the district of Juchitán, in the Isthmus region, were selected. About twenty-five communities were involved in the project. Approximately 50,000 people were covered by the program, including 20,000 Zapotec, 20,000 Mixe and some 10,000 Chinantec (URO 1982). The average community numbers 2,500 persons, and all the villages are situated in remote mountainous country, the only access being by unmade roads or tracks.

Almost all the communities suffer from the effects of a constant decline in natural forest resources and the erosion of arable land due to over-exploitation. The land is being eroded because the population has increased steadily in the last few decades, despite the high rate of emigration, and more commercial crops are being grown. Some communities are barely self-sufficient in basic foodstuffs (maize, kidney beans, chili beans, pumpkins, etc.); others have to import these products from the central valleys of Oaxaca. On the other hand, the growing of certain commercial crops, in particular coffee, not only leaves less arable land for subsistence farming but also requires intensive seasonal labor, which means that even less labor power is available for the production of essential commodities.

In all these ethnic regions, small artisanal industry using appropriate traditional technology has been deteriorating as a result of the growth of a precarious petty cash economy - cyclically linked to the periods when labor is taken on, both within and outside the region - which encourages the purchase of poor quality, overpriced and industrially manufactured consumer goods from outside the regions.

The road communications system follows the typical colonial pattern for isolated areas: all communities of any importance to consumption and production are connected to Oaxaca City, which is the commercial and political center. The result is a star-shaped communication system with branches radiating from the center to the regions but with no connection between neighboring communities. This cannot be called a communications network. Communities which are only a few kilometers apart often have to communicate with each other by going through the Oaxaca Valley. The system of exchange by means of traditional markets (market places rotating weekly) is still in existence, but there are no roads except for purposes of intra-communal communication. Obviously this form of exchange is not as efficient as capitalist penetration, which uses the network of roads radiating out to isolated areas. A traditional communications network is in use for the exchange of festive and ritual services of a cultural nature, especially performances given by orchestras and dancing groups.

Communal political organization conforms with the colonial model, adopted by the ethnic community in cultural matters, of the system of civic and religious posts which governs appointment to positions of prestige and authority (not necessarily power in the modern economic and political sense of the term). Upon this model is superimposed the modern municipal system - theoretically elective - imposed by the state and federal government as a necessary political and administrative condition. The community operates this administrative machinery, which is of urban origin, with pragmatism and as circumstances require. Nevertheless this political system, based on the central government, is sometimes favored by those members of the community who are beginning to stand out as authority figures: tough men with political and financial aspirations. If this is so,

there may be a violent, closely contested conflict which splits the community along the lines of the two systems of civic and political administration.

Internal differentiations within the communities are appearing, more noticeable in some than in others. A few small sectors, for instance, have taken over the mechanisms and channels of distribution and commercialization and, in some cases, certain commodities, and there is also a local bureaucratic petty bourgeoisie which is tied up with the state administrative and productive system. Nevertheless, as we have said, the basic contradiction between use value and exchange value continues to function as a powerful instrument of social equalization and economic redistribution: individual accumulation continues to be socially controlled and criticized.

### Methods of Work

The program began with the selection, in conjunction with ethnic communities and their ethno-political organizations (if they had any), of members of a community as candidates to participate in the eight-month course. The candidates were selected after they had been given a talk on the nature and objectives of the training program and had been told that participants would be expected to return to their communities, after training, as cultural workers (officially known as Bilingual Cultural Workers).

### Principles

Central to the theory underlying the course and the activities subsequently undertaken and carried through by the organizers and the Oaxaca Research and Promotion Unit are a number of principles and basic ideas which are always explained to the members of the communities involved in the program. They are briefly summarized by the Unit (URO 1982; Varese 1983c).

- Subordinate and repudiated though it is, the culture of the indigenous peoples could be the driving force of a will, a determination to opt for development and self-assertion. This principle recognizes the primacy of the mind, ideas and language as opposed to the desire to imitate and reproduce the economic growth - of questionable value - achieved by sectors of the dominant society.
- Throughout the centuries the indigenous peoples have always shown a determination to survive. Expressing their ethnicity in their own way, they have gone through the different stages of pre-colonial, colonial and national development, adapting to profound economic and social changes while remaining different from the rest of Mexican society.

- The social identity (primarily and necessarily that of the individual) of an indigenous people centers around its cultural activities, that is, all its activities concerned with production, distribution, use and consumption, which can be divided into two broad categories of time whose nature is quite distinct - times for everyday life and times for celebrating rites or festivals. Basically, however, the culture of an indigenous people originates and evolves in the world of work, in the whole process of production. (A phenomenon that is characteristic of capitalist development is not found in indigenous ethnic groups - the substitution of cultural activities for culture, so that the people become an object of culture, of the consumption of culture, rather than a subject creating and reproducing culture.)
- An ethnic group's reflection on its own culture is a matter of such concern to all its members that it can arouse the group to action and stimulate its development.
- The problems and obstacles which prevent such action have their origin in the long process of the colonial and neo-colonial dependence and subordination of the indigenous people. The social and economic submission of a people conceals the progressive weakening of its specific form of civilization, the loss of its cultural initiative and its lack of confidence in its own proposals, until it is not really aware of its situation. The immediate problems, especially financial ones, are so great that culture tends to be relegated to the background and regarded as being of little importance. People think that once urgent financial problems are solved there will be time enough to consider ethnic and cultural questions and to deal with difficult problems such as those of identity and creativity.
- Nevertheless, to propose to solve a financial or social problem in one way rather than another is precisely to take a cultural decision, opt for a particular way of life, choose (even if unwittingly) a specific manner of going about the maintenance, construction or reconstruction of one's own society.

The cultural question thus ceases to be covered up, put in the background and ignored. An erroneous consciousness "constantly affects the base on which it is formed as such", and this means that a false conception helps to reproduce the social and economic structure which gave rise to it, at the same time amplifying and justifying it. So it is of the greatest political importance that an indigenous people should be able to regain a real consciousness of its historic and cultural specificity and of the potential of its cultural plan. Liberation, therefore, takes place strictly within the context of cultural creation.

The ethno-political project, as an undertaking aimed at cultural mobilization, rehabilitation and development, is a long-term and wide-ranging collective task; no social activity is excluded from it. Cultural workers are catalysts, but the com-

munity as a whole, at the communal level and also, possibly, at the ethnic-cum-regional level, is the real mobilizing agent.

### Teaching Practice

The main pedagogical feature of the modular training program is that it is highly flexible and can be adapted to suit participants at the outset and as they progress through the course. The multidisciplinary team (consisting of people qualified in anthropology, linguistics, biology, geography, pedagogy, musicology, visual arts, theatre and so on) co-operates in the preparation, presentation and discussion of the teaching modules and units. Teaching is based on the realization that the "pupils" already possess knowledge and experience and that the function of the "advisers" is to motivate them, guide them, stimulate them to reflect on and learn, helping them to see what other members of the indigenous communities may know or think, as individuals or as a group. The object is to systematize "popular ethnic knowledge and thought" and enhance its value by critically comparing it with "universal" knowledge and enriching it thereby.

This kind of exploratory project has a number of aims, but the principal one is to restore to participants a sense of security and confidence in their own systems of thought and knowledge and their way of looking at the world: in their own ethnic language; their history, which has been restored to them; their land, whose importance they have rediscovered; their forms of social, economic and political organization; their place in the regional framework; and finally the social future of their ethnic communities.

The learning/teaching method is such that the exposition of cultural questions and reflection upon them are not separated from research and proposals for practical projects. The idea is to avoid dissociating learned theoretical concepts from the possibility of applying them in practice and from the ability to do so. Thus the course is designed to train people to think about culture rather than to copy it; to produce militants and activists rather than "academic scholars".

There remains the problem of reading and writing in ethnic languages. There is as yet no collectively accepted written form of the languages of the three ethnic groups involved. During the course, participants work out, construct and learn an alphabet which makes them "literate" in their own languages. Of course this is only the beginning of the real problem of introducing the communities to literacy in ethnic languages, with the attendant problem of uniformity and standardization.

The collective task of teaching, research and cultural promotion performed by members of the ethnic groups in conjunction with the advisers has five main objects.

In the first place, the recovery of *ethnic time*, that is, placing the history of the ethnic group as an objective and analytical unit within the regional and national context. The object is to retrieve the history of the indigenous group at important

stages in its civilization and in all its length and depth. Participants study the history of subjugated peoples, discover their contribution to civilization, and see what a partial and false view has been given by the dominant culture.

The second object is to study the group's *space-place*, their territory (both now and in the past), their environment, and all the knowledge possessed by the ethnic group about these categories of nature, with a view to stimulating critical reflection about the land-territory where the group lives, the people's ideas about their land and the way they use it.

The third object of the program is to revive the *language*, that is to say, to set in motion a systematic process of reflection on the language itself, the critical analysis of the language and categories of thought and of the "construction" of the universe that it embodies, expresses and reproduces creatively. This is central to our idea of the learning-teaching process, because we acknowledge that language is the principle matrix of any civilization. The knowledge and imagination, the future and the dreams of a people exist in and are expressed in its language. To regain confidence in the generating and creative power of one's ethnic language is to begin the process of cultural mobilization. This implies inventing or reinventing a way of writing the ethnic language and exploring its potential.

The fourth object, closely linked with the third, is the rehabilitation of *ethnic conceptions and knowledge*, or the rediscovery of the various ethno-systems, cognitive and classification systems, technologies and knowledge in all areas of social life.

Fifth, there is the future plans for society, systematized imagination and thought directed towards the possible future of the ethnic group. The object of this aspect of the program is to give people an idea of the role that each of the ethnic groups taking part can actually play in the future, in the national context as it really is: as well as the practical means of working out ethnic projects and giving effect to the will of society regarding the organization of life on the basis of corporate decisions that will be increasingly independent.

### Ethno-Political Practice

The process of introducing cultural workers into the community and into the ethnic region is a difficult one, and gives rise to conflict. It was of the utmost importance for us to select candidates on the basis of incontrovertible criteria, and it was desirable that the origin and social status of each cultural worker selected should enable the community to identify fully with the person. The level of formal schooling attained was not of major significance, the only condition being that the candidate should be able to read and write Spanish. The aim was to appoint an equal number of men and women, but this was not always possible. People who had shown a high degree of "ethnic militancy" were chosen. Finally, recommendations made by the community and indigenous organizations were taken into account in the selection.

The most determined opposition to the work of those organizing the project came, first, from teachers, many of whom ideologically represent the interests of small businessmen in the community who attempt to break the force of ethnic resistance and to introduce the changes required for greater monetization of the economy and the growth of exchange value. Besides this, the teacher perceives a threat to his traditional monopoly-knowledge of the content and the principles of the national culture. In the end, the conflict between the teacher and the cultural worker centers around the complete incompatibility of what they are doing, though this has seldom been made clear. On the one hand, there is faith in official education as the conveyer of "civilization" and progress for indigenous peoples; on the other, there is the rehabilitation and upgrading of a people's culture and of all that the school identifies as signs and causes of "backwardness", from the people's language to its ceremonial festivals.

In addition to these sources of conflict, in the first few months of the cultural workers' activity in their communities there were a number of misunderstandings, sometimes on the part of the community: the intangible nature of the cultural workers' efforts was the object of criticism that was difficult to refute. As peasant people see it, exclusively intellectual activity is not real work. The teacher (who actually works in the school) is the only person who, thanks to the considerable degree of approval accorded to him in the last few decades, is allowed not to be "productive". Even musicians, a very special and highly respected social group, have to perform productive work. So the cultural worker is a complete newcomer, who has to find his own place within the ethnic community by persuasion and example, which is not easy. In one of the Zapotec regions the people coined the term *guendashaba* to refer to bilingual cultural workers - a term meaning "those who do nothing" - that is, those who go around asking questions but who do no work and produce nothing.

Of course, at the beginning, the cultural workers were alarmed and lost confidence as a result of this social pressure, and they were on the point of giving up; but none did so. Small groups of residents began to discuss the projects for cultural rehabilitation before they came up for consideration by the entire community meeting in a general assembly. Various ways and means, both traditional and modern, were used to publicize ideas, projects, progress and results. The theatre was certainly one of the most effective means of raising awareness, informing people, and getting them to think about and discuss such matters, especially in cases where few people in the community could read either Spanish or the new alphabets of the ethnic languages.

In these early stages, the cultural cadres worked out research and promotion projects (constantly supplying the ethnic community with information about progress and results, by various means) in the different fields corresponding to the five themes covered by the course. Various kinds of material were produced - bilingual leaflets of instructions for using medicinal plants; travelling exposi-

tions of useful plants known to ethnic groups in the region and classified by them; posters showing suggested alphabets for discussion and testing; booklets for teaching the reading and writing of ethnic languages; booklets and textbooks on ethnic techniques and other information possessed by ethnic groups. Some cultural workers decided to work for the rehabilitation of ethnic music and dance, acting as promoters or participants, or providing technical assistance.

All these predominantly cultural activities, which were part of the superstructure, had two noteworthy results. Members of the community became aware of the hidden aspects of their culture, and they were somewhat startled to realize that their identity had been ignored or driven underground. But, at the same time, members of the community, cultural workers and members of local organizations became polarized around two apparently irreconcilable questions: indigenous culture ("customs" is the local term) or development; tradition or change; conservation or innovation.

### The Question of Development and Culture

Discussion and debate have begun and are still in progress.<sup>5</sup> One point became clear at the outset - that the contradiction between a people's culture (ethnicity) and its development is only apparent and is intentionally maintained as an ideological instrument of control. The best example of the entire compatibility between ethnicity and development is provided by the Zapotec of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, whose militant loyalty to their ethnicity and language is contributing to the success of a development and modernization project undertaken by the people.

Nevertheless it also became clear that the time had come for the cultural workers and other ethnic activists to progress from reflection and action concerning the superstructure to action at the economic base. This means that the nature and implications of economic, technological and organizational options must be constantly studied and discussed, and that a careful assessment must be made of the kind of productive economic plan that should be supported and the social and cultural repercussions it causes. At the same time, the study of these options led the entire team to review the question of "support for the rehabilitation and development of the local cultural heritage". Members of the community traditionally involved in music, drama, dance, literature and art (those who made masks, costumes, ceramics, baskets, etc.) realized that the widespread impoverishment suffered by the communities affects these areas of culture first of all. Musical groups are disbanded, dance troupes cease to perform, masks and the complex, elaborate ethnic costumes are no longer produced. In short, the most obvious external signs of ethnic

identity are the first to be lost as a result of poverty. When the external signs cease to exist, the mirror of identity, in which the ethnic group finds its identity, recognizes and reasserts itself, also disappears.

Contrary to the myth propagated by developmentalist theorists, these external signs of ethnicity are not the causes of the poverty, obsolescence and underdevelopment of the indigenous peoples; they are their riches, their cultural heritage, the outward expression of the people's social and historic decision as to the nature of the surplus wealth produced by society and the use to which it should be put. Most communities are well aware of the decline in indigenous culture under the conditions described, hence the enthusiasm with which proposals to support these areas of communal life are adopted.

But at the same time it became evident to the cultural workers and the team that a dangerous state of dependence might arise if external economic support were provided in these areas of culture as a result of a state decision and administered by the state system, as has been the case recently in Mexico through different agencies. There is such a thing as a "resuscitated culture", one that is kept alive by external financial oxygen and permanently threatened with sudden death by a bureaucratic decision or by shortage of funds. It was therefore clear that the economic capacity and the organizational skills that provided structural support for the cultural activities which were part of the superstructure must be regained. The qualitative improvement in the condition of cultural workers, which was merely a return to the original situation of the really organic members of the indigenous ethnic group, came about in this way. Their role changed from that of thinkers and workers in the area of culture to that of "productive intellectuals", directly involved in productive communal and cooperative projects aimed at retrieving an economic profit margin which was to be allocated to the rehabilitation, support and development of ethnic culture.

A simple experimental model was chosen. A communal organization is formed to which the entire community belongs, or a "solidarity group" (part of the community). A production project of communal interest is planned with the key factors of technological options, the scale of the project, markets and distribution. External financing is sought at the outset - the state and various other bodies provide funds - and the independence of the project is negotiated with them. The project is set up and income is divided among three sectors: expenditure; reinvestment and maintenance of fixed capital; and a cultural fund. The small scale of the project and the technological option are key points calling for special attention. A few examples of communal productive concerns will give the reader some idea of what is being done in the area of cultural rehabilitation and ethnic projects: silk production; sheep raising and traditional wool production; ceramics; production of cochineal (a natural dye); plantations of fruit trees; baking of bread in earthen ovens; basket-making; small-scale irrigation; a farm for fish breeding

(with ducks and irrigated gardens); carpentry shops (furniture and masks), and so on.

The experiment is still in progress, and it is impossible to assess its results at the present time. Eventually the income generated by some of the production projects will begin to support the culture that is now asserting itself. The gap that had been opened up by poverty will be closed: production feeds culture, and culture flourishes in the context of production and consumption. So far, we have only taken a few tentative steps: a little money for the costumes for a dance; a musical instrument, perhaps a violin, for the old teacher who still remembers some airs from the past; payment for the woman who knows all about silk and looms and can teach a few Zapotec women the ancient craft once practiced by their ancestors; support for a Mixe cultural center, and for another very ambitious center for the Chinantec; a scholarship - a symbolic sum - for secondary-school pupils who obstinately insist on learning to read and write in their own ethnic language; a safety net so that Don Urbano's tightrope walkers can continue to walk their colorful ropes, and no municipal authority from the city can say that this custom must stop because it is too dangerous.

Thus a few dozen cultural workers in a few Chinantec, Mixe and Zapotec communities in the mountains of Oaxaca Sierra are organizing and leading a collective investigation of their peoples into the possibilities and limitations of the successful survival of cultural diversity and its forms of civilization. These people are facing the unknown. The past gives no indication of what will happen, but the communities are determined to resist and not to relinquish their distinct and uncompromising cultural personality. If the work being done today is any indication of the future, then the future is on their side, on the side of permanence and of the convergence of diversity to form a project for all.

## Notes

- 1 The sample comprised mainly young people (56 per cent male, 38 per cent female) between the ages of 13 and 15 (36 per cent), with an almost equal proportion aged between 10 and 12 (20 per cent) and between 16 and 18 (22 per cent). People older than 18 years constituted 14 per cent of the sample. 47 per cent of those in the sample were in the last year of primary education, 28 per cent in basic secondary school and 17 per cent in higher secondary school or the senior classes of technological institutes. See S. Varese, 1984: *Proyectos étnicos y proyectos nacionales*, p. 85, SEP-80 /Fondo de Cultura Económica, Mexico.
- 2 Only in the mid-nineties has the Mexican indigenous bilingual educational system begun to hire women teachers, who still constitute a minority within the system.
- 3 In South-eastern Mexico's indigenous communities, these collective duties are called *tequios*, from the Nahuatl term *tequistl*.
- 4 The program, co-ordinated by myself under the official auspices of the Oaxaca Research and Promotion Unit (URO), came under the General Directorate of Popular Cultures in the Under Secretariat for Culture of the Federal Government of Mexico.

- 5 In the summer of 2002, I was invited by a group of community activists, with whom I had initiated the program in the eighties, to critically discuss the present and future situation of the program. I was surprised by the level of analytical refinement achieved by the indigenous activists and the sophistication of their community development projects, which covered a vast array of cultural and productive activities and which had incorporated electronic media, information technology and audio-visual technologies in "culturally appropriate" indigenous programs.

## CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR INDIAN EDUCATION IN MEXICO (1990)

### abstract

In 1982, a multidisciplinary study commissioned by the Mexican government came to an end.\* Its aim was to quantitatively and qualitatively evaluate the state of indigenous education in the country and come up with a desirable and possible alternative scenario to the year 2000. The document indicated that an independent national project involving all societal groups and indigenous peoples should draw on the community's creative forces and channel them into the correct path towards a desired future. The country's different indigenous peoples would thus be rehabilitated, releasing them from the repression caused by homogenising forces and clearing the way for the expression of their full creative potential. Indigenous education is not simply a technical issue of research, planning and practical teaching but forms part of a wider and more fundamental debate into the nature and definition of society and into the Mexican nation state. One of the central debates in this issue is raised in the dialectical relationship between assimilation, which sees the school as an institution for converting the indigenous into culturally integrated Mexican citizens, and ethnic pluralism, which recognises the possibility of using the education system to strengthen independent indigenous cultural development. The Mexican indigenous peoples' capacity for political analysis and participation since the 1970s demonstrates their cultural vitality and strength, as well as their status as active members of civil society. Indigenous migration to the United States to work as agricultural labourers and also to form part of the urban proletariat has contributed to this. This process has caused them to adapt their own cultural strategies in order to be able to survive within the changing circumstances of their social environment. Peasant emigrants have lost their provincialism and gained a knowledge of labour and union affairs. The new indigenous profile has become an important facet of the new educational issues. In 1985, the Mexican government published an important document that laid down the ethno-educational, legal and political principles of an indigenous education which, among other things, anticipated transfer of the system into the hands of the indigenous. This handover of responsibilities did in fact take place a few years later, although critics of this measure argued that it was a political attempt at demobilisation, and one that also aimed to discredit the indigenous as organisers of their own education. Despite the controversy, indigenous intellectuals and organisations have come up with

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a series of proposals for the current education system, such as incorporating and linking ethnic knowledge systems and skills with universal knowledge, the use of mother-tongue language in literacy and the development of mathematical skills, and full recognition of the role played by the local or regional community in education, among other things. The effects of the economic crisis, which is leading to budgetary cuts in this area, and the apathy created by years of eccentric and racist prejudice, also affecting the way in which many indigenous people think and leading them to reject bilingual education, both weigh heavily on the future of indigenous education in Mexico.

In mid-1982 we concluded a joint research study on indigenous education in Mexico with the following lines:

*An independent national project involving all the constituent groups of society and every one of the nation's peoples should release all the creative cultural forces in the community and set them on the right road to the desired future. This entails rehabilitating the various maps for civilization of the country's ethnic groups freeing them from the repression introduced by the forces of standardization and clearing the way for the expression of their full creative potential.*

*It is within this framework that we see education as having a part to play: a system for the general mobilization of all the cultures of the nation, both the oppressed and those which today are dominant, in an ongoing and egalitarian encounter and debate guided by the target image of the future that we seek. The education of the indigenous, of each indigenous ethnic group in the country, is the driving force and the context for the liberation of those forces of civilization, hitherto frustrated, which are now leading the way to the design and implementation of a pluralist plan for the nation. (Varese et al. 1983: 169)*

The study summarized a year of research work by a multidisciplinary team which had been asked by the government of Mexico to provide a qualitative and quantitative evaluation of the state of indigenous education in the country and to set out a desirable and viable alternative scenario for the period up to the year 2000.

Today [1990], eight years after the completion of the study and the scenario, I still subscribe to the same ideas, albeit with more limited optimism. By this I mean that the question of indigenous education is not exclusively a technical matter of research, planning and educational practice but forms part of a wider, fundamental debate on the nature and definition of society and the Mexican nation-state. The quality and form of education which that state is willing to provide through its state school system to 12.4 per cent of the national population<sup>1</sup>

has a direct bearing on the ideal image of the country held by politicians and civil servants. Ultimately, the question to which the national education system must provide an answer boils down to a choice between an assimilationist option and a pluralist proposal: a nation-state which sees itself, acts and perpetuates itself as the standardizing and hegemonic cultural blueprint of the majority alone, or else as a map for the expression and development of all of the country's ethno-cultural minorities.

### **Assimilation or Multi-Ethnicity: Indigenous Education at the Crux of the Debate**

The dilemma is not a simple one and does not express a purely formalist concern with the nature of the nation-state. This is evident from the fact that during the seventy years of post-revolutionary government, and with increasing intensity since the government of President Lázaro Cárdenas in 1940, Mexico has been engaged in an ongoing, tense and at times violent controversy on the actual and potential social status of the indigenous peoples in a reconstructed revolutionary society. The tension between, on the one hand, the old and updated positivist theses of the pre-revolutionary Porfirio Díaz dictatorship advocating indigenous assimilation in "civilization" and "modernity" and, on the other, the new nationalist and grass-roots attitudes which were expressed in a rhetorical and generic appraisal of the indigenous, elevated to the level of a metaphor for the new nationality, constituting the nucleus of the political movement and practice referred to as "*indigenismo*". In that movement, the form and content of indigenous education, the use or non-use of vernacular languages in schools, the function of bilingualism in school and community and the proper place of indigenous languages in modern Mexican society assume a central position of great strategic importance. They even constituted one of the factors contributing to the promulgation of the short-lived constitutional amendment of 1934 which proclaimed socialist education in Mexico and made bilingual education possible for the indigenous population (Aguirre Beltrán 1983: 114).

Within the *indigenista* paradigm, which determined the state's policy of consideration for the indigenous peoples from the years immediately after the revolution (1930s), a complex dialectical relationship was established between the assimilationist tendency (which sees the school as an ideal institution for turning indigenous into culturally assimilated Mexican citizens) and the pluralist tendency (which recognizes the possibility of using the education system to bolster independent indigenous cultural development). This contradiction may be traced back to the dawn of the national revolution, and it came to a head in the profound crisis of the Mexican political system which occurred in 1968 with the eruption of the grass-roots student movement. Nevertheless, it was only when the indige-

nous organized and started to play a full part in political life in the mid-1970s that the debate on the nature and function of the indigenous education system became a matter of priority and urgency (Bonfil 1981; Varese and Rodríguez 1983).

Faced with the growing mobilization of indigenous peasants and the educated sectors of the small indigenous professional class (schoolteachers and civil servants), the government was obliged to put the problem of education for indigenous ethnic groups back on the political agenda. All the indigenous organizations, whether rural or urban, independent or subordinate to the official trade unions and the single governing party, were alike in displaying a highly critical attitude towards the state education system, the alienating and neo-colonialist role that it played among indigenous peoples and, especially, the rift in the indigenous community caused by a national education system which neither recognized nor respected the calling and the specific cultural requirements of each ethnic community (Aguirre Beltrán 1983; Coronado Suzán 1987; Rodríguez and Varese 1981a, 1981b; Varese and Rodríguez 1983).<sup>2</sup>

The assimilationist trend of *indigenismo* advocated by the anthropologist Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, one of its most brilliant and committed theorists, attributes this renewed indigenous mobilization and belligerence to the manipulative influence of what he himself calls the "anarchist tendency" of the new anthropology or the self-management school of *indigenismo* (Aguirre Beltrán 1983: 15-16, and 333-55). Thus the indigenous peoples are once again denied the power to make their own decisions, and their political and cultural behavior is assumed to be subject to the dictates of the non-indigenous intelligentsia. What is certain is that the social reality of indigenous Mexico is much more complex than a simplistic division between marginalized and ignorant rural indigenous, incapable of forming a critical judgement about their own education or development, and urban indigenous professionals under the influence of critical anthropologists with their own political axe to grind. I believe, on the contrary, that the intensive mobilization and political involvement of the indigenous communities, from the 1970s onwards, which undoubtedly coincides with, runs parallel to or is coordinated by the most keenly critical sectors of Mexican society, is an eloquent expression of the vitality and cultural strength of the country's indigenous peoples and of their status as bona fide members of civil society.

### **The New Indigenous Profile**

It is certain that centuries of colonial and neocolonial relations and decades of economic and political subjection of the indigenous community to an inequitable and dependent form of mercantile capitalist expansion have marginalized some communities (which Aguirre Beltrán himself defines as "indigenous refugee zones"), cut them off from the prevailing ideological and political currents in the

country's decision-making centers and, in general, resulted in a parochial, fragmented and myopic political culture. But at the same time a whole series of new social phenomena has brought the indigenous communities into contact with a range of social, political and cultural worlds which call for a constant capacity to respond and adapt.

From the first managed migrations to the United States under the farm workers program of the 1940s (the so called *Bracero Program*) to the mass temporary migrations of Mixtec, Zapotec, Chinantec, Trique and Purépecha peasants and other ethnic groups to California, Oregon, Washington and other north-western states, involving the processes of rural and urban proletarianization, the Mexican indigenous have constantly been forced over the last three or four generations to realign and adapt their own cultural strategies in order to cope with the changing circumstances of their social environment. This constant cultural re-negotiation, virtually imposed upon a large section of the indigenous communities, is at the same time an effective form of political schooling (cf. Kearney and Nagengast, 1989; Morales 1989; Varese 1989a; Zabin et al. 1989). In this process, the peasant migrants lose their provincialism and acquire an education in labor and trade-union affairs; they become keenly aware of the problems of ethnic and racial discrimination and sharpen their class perceptions, undergoing in some cases a process of transnationalization through which they learn cosmopolitan social behavior, though this does not necessarily imply abandonment of their indigenous identity and local ethnic community attachments.

This "new indigenous profile", which is statistically difficult to define but undoubtedly applies to a large number of people,<sup>3</sup> is becoming an important facet of the new subject of indigenous education. It concerns social actors who mobilize and demand special educational treatment, establish alliances with important sectors of the independent teaching trade unions and carry their ideas concerning an ethnically relevant bilingual and intercultural form of education over the border to the United States, where they live as economic deportees (CC-MP 1990). Contrary to what might be supposed, the enforced exile of indigenous villagers does not lead to isolation and the abandonment of cultural loyalties but rather to a reaffirmation and radicalization of their own ethnic identity, a search for and scrutiny of their own cultural roots and hence a critical review of the educational provision available to them in their own ethnic region.

This process of expatriation, which we have called "distant belonging" (Varese 1989a), has been responsible for the cultural politicization of the indigenous migrants, helping them to overcome the fragmentary and parochial perceptions of their ethnic identity which are so typical of indigenous populations subjected to centuries of colonial rule. In this way the "new indigenous", proletarianized in the fields of Mexico's northern agribusiness and on the farms of the United States, or else in the insecurity of urban under-employment in Mexico City and Los Angeles, bring their work and organizational experience and their broader cultural

outlook to the indigenous of the community, helping to reproduce an indigenous political culture which is less parochial and more critical and expects more of the state.

In short, we can claim that the economic instability of the 1970s profoundly affected the indigenous rural areas of Mexico, provoking a crisis in the indigenous peasant subsistence economy and producing fundamental social changes which have found expression in a sharp increase in the rates of regular and periodic migration within Mexico and also abroad. The increase in indigenous migration to urban areas in Mexico and to the United States has been accompanied by a growing change in the social mix of migrants: whereas the majority were formerly adult males, the men are now accompanied by women and children. The length of stay of the indigenous migrants, whether seasonal or lasting for a period of years, in cities, agribusiness, farms, factories and the service sector of the United States, has created a large proletarianized and politicized class of indigenous who, to an increasing extent, join the "indigenous intelligentsia" in their home rural communities or in ethno-political and trade union organizations which until a few years ago were virtually monopolized by indigenous working in the teaching profession or the lower echelons of the civil service.

### Indigenous Demands in Education and the Response of the State

In 1985, the General Directorate of Indigenous Education (DGEI) of the Mexican Secretariat for State Education released an important planning document which laid down the ethno-educational, legal and political principles of indigenous education (DGEI, 1985a). One of the most important aspects of this educational policy document is also one of the least obvious: a government program developed and to be executed by a federal administrative agency that was entirely in indigenous hands. The overwhelming majority of the staff in this government administrative unit, from the Director-General, a Zapotec teacher from Oaxaca, to the sub-directors from the Nahua, Purépecha and Mixtec peoples, to the ethnic and linguistic experts in almost 100 languages and dialect variations, belong to one indigenous group or another. Hence the Directorate of Indigenous Education symbolizes and represents more than 30,000 bilingual indigenous teachers in state service and an indigenous population estimated at some 8 million individuals, divided into more than fifty ethno-linguistic groups.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, since the early 1980s, the General Directorate of Indigenous Education and most of the indigenous primary school system has been gradually handed over to indigenous professionals and teachers by a state keen to respond both to the challenge of indigenous mobilization and to recognition of the failure of a lengthy assimilationist policy exercised in the field of education through the imposition of the Spanish language and acculturation at school. By 1983, the entire national

system of indigenous education was under the control of the indigenous themselves. The tortuous history of this transfer of power and responsibility to the indigenous is symptomatic of the intensive process of politicization and mobilization experienced by indigenous ethnic groups in recent decades. As already stated, that politicization was attributable to increased mobility and to the exposure of indigenous peasant farmers to new and diverse social, economic and cultural experiences, but we are certainly also observing the outcome of years of powerful assaults on the indigenous ethnic communities, not only in the economic field but also on their old (in part colonial) codes of political and cultural autonomy: the specific codes of the old "Indian republic" (*La República de Indios*), rendered increasingly non-viable by the expansion of the market economy and its institutionalization.

Critics of social policy have argued that this transfer of responsibility for education and its administration to the indigenous was an attempt at political demobilization that was also intended to discredit and disqualify the indigenous as organizers of their own education. It is claimed that a similar operation was mounted in the field of state policy for the development of the indigenous regions through what has come to be called the "new *indigenismo*" or "participatory *indigenismo*" (Baez-Jorge 1982; Calvo and Donnadieu 1983; Galván 1983). The arguments for this mechanical interpretation do not seem particularly convincing. They assume an artificial and static division between the "state with its ideological apparatus" (school, education system, Indigenous National Institute, etc.) and the community of indigenous peoples (Rockwell 1987).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, it is important in our view to look at the specific proposals and operational projects that indigenous have put forward in the field of education since attaining their new position of shared responsibility and management.

What educational demands and claims have constituted the main planks of the indigenous organizations' political platform in the past two decades, and what has been the response to these demands by the new indigenous administration of the indigenous education system?

Basically, leading indigenous intellectuals called for a radical critical assessment of the national education system, which it accused of being assimilationist, ethnocidal, foreign to the culture of individual indigenous ethnic groups and, above all, profoundly alienating and destructive of communal and ethnic unity and ethics. Even when the state took the initiative of launching experiments in bilingual education, the indigenous objected to the indirect and manipulative nature of the plans and programs, in which they saw a hidden intent to undermine indigenous culture and achieve linguistic domination, first using the mother tongue and then moving on to Spanish only later. Indigenous object to the use of inappropriate, racist and ethnocentric texts in which the history, knowledge, culture and art of ethnic groups are distorted and misrepresented. In short, they reject the imposition of educational styles and methods inimical to the cultural foundations of each indigenous people, pushing them still further into subjection

instead of equipping them for emancipation and development (ANPIBAC 1977,1979,1980; CNPI 1982; Varese 1987a: 48-9; Varese and Rodríguez 1983).

Indigenous criticism of education alleges that the content and methods used correspond to patterns of thinking and educational practice and organization that are Eurocentric and neo-colonial in origin. It claims that the ideological matrix of the educational scheme prepares the ground for two of the most important functions of the system itself: first, undermining the pupils' own culture by invalidating it and their language and replacing them with urban-centered generic knowledge and, second, preparing pupils for a type of training geared to the lowliest levels of manual wage labor (Varese and Rodríguez 1983:17). This is said to be a scheme devised by the ruling class in order to achieve hegemony for its culture: a social, economic, cultural and ideological blueprint for changing the nature of the indigenous peoples and quietly incorporating them into the national and international labor market. The school has a special domesticating task to perform in this assimilationist scheme. The most important role of formal education is to de-structure each particular indigenous ethnic group by falsifying its history, misinterpreting its culture and invalidating its language as a tool unsuited to modernity and "rational" development.

This criticism recognizes the basic distinction between the thinking and social circumstances of an educated and schooled individual and of a cultured person, that is to say, someone who is organically rooted in a culture (Varese and Rodríguez 1983:17-18):

*The former group, in spite of these qualities, may not be cultured, may not recognize their historical roots and may be neither linked nor strongly attached to the principles which govern the lives and aspirations of the other members of their community. Someone who has undergone the process of formal official education may be completely uncultured and culturally deprived. In other words, such persons may have completely lost the capacity to relate to their joint past, to accept it as their own, to understand the social aims, whether implicit or explicit, of their own people and to share albeit from a critical viewpoint, in the store of knowledge and values built up by their people through the ages.*

The paradox of this contemporary form of education is precisely its claim to be universal in scope and appropriateness, which is merely an expression of the hegemony exerted by the various cultural forms of Western expansionism camouflaged as a doctrine of general technical efficiency. Present-day formal education is seen by indigenous critics as a technique for socialization (and secondary acculturation) within a specific ideological and cultural framework which passes on models of behavior, knowledge and skills designed to turn pupils into well-adjusted social beings, integrated, with the lowest possible level of conflict, into a hierarchical social scheme based on a particular form of division of labor and a

specific economic option. Accordingly, its aims include cultural standardization and clear demarcation of the boundaries between the normal and the abnormal as well as the definition of levels and forms of knowledge and the channels and conditions of access to that knowledge. Cultural standardization and the perpetuation of the socio-cultural order established in the country determine the assimilationist and necessarily class-based nature of the prevailing system of formal education. This criticism cannot be confined to the specific content of knowledge (which in most cases serves its purpose as a tool for understanding and working within the hierarchical system of society) but must be extended to the totalitarian and non-participatory form of decision-making that governs the objectives, content, methods, organization and management of education for the indigenous population (Varese and Rodríguez 1983).

If the cultures of the subordinate indigenous peoples are not recognized as a fundamental part of the national and universal heritage and are excluded from the country's education plan, then formal education becomes locked into a single model for the transmission and reproduction of knowledge and skills that is often obsolete and dysfunctional: an exclusive model which is applied in identical fashion in all Mexico's geographical and ethnic and linguistic regions on the false premise of the nation's homogeneity or the need to establish it. This educational formula, by definition, excludes the creative participation of the bulk of the indigenous peoples for which it is intended, precisely because it assumes that the indigenous have nothing to contribute to the development process, are "uncultured", "lack education" and must be assimilated by the nation, that is to say the labor market and the dominant production and consumption pattern.<sup>6</sup>

Intellectuals and the organized indigenous movement in Mexico have added a set of proposals to the criticisms levelled at the prevailing system. These may be summarized as follows (Varese 1987a:49):

Teaching of literacy and numeracy should be carried out in the mother tongue with subsequent transition to the use of Spanish as a second language or medium of instruction.

Ethnic systems of knowledge and skills should be incorporated and tied in with universal knowledge, using a specific form of educational approach for each indigenous group.

The education system should give full recognition to the essential role played by the local and/or regional community in education, and should consequently enable the indigenous community to participate fully at its various operational and administrative levels (schools, teachers, administration, etc.).

The state should increase funding for the preparation of teaching materials and information for distribution appropriate to the culture of each ethnic group and language.

The state should provide support for the training of indigenous professionals in all branches of knowledge at an indigenous university and special schools for managers and specialists.

Specific legislation should be enacted to guarantee indigenous education and a coherent, pluralist and democratic language policy.

In another series of technical and project documents prepared in 1985, the DGEI mapped out the medium-term objectives of the indigenous in controlling their own education system: catering more fully for educational demand so as to increase the current average of 50 per cent to the entire school population; expansion of current bilingual pre-school facilities, bilingual and bicultural primary schools and school hostels; bilingual radio programs as a back-up measure for schools; more research, and production of teaching materials, grammars and dictionaries of indigenous languages; consolidation of university degree courses for indigenous in ethnic linguistics and educational theory (DGEI 1985a, b, c, d, e and f).

The indigenous' project is both ambitious and critical in its appraisal of the current situation. It recognizes the lack of preparation and militancy on the part of bilingual teachers and the conflicts of ethnic identity and allegiance which they experience; the poor quality and socio-cultural irrelevance of the teaching materials currently available, including those produced during the few years for which the system has been under indigenous management; the high rates of failure and drop-out and the low level of attainment on completion of schooling;<sup>7</sup> plus the heightening of linguistic conflict in the ethnic communities, itself the result of action by bilingual indigenous teachers with an ambivalent and unclear attitude towards their linguistic and cultural loyalties (DGEI 1985a, b, c, d, e and f; Varese 1987:183).

Within these given limits, indigenous bilingual and bicultural education seeks to develop indigenous children's biological, psychological and social potential, starting from the context of their own culture and in accordance with the historical requirement of their social group and of the country (I quote practically word for word DGEI, 1985d). This type of education will help to rehabilitate and develop indigenous cultures and languages by introducing methods, techniques and tools of scientific inquiry which will enable pupils to expand their critical awareness and intellectual creativity. The indigenous educational plan also aims to stimulate the link between school and community in order to give practical meaning to the knowledge that pupils acquire and also to strengthen their self-

image in the immediate social context. Indigenous bilingual and bicultural education will help pupils to cope with the duality inherent in their bilingual and bicultural status, enabling them to make sense of the contradictions deriving from that situation and to accept the responsibility which falls to them by virtue of their being indigenous in Mexico.

The institutional framework, curriculum, teaching materials and educational content must be overhauled and revolutionized on the basis of the new theory and practice of indigenous education. Thinking on educational facilities, physical structures, calendars and timetables is challenged by the proposals. The curriculum is based on several fundamental principles that take account of the historical demands of the indigenous movement: (a) conservation, transmission and development of the culture, language and identity of indigenous groups; (b) educational, administrative and strategic functions of the system which meet the specific demands of ethnic groups; (c) permanent links between the three fundamental educational levels: family, community and school; (d) fostering of new attitudes among non-indigenous members of Mexican society and promotion of manifestations of indigenous culture as part of the country's heritage (DGEI 1985d).<sup>8</sup>

The system of indigenous education has made notable progress in the study and development of the languages of ethnic groups for educational purposes. By 1987, 50 per cent of the proposed dialect variations studies had been completed, 70 per cent of the thirty-five grammar books scheduled were ready, and some fifteen dictionaries of the most widely-spoken indigenous languages were now available. Lastly, over 80 per cent of the country's fifty-six languages now had alphabets (Varese 1987: 185).

Other educational demands of the indigenous movement and of the DGEI have gradually been satisfied over the course of the 1980s. First, a substantial effort was made to increase the number of qualified indigenous staff able to participate in educational management. The Training Program for Indigenous Ethnolinguists provides training and awards a total of 100 university (Bachelor's) degrees to indigenous from various Mexican ethnic groups. The Program is part of an Integral Staff Training Plan for Bilingual and Bicultural Education and Cultural Advancement, which may in due course cover the planning, execution and evaluation of the various levels of ethnic and linguistic development (Coronado Suzán 1987: 448). In another drive to offer more university opportunities to indigenous educators, the *Universidad Pedagógica Nacional* (National Pedagogical University) is launching a new Bachelor's degree in bilingual indigenous education intended exclusively for members of indigenous communities.

Critics of the Mexican political system have recently interpreted these government initiatives as evidence of "new forms of political control... a more sophisticated and supposedly liberationist technique for manipulating and taking over the ethnic minorities and their specific claims" (Lopez and Rivas 1980, quoted in Coronado Suzán 1987: 450).

Similar criticisms have been directed against the programs of the General Directorate of Popular Cultures (a section of the Sub-Secretariat for Culture), which has organized various regional programs for the cultural rehabilitation and development of indigenous ethnic groups since 1979. The various regional units located in areas densely populated by indigenous or culturally-threatened ethnic groups offer new educational methods for training indigenous organizers to promote and infuse fresh energy into their own cultures and languages, while at the same time starting up and taking an active part in productive and cultural projects attuned to the ethnic community (Varese 1983, 1985, 1987). The programs do not directly affect the schools but constitute an important supplement to formal education. There are many reasons for training indigenous organizers who are literate in their own ethnic languages but the main reason is to give indigenous participants a sense of security and confidence in relation to their own systems of thought, knowledge and interpretation and classification of reality as well as in relation to their own ethnic languages, their rediscovered common history, their own territory revisited and reconsidered, their own forms of social, economic and political organization, the situation of the group in the regional framework and, lastly, the future position in national society of the ethnic communities themselves.

On returning to their own ethnic regions and communities, the bilingual cultural organizers initiated cultural study and promotion projects. These studies and efforts to rehabilitate their ethnic culture, expressed in dozens of highly specific communal projects, provided in many cases the driving force and content for a review of the curriculum in bilingual indigenous schools. Linguistic research and the development of practical alphabets by organizers and linguists from the General Directorate for Popular Cultures constituted another substantial contribution made by this program to indigenous education. While it is difficult to evaluate the program's impact on the entire system of bilingual education, it is clear that major analytical and practical advances were made which have been, and are being, assimilated by the indigenous education system.

### The Future of the Indigenous Bilingual Education Project

Perhaps the most serious and immediate threat to the indigenous project for bilingual and bicultural education is the economic crisis currently rocking Mexico. The Mexican Government is carrying out the recommendation of the Major Project in the field of education in Latin America and the Caribbean (Unesco, Mexico City, November 1984), devoting eight per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP) to education. Of this, nearly five per cent is earmarked for indigenous education. Given the seriousness of the crisis, there is little hope that the same rate of investment and growth will be maintained in the education sector, espe-

cially the indigenous sector, which needs even more resources than are currently available.

The weight of other social and cultural factors impeding the full development of the project must be added to this threat to the sustained growth of public expenditure on indigenous education. The education system must make an immense effort to overcome the inertia built up over years of ethnocentric and racist prejudice on the part of a rigid and incompetent education system if it is to cope with the challenge of the indigenous peoples. Contradictions and inconsistencies may also be observed within the indigenous education system (between officials and indigenous teachers of the DGEI), which increase with the distance between the central intellectual and standard-setting core and the teachers in indigenous schools at the periphery of the system. The latter express their feelings of inferiority at being associated with a strategy whose theoretical and ideological premises they do not, in many cases, fully understand. As a result of this self-image and the school paradigm put across by the teacher training which many indigenous teachers nonetheless undergo, they tend to reproduce the characteristics of the non-indigenous federal schools, which are seen as superior. This mimicry practiced by bilingual teachers defeats the very purpose of specialized education for indigenous.<sup>9</sup>

The difficulty of understanding cultural pluralism, and an ambivalent and indecisive attitude towards their own ethnicity, has left indigenous teachers torn between a formal and rhetorical educational and cultural discourse on the one hand and, on the other, a daily practice that is completely at odds with this: a certain contempt for their ethnic and community culture, strengthening of their hierarchical and authoritarian position within the community and remoteness from parents. There is also a trend towards *diglossia* in the use made by indigenous teachers of their ethnic language. School subjects are studied only in school and only in Spanish. The indigenous language is relegated to the narrow context of everyday life, a state of affairs which emphasizes its subordination and deepens the rift between the children's socio-cultural experience and the process of schooling.

The ambiguities and vague statements of some teachers are echoed by members of the indigenous communities reared on the assimilationist ideology of *indigenismo*. Not infrequently, adults and elders of certain indigenous communities are the first to reject the proposals of a school in the bilingual system, and some indigenous teachers do their utmost to be transferred to the non-indigenous school system in a desperate bid to renounce and conceal their ethnic origins (Varese 1987b).

This being the case, indigenous education must be able to achieve professional competitiveness in its performance and reduce the number of defections by teachers for whom it is at present socially advantageous to transfer to the non-indigenous education system. Simultaneously, in a race against time, indigenous education has to make up for centuries of neglect, ignorance and the overshadowing

owing of indigenous cultures. But despite the achievements of the last five years, historical, cultural, ethno-scientific, ethno-linguistic and ethno-pedagogical research is lagging far behind and leaves much to be desired. In short, a systematic history, geography and ecology of the indigenous peoples has still to be written. Indigenous concepts of space, time and quantity must be described, rehabilitated and developed and the spiritual legacy of indigenous societies must once again be given full recognition.

A complete indigenous education system, appropriate for the 56 indigenous peoples in Mexico, would require the systematic rehabilitation of the 56 ethnic projects that were suspended and thwarted many years ago. This is a task involving large-scale political and cultural mobilization, immense challenges and, undoubtedly, very great risks. There is every indication that indigenous intellectuals, the organized indigenous movement and broad sectors of the indigenous peasant communities and peoples of Mexico have accepted the challenges and the risks: it is now up to them to forge ahead boldly but with political sensitivity in exploring the outer limits of this venture.

## Notes

- 1 See Varese and Rodríguez (1983:16). Projection of the growth rates and recovery of the indigenous population since 1970 in a linear regression curve gives a total of 13.9 million indigenous in Mexico by the year 2000. (See Varese 1983c: 144.). As I review this text in 2003, I can confirm that my calculations of twenty years ago were accurate since this is approximately the official number of indigenous people in today's Mexico.
- 2 A detailed analysis of the indigenous situation in terms of education and the use of mother tongues can be found in the second part of the article by Varese and Rodríguez (1983), which reviews several dozen declarations and documents of indigenous organizations and movements in Latin America and Mexico produced in the ten years from 1971 to 1981.
- 3 There is no reliable data on the number of indigenous migrants to the United States or on indigenous farm workers doing seasonal work in the agro-business of the country's north-western states. According to the unofficial data used by the *Instituto Nacional Indigenista* (oral communication by Sr. Jesús Rubiel Loaano, Operations Director of INI), there are at present nearly 5 million agricultural day laborers in Mexico, some 15 to 20 per cent of whom are indigenous. Only fragmentary and unreliable information is available on indigenous migrants to the United States owing to their illegal status. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that a minimum of 250,000 Mexican indigenous are involved in the "circular migration" which takes them on a cyclical basis from their rural communities to the fields and cities of the United States (see Kearney and Nagengatt 1989; Zabin et al. 1989).
- 4 Between 1971, the year in which the mobilization of the indigenous organizations was stepped up, and 1980, indigenous primary schools practically tripled their enrolments. In spite of this rapid growth, the figure in 1980 represented only 49.26 percent of the total indigenous population in the age group (Varese 1985:45-6). Between 1980 and 1988, the rise in the number of bilingual indigenous teachers in primary schools (Grades 1 to 5) was even more dramatic: from 13,901 in 1979 to approximately 30,000 in 1988 (Varese 1985; DGEI staff data collected in 1988).
- 5 For a highly thought-provoking Gramscian study of the relationship between state education and civil society in Mexico, see the study by Elsie Rockwell prepared for the *Instituto de Investigaciones Educativas del Instituto Politécnico Nacional de México* (Rockwell 1987). Briefly, Rockwell defends (as a specific historical structure) the heterogeneous nature of the school and the education system. It is thus impossible to separate and distinguish clearly between the "education system" and

"civil society", between school and community. But indigenous teachers and officials are not mere transmitters of a dominant state concept: they are also the bearers and representatives of a variety of ideas. "The heterogeneous and historical nature of culture ... in the school context establishes a dynamic which is far from being a straightforward imposition or a clear-cut conflict ..." (Rockwell 1987: 48-55). The author takes the view that the creation of the organizational unity necessary for a national education system and the establishment of universal practices in schools (written language, clear concepts of history and nationhood) are key elements in this pattern of opposing political and social forces (Rockwell 1987:58).

- 6 This assimilationist conception of education contains a blend of several ideas and attitudes which have frequently been deployed in other national contexts to reject a pluralist form of education culturally appropriate for ethnic minorities: from the supposed genetic inferiority of the indigenous peoples to the idea of the indigenous' "lack of culture" or the "lack of overlap" between different cultural conceptions. In the United States, this type of explanation has been derived from analysis of the educational attainments of ethnic minorities (see Sue and Padilla 1986).
- 7 By the school year 1979/80, the average percentage of drop-outs and failures in indigenous schools stood at 24, as against 19 per cent for ordinary federal schools. However, in some Mexican states where the indigenous population lives in extreme marginality and poverty, the percentage of drop-outs was much higher: Durango: 67.8; Sinaloa: 46.7; Sonora: 41.7; Guerrero: 35.8 (Varese et al. 1983:54-5).
- 8 The DGEI develops and implements this indigenous education program on the basis of a political commitment made by the Government of Mexico in two documents setting out guidelines for governmental action: the *Plan Nacional de Desarrollo* (National Development Plan) 1983-88 and the *Programa Nacional de Educación, Cultura, Recreación y Deporte* (National Program for Education, Culture, Recreation and Sport) 1984-88. The present regime has expressed its intention of giving continued recognition to the country's multi-ethnic and multilingual character in various official declarations, including a bill before the federal legislature which seeks to modify those articles of the Mexican Constitution that relate to the existence and exclusive rights of the indigenous peoples. As of the year 2003, the national federal and state legislations have adopted a series of amendments that recognize the multi-ethnic and pluri-linguistic character of Mexico and ensure some basic cultural rights to indigenous peoples.
- 9 In this section, we draw on the analysis of indigenous education carried out in 1983 (Varese 1983a), which is still broadly valid, in our view.

## POSTSCRIPT CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR INDIAN EDUCATION IN MEXICO (2006)

Since 1990, Mexico has seen an increasing deterioration in some of the dearest social, political and cultural values of its Revolution. The slow demise of the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party), which had ruled the country for almost seven decades, the consolidation of a strong political opposition from the Right and the difficult construction of an opposition party from the democratic Left has caused public neglect of, among other "revolutionary ideals", a democratic, popular and universal education for all Mexicans regardless of social status or ethnicity. *Indigenous Education*, which had received so much government attention since the late 1930s and the early 1940s with President Lázaro Cárdenas, and during the PRI administrations of the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, finally succumbed to the pressures of more "realistic" and pragmatic governmental plans. In the 1980s, Mexico devoted 12% of its national budget to education, far higher than the UNESCO recommendation of 8%. The Mexican state developed a substantial number of programs specifically aimed at indigenous education, including the training of thousands of bilingual teachers, the printing of grammars, dictionaries and school books in more than sixty indigenous languages and dozens of dialect variations, and the professional training of indigenous "ethno-linguists" with Master's degrees in linguistics, ethnography and pedagogy. During this phase of Mexico's *indigenista* policy, the state also created a National University of Indigenous Pedagogy to train indigenous people to create and develop specific forms and modalities of Indian education. All this was part of the *indigenismo* policy (policy of Indian affairs) initiated by President Cárdenas and, before him, by anthropologist and government minister Manuel Gamio, followed by anthropologist and minister Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán who eventually, in the late 1970s, opened the doors of the various state agencies to a group of progressive social scientists. This was a time when Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, Arturo Warman, Rodolfo Stavenhagen, Salomón Nahmad and many other critical social scientists were able to have an impact on state policy in many areas of indigenous life: development, community governance, health and education.

Mexico's economic crisis of the 1980s brought all these reforms and innovative policies to a brusque halt. Budgets were reduced drastically, state support for rural development of indigenous and peasant communities ceased, special programs of indigenous education were reduced or cancelled altogether and a neo-liberal ideology and practice of welfare state contraction and elimination became dominant in all sectors of political society. By 1990, when I prepared this text for UNESCO, it was becoming apparent that the beginning of the end was fast approaching. What I mean by "the end" is that the political and ideological impulse that had begun in the immediate post-revolutionary period, with its ideals of social justice and minimum levels of cultural/ethnic democracy, was having to confront the crude reality of a model of neo-dependent national development that required huge popular sacrifices in order to allow massive capital accumulation on the part of the small state/private ruling elite. Such a paradigm of economic growth requires the reduction - if not the elimination - of safety nets and social welfare programs and the institution of fiscal austerity, which inevitably means the elimination of any form of subsidy considered superfluous from the perspective of profit-making investments. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank had unequivocally established the model of neo-liberal state management for developing countries and there was little maneuvering room for the few "progressive" members of the Mexican administrations of the 1980s and 1990s to oppose or negotiate better conditions for the survival of a fragmented welfare state. Indigenous and popular education and rural development were the first victims of the budgetary onslaught.

By the time the PAN (National Action Party) came to power with President Vicente Fox in the late 1990s, the dirty job of dismantling decades of construction of indigenous education had already been accomplished by the previous two PRI administrations. President Fox eliminated the INI (National Institute of Indigenous Affairs) and substituted this large entity with a reduced National Council for Indigenous Peoples' Development with very limited powers. Fox's administration also drastically reduced the General Directorate of Indigenous Education and, with the excuse of decentralizing the government, has delegated some of the most important planning and executive functions of the central state to each local state administration. The net result of this policy of reduction masked as decentralization is that the local provincial politicians and *caciques* (political bosses) have regained power and budgetary autonomy, with scarcely any supervision from the federal government.

In the states of Guerrero, Oaxaca and Chiapas, the indigenous and *mestizo* teachers are organized in a strong autonomous labor union which is fighting back on labor issues, on governance and labor union autonomy and on the economic front. Strikes and walkouts are recurrent events. In the state of Oaxaca, at least, the indigenous movement relies heavily on the support of individual and organized transnational migrants. It is not uncommon that a strike or a local movement receives monetary support and political solidarity from indigenous migrants in California, Illinois or Georgia. The outlook may not appear very

bright, but the forthcoming electoral process indicates that a presidential candidate from the Left may be the victor in the July 2006 elections. If this is the case, there may be some light at the end of the proverbial tunnel and the indigenous people of Mexico may reclaim and regain some of the social achievements they have been fighting for over the last few centuries.

# BEYOND BORDERS

Photo: Pablo Casariego



# CHAPTER III

## ETHNO-POLITICS OF INDIAN RESISTANCE (1991)

### abstract

The study of indigenous resistance movements on the part of the social sciences has been undertaken on the basis of fundamentally Euro- and ethno-centric theoretical and analytical definitions. A new approach must consider the historical relationship that has taken place between the indigenous elite and the communities, incorporate the categories of moral ecology and economics and address the culture and construction of indigenous hegemony from a dialectical perspective. Varese approaches these three issues throughout the text.\* With regard to the first one, he argues that the category of Indian is a colonial epistemological category invented by the Europeans that has fulfilled the dual aim of concealing the complexity and diversity of southern hemispheric civilizations, and leaving them with a reduced and uncertain social identity. Oppressed by colonial institutions and urged on by the need for individual and collective restructuring to respond to them, the American indigenous were placed in a dialectic between an assumed ethnic communal identity and the generic Indian identity, both products of European political domination. The long history of resistance of the native peoples of Latin America represents the search for an identity that responds to the need for ethnic belonging and which expresses solidarity with all those in a similar situation. This identity was, however, taken up in a different way by the nobility and the indigenous. The political history of indigenous American resistance and its cultural tenacity cannot be understood without considering the differences and relationships that have historically taken place between these two groups and which today continue to be expressed through the difference between indigenous intellectuals and *déclassés* and the communities. Regarding the second issue, the author explains that moral ecology and economy are recurrent themes in relation to colonialism and cultural oppression, as demonstrated by the different historical experiences of ethnic resistance and rebellion on the part of indigenous peoples over the centuries and throughout the continent. This moral ecology and economy, governed by values of individual use and enjoyment of collective property and the primacy of use value are in contradiction with the intrusion of a worldview based on exchange value, which corresponds

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to the capitalist economy. The contradictory existence of these two rationales in the indigenous communities creates a constant cultural tension. Indigenous social movements' unwillingness to succumb to the logic of economic accumulation and their commitment to the dictates of reciprocity and ceremonial waste, along with their participation in experiences of social generosity, could be considered practices of internal resistance. With regard to the third issue, Varese claims that social scientists' lack of interest or mistaken interpretation of indigenous political mobilisation is due to two distortions: the anthropological view of culture as a taxonomic field governed by a border code rather than as a sphere of permanent dialectical reconstruction; and the prioritising of categories of economic analysis at the expense of a wider cultural and social vision. For this reason, there is a need to understand ethnicity, cultural identity and the struggle to maintain socio-political and ethnic autonomy more in terms of flexible horizons than rigid borders. Being a situational phenomenon, indigenous ethnicity is constructed and reconstructed socially in a permanent process of dialectical negotiation.

The Indian was, of course, invented by European colonialism. In the years immediately following the invasion of the Americas, the Spaniards constructed Indians as an epistemological category that has served, since then, the dual purpose of occluding the complexity and diversity of civilizations found in this hemisphere and leaving them with a diminished, uncertain social identity. Since the early 16th century, to be Indian in America has been a recurrent journey into the realm of ambiguity, an inquiry into a self whose limits and attributes are more the results of colonial interaction than the outcome of autonomous choices.

The indigenous people of the agrarian civilizations of Middle America and the Andes were increasingly compressed by the fast-growing *mestizo* populations surrounding them and, soon after the invasion, this began to look like the inevitable fate of Amerindian societies. Indigenous peoples found themselves beleaguered and oppressed by the intricacies of colonial institutions and forced to restructure themselves individually and collectively to serve the colonizers' goals and to survive. This onerous process unleashed a painful dialectic between an assumed communal ethnic identity and allegiance and the generic colonial indigenous identity, both products of European political domination. This continuous search for an ethnic identity that would both satisfy the need for communal belonging and express affinity/solidarity with all those who shared the colonial experience has characterized the long history of ethnic resistance of the indigenous people of Latin America.

### Peasants and Intellectuals

Not all indigenous responded to this dilemma in the same manner. Generic indigenous identity soon became the main form of self-identification of the indig-

enous nobility and elite, while communal ties comprised the primary identity of indigenous peasants. The pre-Columbian separation between the dominant indigenous nobility and elites and the subordinate commoners (the *macehuales* of Meso-America and the *aylluruna* or *comunruna* of the Andes) was reinforced and re-established soon after the Spanish invasion and was supported by the Spaniards' expropriation of Indian nobilities' tributary and territorial privileges. Deprived of their territories, their subjects and their gods, nobles and priests found all their norms for living and their legacy from the past called into question (see Gruzinski 1988). Some survivors of the first clash chose clandestine cultural and religious practices, whereas others were drawn into debates among themselves and with their oppressors; they began to use European-derived arguments, discourses and literary tools to denounce Christianity and the colonial enterprise (Gruzinski 1988: 40-41).<sup>1</sup> In contrast, the rural indigenous masses suffered a long process of communal isolation and fragmentation of what remained of the ethnic totality. Severed from the rest of their diminished polity and connected, for economic and administrative purposes, to the new dominating foreign polity via their local leaders, the co-opted *caciques* and *curacas*, indigenous communities embarked on their own construction of the colonial matrix of neo-indigenous rural society.

I am suggesting that increasing class differentiation and cultural and geographic separation occurred between the indigenous intelligentsia and the rural masses. The former, mostly urban, were transformed into a literate dependent aristocracy that re-created its identity, drawing on collective memories that combined old ideas contained in codices, glyphs, *quipus* and other oral traditions with the new prestigious alphabetic writing (Gruzinski 1988: 43). This is the intelligentsia that produced the 1,200-page letter from Guamán Poma to King Philip of Spain, the *Nueva Crónica y Buen Gobierno*, and the *Relaciones Originales de Chalco Anequemecan* by Francisco Domingo Chimalpahin Cuauhtlehuauitzin. Although these indigenous elites and nobilities fundamentally sought to defend their class interests throughout the colonial period, in the 18th century they increasingly became engaged in popular movements and rebellions. This brought into the debate elaborate ideas about "Indian nations" and independent indigenous kingdoms and states.<sup>2</sup> This type of indigenous nationalism, undoubtedly inspired by the Bourbon reforms and nourished by the Enlightenment, was occasionally able to combine the grievances expressed by the indigenous elite and the iniquities suffered by the indigenous peasantry, thus overcoming the differences between urban aspirations and parochial perceptions in the hinterland.

Although the process of achieving political independence in Mexico, the rest of Middle America and the Andean countries and the subsequent hegemony of liberalism struck a blow to the indigenous elites as a class, a small group of indigenous intellectuals and *déclassés* can be found to this day. They currently constitute part of the indigenous *petite bourgeoisie* consisting of petty bureaucrats, local *caciques*, town merchants, schoolteachers, students and professionals. Their rela-

tions with the indigenous peasant community may at times be distant, ideologized, paternalistic, and even arrogant but, nevertheless, this contradictory and ambiguous relationship has characterized the life of indigenous communities for centuries. Understanding this relationship is necessary if one is to comprehend the history of Native American political resistance and cultural tenacity.

### Indigenous Ecology and Economy: the Moral Approach

Two themes pertaining to ethnic resistance recur in the long history of interaction between the indigenous elite and the indigenous peasantry. One is an indigenous cultural concern that we might call the moral treatment of the cosmos, a kind of moral ecology, and the second is the social understanding of economic relations, what James Scott, using a notion developed by British historian E.P. Thompson, has termed a "moral economy" (Scott 1976; Thompson 1963). In the next few pages I explore how the interests of intelligentsia and the masses have coincided and diverged in these spheres of moral ecology and moral economy.

During the years immediately following the Spanish invasion of Mexico, the Maya people of Yucatán initiated repeated acts of resistance that frequently turned into armed insurrections. These insurrections were motivated by a call to reconstitute the social and cultural pre-colonial order and return to the world's sacredness - to purify a nature contaminated by foreign oppressors. In 1546 the *chilam* (prophet-diviner) Anbal brought together a coalition of Maya people. On the calendric date of Death and End (November 9) they initiated a war of liberation intended to kill the invaders, put an end to colonial domination and purify the earth (Bartolomé 1984; Barabas 1987). The rebels killed captured Spaniards and their Maya slaves in sacrificial rites and meted out the same punishment to all plants and domesticated animals brought by the Europeans. In 1786 the Totonacs of Papantla, in the Mexican south-east, rose in rebellion against the Spanish authorities in defense of their trees, which had been threatened by the mayor. A Spanish source mentions the indigenous' reasons: "The trees give shade to people and help them to persevere, are useful to tie animals, protect houses from fires, and the branches and leaves are used as fodder for animals" (in Taylor 1979: 137). A few years earlier, in 1742, in the Amazon forest of Peru thousands of kilometers to the south, a Quechua messiah, Juan Santos Atahualpa Apo Capac Huayna, began to foment a rebellion. Educated by the Jesuits, Atahualpa was knowledgeable in Latin and had traveled to Europe and Africa. His insurrection would mobilize thousands of Ashaninka, Quechua and a dozen other ethnic groups and would keep Spaniards and Peruvians out of the region for a century. Among the insurgents' revolutionary demands and proposals were some that I would consider part of a moral ecology: the right to life in dispersed villages and households in order to allow a rational use of the tropical rainforest; the eradica-

tion of European pigs, considered harmful to farming and people's health; the right to free cultivation and use of coca (*Erythroxichon coca*), "the herb of God"; and the right to produce and ceremonially drink *masato*, a fermented manioc beverage of substantial nutritional value (Varese 1973b; Zarzar 1989).

Two centuries later, in 1973, among the Chinantec of Oaxaca, an intense messianic movement flared up. The Chinantec opposed the construction of a dam that would flood their territory, forcing them into exile to distant lands (Barabas and Bartolomé 1973; Barabas 1987). To defend the ecological integrity of their territory, which they considered sacred, the Chinantec implemented a diversified strategy that ranged from legal and bureaucratic negotiations and alliance building with poor *mestizo* peasants to the mobilization of shamans, "the caretakers of the lines" (the ethnic borders), so that with their "lightning" (*nahuáls*) they would kill the president of Mexico, Luis Echeverría (Barabas 1987). The Chinantec messianic movement legitimized itself culturally and socially with the sacred appearance of the Virgin of Guadalupe and the "Engineer Great God", who ordered the performance of a series of collective rituals in which certain environmental or ecocultural units (such as the rivers, mountains, trees, springs, caves, trails) were ideologically and physically reinforced through a liturgy of cultural interpretation.

In March 1984, representatives of five indigenous organizations from the Amazonian countries of Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru founded an international organization: the *Coordinadora de las Organizaciones Indígenas de la Cuenca Amazónica* (Coordinating Body for the Indigenous Peoples' Organizations of the Amazon Basin-COICA).<sup>3</sup> The objectives of COICA are essentially ethno-political: (1) to defend the rights of the indigenous people, their territories and their self-determination, (2) to represent member organizations before government and international agencies, (3) to strengthen the unity of all indigenous Amazonian peoples, and (4) to promote indigenous cultural values through autonomous development. In October 1989, a commission of five members of COICA went directly to the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and the United States Agency for International Development to promote their environmentalist agenda. COICA complained to US environmentalist organizations that, in true colonialist fashion, the development institutions in the Amazon had marginalized the main subjects of Amazonian development: indigenous people. "The Amazon that is burning right now is our life," declared COICA's President Evaristo Nugkuak (COICA 1989), and continued:

*We are encouraged that the environmentalists are seated at the same bargaining table with the heads of South American governments, the international lending agencies, and the timber and cattle magnates. But the time has come for the indigenous people of the Amazon - the people who have always lived there - to take a place at the table as well .... We, the indigenous people, have been an integral part of the Amazon's biosphere for millennia. We have used and cared for the resources*

*of the biosphere with a great deal of respect, because it is our home, and because we know that our survival and that of our future generations depends on it. Our accumulated knowledge about the ecology of our home, our models for living with the peculiarities of the Amazon biosphere, our reverence and respect for the tropical forest and its other inhabitants, both plants and animals, are the key to guaranteeing the future of the Amazon Basin, not only for our peoples but also for all of humanity.*

I want to draw attention to the moral ecology theme characterizing these few examples (chosen from a vast number of possible ones, both historical and contemporary). This underlying theme seems to have guided the long history of indigenous resistance to colonialism, economic exploitation and political oppression. During the first centuries of colonial occupation, indigenous social interpretation was marked by sacred non-Christian hermeneutics. This ecological cosmology, based essentially on the notion and practice of individual usufruct of collective property and the primacy of use value, resisted (with different degrees of success) the intrusion of a cosmology based on exchange value that corresponded to the capitalist market economy that would fully develop in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries.

Nonetheless, since at least the mid-17th century the local indigenous communities, as well as the larger ethno-national indigenous collectivities, have witnessed the establishment of an economic system in which part of the production satisfies subsistence needs and the rest, the surplus, enters the circuit of commercial exchange via the capitalist market. This contradictory coexistence of two rationales within the indigenous ethnic community, one ruled by use value and the other by exchange value production, has generated a constant cultural tension that deepens as the dominant capitalist economy penetrates indigenous society. A distinction must nevertheless be made in order to understand this internal tension of the political economy of the indigenous community. Although the community may engage in capitalist relations of exchange with the external market, it maintains and internally reproduces non-capitalist relations of production.

I do not wish to foster analytical naivety by including myself in the neo-populist anthropology that defines indigenous communities as uncontaminated citadels of the pre-capitalist economy. I wish instead to add to the discussion of how indigenous ethnicities are reproduced, that dimension of social reality that Scott (1976, 1985) acutely analyzes for Asian peasants. Scott maintains that a theory of economic exploitation and ethno-political oppression of indigenous people cannot be limited to an analysis of the factors of external domination. Rather, it must also analyze the indigenous economy, which is a moral economy founded mainly on the logic of reciprocity and on the right to subsistence and, secondarily, on the necessity of exchange in the capitalist market. These moral principles permeate the social life of pre-peasant, peasant and even some post-peasant indigenous who,

self-exiled from their communities because of poverty, partially reconstitute this moral economy as urban sub-proletarians or transnational migrant workers in the agricultural fields of California (Arizpe 1978; Kearney and Nagengast 1989).

If a new historical reading of the numerous indigenous social movements were to pay attention to forms of internal resistance based on the political economy of reciprocity and on the ecological treatment of the cosmos, a process of parallel social lives would be revealed. These lives, only partially articulated, emerge when indigenous people and dominant national societies reproduce themselves on the basis of contradictory cultural principles that are negotiated time after time, occasionally - when an indigenous society is cornered by the oppressor and cannot avoid direct confrontation - in violent terms.

In this sense, the fierce confrontations and rebellions of indigenous people embody and condense in heroic moments the other struggle that takes place in daily forms of opposition to external intervention. I am thinking of the indigenous' deliberate refusal to yield to the principles and modalities of the exchange value economy, of their indifference to the logic of economic accumulation, of their commitment, on the contrary, to the dictates of reciprocity and ceremonial squander, of their involvement in social generosity, and of the leveling process that impoverishes economically while empowering politically.

It is not strange, therefore, that the epistemological limits devised by the hegemonic disciplines as a result of a long historical vision fabricated from the imperial and endo-colonial perspective have conspired to obscure the daily forms of indigenous resistance. They have favored, instead, the perception and analysis of the intense moments of open opposition: social movements in their climactic confrontation. Through this process, indigenous societies are anthropologized and therefore essentialized in their exemplary characteristics (along the lines of Said's [1979] analysis of "Orientalism" and Clifford's [1988] work). Following such epistemological treatments, indigenous ethnicities are situated in different taxonomic slots that are typically the domain of ethnographic activity (a discipline that has been notoriously impervious, to say the least, to political considerations). Subsequently, the procedure has been to dichotomize the social continuum between indigenous cultural ethnicities and non-indigenous cultural sectors and to separate them by ethnic boundaries that are reputed to hold specific referential and supporting attributes of ethnic identity. For years, analysis of the alleged unidirectional crossing of these ethnic boundaries from indigenous ethnicity to the generic *mestizo* national cultures has been the main goal and preoccupation of the so-called applied anthropological and "indigenist" policy of Latin American states. If the obstacles to indigenous people's modernization and assimilation are these imagined borders of cultural identity and allegiance, then let us help them to leap courageously across the line that separates barbarism from civilization via the educational system and the various programs for developing the community.

### The Difficult Hegemony of Indigenous Mobilization

Yet social and cultural dialectic is much more intricate. Culture, in fact, is a field of contention, a contested domain in which negotiations between individuals and social sectors of the same ethnic group and between the latter and the external dominant society constantly occur. Therefore ethnicity, cultural identity and the struggle to maintain sociopolitical and ethnic autonomy or self-determination can be comprehended more in terms of flexible horizons than of rigid boundaries. A situational phenomenon, indigenous ethnicity is socially constructed and reconstructed in a permanent process of dialectical negotiation.

The contested domain of culture is precisely the area of hegemonic construction - the social space where an indigenous intelligentsia can explore and develop a common ground of political interest that can privilege analysis and mobilize action around issues that most indigenous people identify as central points of injustice and oppression. Indigenous hegemony is therefore a political consensus based on a provisional, well-crafted, cultural agreement. And this, I believe, partially explains the precariousness and fragmentation of long-term indigenous political actions, which can remain consolidated only as long as there is cultural consent.

Since the early 1970s, the political voices of indigenous people of Middle and South America have become increasingly powerful and have penetrated the near-impervious discourse of academic social sciences monopolized by Latin American intellectual elites of the dominant culture. We are facing a process of indigenous re-appropriation of the historical initiative, clearly linked to the broader ethno-political mobilization of other colonized people of the Third World. The indigenous movement has nevertheless been misinterpreted through the privileging of economic categories over a broader cultural and social critique. The result has been an impoverished reading of indigenous political responses, an interpretive transfiguration of indigenous people into generic peasantry, a dismissal of indigenous initiatives, especially when these take place among pre-peasant (tribal) ethnic groups or, at the other extreme, among proletarianized sectors of indigenous people. Academics' limited attention to this massive social movement is particularly disturbing in view of the fact that it represents a constituency of millions of people and hundreds of ethnic groups.

Only rarely has this neglect been overcome. One occasion was in 1981 when the Miskito of Nicaragua, heavily supported by the United States, rose up in arms against the Sandinista government. The military offensive brought this almost unknown Amerindian group to the front pages of the Western press and, most important, to the CIA analysts' desks. The quiescence of anthropologists was also challenged when the cryptic guerrilla insurgency of *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) sprang up in the southern Andes of Peru. "On May 18, 1980, Shin-

ing Path guerrillas burned ballot boxes in the Andean village of Chushi and proclaimed their intention to overthrow the Peruvian state" (Starn 1989). Intentionally using the widespread *Inkarri* myth of indigenous resurrection from the cataclysm of the conquest and colonial domination, the revolutionaries chose to highlight the 199th anniversary of the execution by the Spanish colonizers of the Quechua rebel José Gabriel Condorcanqui, Túpac Amaru II. From that initial symbolic action, though many have been reluctant to acknowledge it, undeniable elements of Quechua indigenous culture became increasingly evident in Shining Path's activities.<sup>4</sup> The tragic decade of death and terror that followed the onset of the insurgency was eventually to confirm that this was a war with strong ethnic connotations - a war waged by the children of indigenous peasants, by proletarianized rural peoples and by provincial *mestizos* against the *criollos* (creoles) and urbanized *mestizos* perceived as part of the oppressive bourgeois system and state. Undoubtedly a class struggle in the most orthodox Marxist tradition, it was nonetheless a class struggle permeated, shaped and mobilized by ethnic grievances. Evidence of this comes from the list of surnames of disappeared and killed persons investigated and published by Amnesty International; of the more than 20,000 lives claimed by this ferocious war, most are Quechua.

The close attention paid by social scientists to both these political movements and the recent acknowledgment of their ethnic/indigenous character (which in the case of Shining Path is still intensely debated by Peruvian anthropologists) is in my view indicative of what could be called the neocolonial epistemology of anthropology: a pre-Copernican spirit that insists on recycling theoretical and analytical definitions that are fundamentally Eurocentric and ethnocentric. Indigenous people in Latin America still share with their fellow peasants the burden of Marx's unfortunate dictum about sacks of potatoes and peasants' political and cultural inability to organize themselves and strive for economic rights and self-determination (Shanin 1990a). Contemporary explanations of this type argue that if an indigenous movement is politically well organized in terms of Western rationality and logic, and its ideological stand has drawn sufficiently from the Western (Euro-American) scientific tradition, then obviously it is no longer indigenous but has become an integral part of the generic movement of the popular classes, regardless of its objective ethnic composition or its declared ethnic identity. We may here distinguish between a movement like the Miskito, which adamantly claimed to be indigenous, and one like Shining Path, which may be objectively (demographically) indigenous but, except for some use of subtle Andean cultural metaphors, does not boast an indigenous identity, on the contrary denying it.

It could be argued that in the Latin American indigenous movement we are seeing an increased participation of non-indigenous individuals in influential positions, as well as substantial external ideological influences. Social scientists' approach to this phenomenon has not been to view it as a process of hegemony

building but rather to provide a superficial explanation that denies the indigenous any capacity for autonomy.

The main point here is that social scientists' absence of concern or misinterpretation of indigenous political mobilization arises from two complementary factors. Both are based on a non-obvious anthropological view of culture as a taxonomic domain ruled by a code of boundaries rather than as a sphere of permanent dialectical reconstruction. In this sense, indigenous political movements that do not express themselves using Western discourse (which means the hegemony of Western political culture) are acknowledged neither by the social scientists nor by the national society, and indigenous initiative is denied existence by being equated with a generic popular movement devoid of ethnic specificity and intentionality. Only when weapons and violence make their appearance is the indigenous movement acknowledged. Significantly, the discourse of imperial power turns the indigenous movement into an intelligible phenomenon for the dominant society.

The Mexican anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla (1981) has said that when indigenous societies appropriate external cultural elements (generally from the dominant society) and symbolically reinterpret them as authentically indigenous, they are "nationalizing" (Indianizing) those elements and making them available, as an indigenous cultural resource, to the collectivity. In a word, what takes place is a process of social "allomorphism" - the same substance after adoption is perceived and socially imagined as having a different form from the original one, as having an ethnic/indigenous form and value. In this process of nationalization or Indianization of external cultural elements, the role of the indigenous intelligentsia has historically been fundamental. It is the procedure of hegemonic construction that occurs when there is an objective coincidence of interests between the local communities and the indigenous intellectuals, when the concrete local grievances can become part of a more general expression of ethno-national injustice and, vice versa, when the historical national oppression is experienced at least ideologically at the level of the local community.

This process, of course, implies the formation of a clear ethnic and class consciousness that will serve as a basis for transforming ethnicities with implicit (or local, parochial) economic and cultural aims into ethnicities with explicit (or national) political ones - turning corporative ethnicities into hegemonic ethnicities. Crucial here is the transition from a corporatist consciousness focused on demands that the ruling class and its state are willing to yield to a hegemonic collective will (to continue using Gramscian notions). Indigenous intellectuals must establish a difference between corporatist and political actions, between consciousness that focuses on the immediate present and an ethno-national and class consciousness that identifies the ethnic group's historical role on the national scene and in the overall social plan. This arduous task of indigenous hegemonic construction implies the critical demystification of the ethnic group's own history

and culture, the rejection of ethnocentric and chauvinistic positions and, most important, the capacity for understanding, appropriating and reformulating in indigenous terms the culture of the oppressor.

Through the critical examination and formation of ethnic consciousness (the realization of its own unique civilizing tradition and vocation) and class consciousness (the socially shared knowledge and understanding of the fact that its interests as a social group, on the economic and social plane, are in opposition to those of the dominant group and that the opposition is expressed as a struggle to suppress the relation of domination), an indigenous group can truly become master of its own culture and use it to transform and rebuild society (see Varese 1988).

Since the 1970s at least, dozens of important indigenous ethno-political initiatives have emerged in Latin America. To satisfy our need to classify, we might order these indigenous movements along the following five lines, which are based on the work of Richard Chase Smith (1985) for the case of Peru: (1) peasants' organizations, mainly in the Andes and in Meso-America; (2) labor organizations (indigenous as workers, miners, bilingual teachers, rural proletarians); (3) ethnic federations ("tribal" people, tropical lowlands horticulturalists organized along the lines of ethnic membership); (4) urban organizations of highly politicized intellectuals and professionals; (5) organizations of expatriate indigenous such as Mexican indigenous migrants in the United States, other Central American political refugees, and economic deportees (these are the "new transnationalized indigenous", a category corresponding in part to the processes of transnationalization of capital and the labor force and the decline of the nation-state as the institutionalized territorial market). These types of indigenous organizations are not mutually exclusive. In the majority of cases they are, in fact, complementary: they respond to different conjunctures and places, to specific demands arising in different socio-economic contexts.

In July 1990, the representatives of 120 indigenous nations met in Quito, Ecuador, to celebrate "500 Years of Indigenous Resistance". The Declaration of Quito begins with the following words: "We the Indigenous of the Americas have never abandoned our struggle against the oppression, the discrimination, and the exploitation that were imposed upon us by the European invasion of our lands." The meeting took place a few weeks after the conclusion of negotiations between the government of Ecuador and the Ecuadorian indigenous organizations that established a truce after a massive uprising of Ecuador's indigenous people. According to some analysts, more than 100,000 indigenous participated in the popular mobilization, which lasted several weeks. The central demands of the movement were adopted by the continental congress: full recovery and control of indigenous territories, political and economic autonomy, and indigenous self-determination.

An analysis of the lengthy conclusions and resolutions of the congress reveals that the political platforms of organized indigenous peoples of the Americas are fundamentally similar to the demands that have constituted the focus of indigenous struggle for the past five centuries: recovery of the territories lost after the colonial and republican occupation; recovery and defense of the environment and nature destroyed by mercantile exploitation; the right to maintain, re-establish and develop indigenous economies based on communal solidarity and the principles of reciprocity; respect for the sovereignty of indigenous nationalities and the right to self-determination and political autonomy; the right to use and develop indigenous languages; the right to use and develop one's own culture, forms of spirituality and scientific and intellectual capacities without the oppressive foreign intervention of Christian evangelization and colonial systems of education. Organized indigenous declared: "Our final liberation can express itself only through the full exercise of our self-determination ... without Indigenous self-government and without full control of our territories, there is no autonomy... In our general strategy we look for the global transformation of the national society and the nation-state: we look for the creation of a new nation" (Declaración de Quito 1990). The spiritual foundations of the indigenous autonomist political projects lie in a conception of humanity and nature which is essentially communal:

*We do not own nature... it is not a commodity... it is an integral part of our life; it is our past, present, and future. We believe that this meaning of the humanity and of the environment is not only valid for our communities or for the Indo-American people. We believe that this form of life is an option and a light for the people of the world oppressed by a system which dominates people and nature ... We want to look at History, at the History of our people. . the History that is concealed by the invaders... who deny our cultures... to justify invasion, genocide, and permanent pillage during the last 500 years.*

The hemispheric movement of indigenous resistance is growing in unprecedented and multifaceted ways throughout Latin America. The spiritual support of this political program is centered on a moral system that privileges the principles and norms of reciprocity as opposed to those of individual accumulation and an ecological conception of the universe as opposed to one that is utilitarian and exploitative. This system of moral economy and moral ecology gives individual and collective rights to subsistence an essential civilizing role that is not negotiable. The attachment of indigenous people to a normative system that assumes reciprocity and ecological sharing as the central focus of its own cultural-political project reveals a certain idealism and - why not? - a certain utopianism. We may certainly see the politicized indigenous as utopian but only insofar as they believe and act according to a premature truth.

## Notes

- 1 While the Quechua-Inca noble from Peru, Guamán Poma, is undoubtedly the best example of this early indigenous anticolonial criticism (Adomo 1988), other important examples can be found in Inca Garcilaso de la Vega (Ortega 1992) and Santa Cruz Pachacuti (Pease 1989).
- 2 This is clearly the case for the multiethnic indigenous rebellion led by Juan Santos Atahualpa in Central Peru in 1742 and the insurrection of José Gabriel Condorcanqui, Túpac Amaru II, in southern Peru in the 1780s (see Stern 1987; Varese 1973b). A thorough history of the indigenous resistance to colonialism has yet to be written. Some initial steps for the case of Mexico have been taken by Barabas (1987), who studied 56 messianic rebellions in Mexico between the 16th and 20th centuries, and Taylor (1979), who analyzed 142 indigenous insurrections occurring over a period of 131 years in three regions of Mexico: the Valley of Mexico, the High Mixtec region and the Valley of Oaxaca.
- 3 COICA is now made up also of organisations from Venezuela, Surinam, Guyana and French Guiana. For its current composition, see note 3 in the essay *Buried Gods: The Politics of Indigenous resistance*, chapter I. [Ed. note]
- 4 According to the Andean tradition, the body of Inkarrí (Inka Rey and/or the Inka-ri, word/speech/spirit, founding principle of all things in the universe), who was the last Inka ruler, Atahualpa, executed by the Spaniards, was dismembered, scattered and buried in different places in the Andes. The Andean tradition unites symbolically all other indigenous revolutionary heroes, such as Túpac Amaru I (16th century) and Túpac Amaru II (18th century), executed by the Spaniards, and attributes to them the same fate of dismemberment and fragmented burial. The body of Inkarrí (which symbolizes all the bodies of indigenous cultural heroes) has been coming together slowly for centuries in a hidden underground process. When the head joins the rest of the body, the Inka indigenous nation will re-emerge in full independence and sovereignty.

## THINK GLOBALLY, ACT LOCALLY (1991)

### abstract

In the Mixteco villages of Oaxaca, Mexico, even the poorest houses made of wood or adobe have a certain dignity.\* They are also a metaphor for the relations between the individual and the community, insofar as parents and neighbours were involved in their construction and founding through celebrations that will live on in the memories of their inhabitants. The dilapidated urban houses in Fresno, California are also a metaphor, but in this case for the pathetic loneliness of poverty in the heart of one of the world's most prosperous regions. It is here that the Benito Juárez civil association works, bringing together indigenous immigrants to the U.S. from different places who, despite their position in a highly developed agro-industrial centre, act as an indigenous community based around voluntary collective work, a reciprocal exchange of goods and services, democracy by consensus and authority based on moral weight and experience. Organisations are working in different parts of the country to defend the identity of immigrants and their right to exploitation-free work. The parochial perspective of the world that the people had in their communities of origin has been rapidly replaced by a politicised and pan-indigenous vision, a product of the direct and brutal experience of economic exploitation and ethnic discrimination they have experienced. The European colonization of America created the category of *indigeno* as a generic and undifferentiated entity. Immigration to the United States, particularly during the 1980s, and other processes of social mobilisation have also produced a generic identity, although in this case aimed at defending indigenous rights, which is now one of the main forms of indigenous identification. The simplistic interpretations of official historiography indicate that the colonization of the indigenous was achieved in a short space of time and that they had no other option but to adapt to the demands of the rulers. Historians, Marxist or otherwise, are agreed on a vision of indigenous peoples who respond only to the initiatives of others, failing to consider them as historical subjects with their own strategies. Current reality demonstrates quite the opposite. The sociology of indigenous peoples in Latin America is extremely complex and includes rural and urban populations, a proletariat, illegal immigrants, professionals and others, all of which raises a challenge to established anthropological tradition. These days there are ethnic federations, urban indigenous organisations, unions, expatriate associations and international bodies coordinating the indigenous efforts of just one region or the whole planet. To describe the indigenous as people of *traditional* behaviour is of no use in explaining the current reality of the indigenous who, without losing their identity, are medical doctors, doctors in other scientific disciplines, pilots, historians and sociologists. Many indigenous consider that cultural change and continuity must be understood as political strategies.

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When I arrived at the modest home a few blocks from downtown Fresno, California, I was thinking about the Mixtec indigenous villages I had seen in Oaxaca, Mexico. In the High Mixtec region, nestled in the Sierra Madre Mountains, even the poorest houses, made of logs or adobe with palm or tile roofs, have a certain dignity. There, a house is a metaphor for the relationship of the individual to the community: the roof was raised and the foundation laid by relatives and neighbors in a festive celebration that resounds in the villagers' memory years later.

In Fresno, the contrast could not have been greater. The dilapidated home I saw was also a metaphor, a pathetic illustration of the solitude of poverty in the heart of one of the wealthiest regions in the world. A sign in front announced, "Casa del Mixteco". Filemón López, a Mixtec from Rio Timbre in San Juan Mixtepec, Oaxaca who works as a migrant farm worker, is the president and founder of this community center, a meeting place for some of the thousands of Mixtec who work in California's Central Valley. Their organization, the Benito Juárez Civic Association, has members from as far away as Salem, Oregon. In the midst of this highly technological agro-industrial Mecca, the group functions as a truly Meso-American indigenous institution, based on the *tequio* (cooperative community labor donated voluntarily to the collective), reciprocity (as the moral basis for the exchange of goods and services), democracy by consensus, and political authority based on the moral weight of age and experience.

Juan Martínez, the association secretary, is a young Mixtec agronomist who works in a restaurant to earn a living. Juan's dream is to get onto a Master's program in rural development and continue using his knowledge to assist expatriate Mixtec. He would like to found an agricultural production cooperative with two centres: one in California's Central Valley, the other in the indigenous township of San Juan Mixtepec in Mexico. The leaders of the Casa del Mixteco know that ethnic sovereignty and political autonomy are not achievable in either Mexico or the United States without a strategy for economic development that can give them a margin of independence, a certain freedom from the slavery of rural wage labor.<sup>1</sup>

A few miles to the north, in Livingston, another group of Mixtec migrants founded the Organization of Exploited and Oppressed People (OPEO). The group's logo is a handshake crowned by a machete and an axe, with the motto, "For the People's Liberation". OPEO Secretary General Rufino Domínguez maintains that his organization intends to do more than promote the development of their communities of origin in Oaxaca by remitting dollars like most Mexican migrants. It seeks to defend Mixtec in California and northern Mexico from exploitation in the workplace and ethnic or racial discrimination.

Similar organizations of Mexican indigenous - Zapotec, Chinantec, Trique, Purépecha and others - have emerged in recent years in San Diego, Los Angeles, the vineyards of Napa and Sonoma, and the Central Valley. In their communities of origin, indigenous peoples tend to have a parochial view of the world. But

once they come to the United States, they quickly become politicized and "pan-Indianized", transformed by the direct and brutal experience of economic exploitation and ethnic discrimination they all encounter. Back home, oppression has historically been perceived as coming from neighboring villages with which they have for centuries competed for access to land and ever-scarce resources (threatened continually by landowners, companies, state projects and, most recently, by corporate interests).

Here in the United States, on the other hand, they consider themselves to be Mixtec or Zapotec, members of a larger social grouping, of an ethnicity (Nagen-gast and Kearney 1990: 80). Their specific ethnic identity is recuperated as a sense of nationality, with the political awareness that they are discriminated against because they are indigenous, not only by the Anglo population but by Mexicans and Mexican-Americans as well.

The growing ethnic-national politicization of indigenous migrants from Mexico and Central America is a relatively new phenomenon, dating only from 1980, when large numbers of peasants from indigenous regions entered the labor market of the agro-industries of northern Mexico and the United States. Today, of the several million undocumented workers who periodically cross the Mexico-US border, I estimate that more than a quarter of a million are indigenous from Mexico, Central and South America.<sup>2</sup> The Maya of Guatemala flee the terror in their country en masse to Mexico and the United States; the indigenous of Mexico periodically escape the economic misery of their regions; and even towns of Quechua shepherds from Peru's Central Andes find themselves tending sheep on the farms of Basque ranchers in the states of Wyoming and Nevada, while thousands more Andean Quechua take refuge from the terror of Peru's civil war in some other niche of the US labor market.<sup>3</sup>

The case of Latin American indigenous expatriates in the United States is a dramatic example of the evolution of indigenous society and politics since the 1970s. Indigenous movements, thrust into new roles by the new global division of labor and the advanced appropriation of the environment, seem to have taken a strategic step forward. Even as indigenous people are forced to migrate across national borders, and as transnational corporate capital moves into the heart of indigenous territory - or perhaps because of these phenomena - indigenous have emerged on the stage of regional politics, overturning the common wisdom that they and their cultures are doomed to perish in the face of modernity.

An old Latin American saying has it that, "If you've seen one indigenous, you've seen them all". The racist brutality of the platitude points to a fact of history brilliantly analyzed by the late Mexican anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla (1981): Spanish colonialism created and institutionalized a generic definition of "Indians" that negated the historic validity and cultural specificity of hundreds of indigenous nationalities. The colonial system denied indigenous societ-

ies their ethnic ties and identities in an attempt to weaken the reconstitution of indigenous nationalities.

The unforeseen result was the emergence of a double, contradictory process of ethnogenesis. Some of the agrarian peoples of Meso-America and the Andes closed themselves into local units of production and reproduction: the indigenous community, the village, what was known as the "Indian republic". These are the people who supplied the seasonal labor force for public works, *haciendas*, plantations and mines.

Others, "new indigenous peoples", began to emerge from the changing needs of the labor market. They were partially uprooted from their communities of origin and partially connected to their new workplaces. These indigenous were less conservative in their cultural identity, more adaptable to new environments, and more effective in using ethnicity as a flexible strategy. From this group, as well as from the communal elites (of *curacas* and *caciques*) came the most prominent indigenous political and revolutionary figures of the last five centuries: Túpac Amaru, a rich eighteenth-century merchant and international trader from the southern Andes; Juan Santos Atahualpa, a seventeenth-century Quechua intellectual renowned for his knowledge of international politics and Andean-Amazon history and culture; Túpac Katari, Jacinto Kanek, and Quintín Lame, to mention but a few names from a history yet to be written.

Generic "Indianness" encouraged by the colonial state quickly became the principal form of identification for the indigenous nobility of the Andes and Meso-America. But, for millions of indigenous peasants, the residential community, with its colonial social, political and economic structures, its intense and absorbing ceremonial life, and its fragmented and parochial worldview, became the only mirror of ethnic identity. The image it gave was partial and narrow, certainly, but it truly reflected the existing conditions of oppression and injustice.

The gap between indigenous elites and the subordinated communities, confirmed and reaffirmed by the colonial administration, prompted a growing class differentiation between the intelligentsia and the masses. The intellectuals, most of them urban, slowly became a dependent and literate aristocracy, one which invented a new historical memory for its new identity. Although these elites sought to defend their class interests throughout the colonial period, from the middle of the eighteenth century on they became increasingly involved in popular indigenous movements and insurrections, enriching these with ideas about nations, states and independent indigenous kingdoms. This indigenous nationalism, encouraged by the Bourbonic reforms and infused with the ideals of the Enlightenment, was occasionally capable of linking the affronts to indigenous elites with the injustices suffered by the peasantry, thus bridging the gap between the metropolitan aspirations of the former and the parochial perceptions of the latter.

Even though political independence from Spain and the consequent hegemony of liberal thought dealt a mortal blow to the indigenous elite as a class, a small sector of intellectuals and *déclassés* continues to exist to this day throughout the Andean and Meso-American world. This intelligentsia is part of an indigenous *petite bourgeoisie*: a class of petty bureaucrats, local chiefs, village merchants, teachers, students and professionals. Their association with the indigenous peasant community has at times been distant, ideologized, paternalistic and even arrogant. Yet this ambiguous and contradictory relationship has been part of indigenous community life for more than a century, and it is essential to understanding the history of political resistance and cultural tenacity of indigenous peoples (regarding class formation among indigenous peoples of Latin America, see Gruszinski 1988, Barabas 1987, Flores Galindo 1987b).

A Eurocentric reading of the indigenous history of Latin America has obscured and twisted the many rebellions and political movements that occurred over 500 years of European occupation. Official history books give the impression that conquest and colonization were achieved in a few decades, after which the various indigenous peoples simply adjusted to the demands of their colonial and republican rulers. Historians, Marxist and non-Marxist alike, have tended to paint the indigenous as people who can only respond to the initiatives of others, not as historical subjects who, though dominated, continually attempt to negotiate their political and cultural autonomy using all sorts of sophisticated strategies.

Such interpretations tend to assume the inevitable success of capitalism. According to this view, the indigenous have predictable and mechanical responses to the expansion of the market and the penetration of capitalist ways of life into their societies. They become "modern", leaving behind their ethnicity, perceived by theoreticians of modernization as an obstacle to entrepreneurial individualism, and by Marxists as an impediment to proper politicization, that is, class-consciousness. The specific ethnicity of each indigenous people is viewed as a precarious identity that will vaporize as soon as the society joins the modern world, even under conditions of subordination and exploitation.

History, however, shows a different face. The indigenous peoples who survived the biological disaster of the invasion recovered their numbers extremely slowly, albeit steadily. This was particularly true for the agrarian peoples of the Andes and Meso-America, and moderately so for those in the Amazon and other tropical lowlands. In Latin America today there are nearly 40 million indigenous and more than 400 major ethno-linguistic groups. Contrary to the predictions of assimilative policies, indigenous peoples have remained demographically stable, bilingualism has increased without any disastrous loss of indigenous languages and, in some cases, there is an unmistakable tendency toward demographic growth.

In other words, neither with respect to demographics nor cultural assimilation have indigenous peoples been defeated. On the threshold to the third millen-

nium, there are indigenous in nearly all regions where they lived in the eighteenth century. In some cases they have expanded into new territories and established a presence in urban, highly industrialized communities supposedly incompatible with the stereotypical image of indigenous peasants. Thousands of indigenous squatters occupy the cities of America, from Lima, La Paz and Quito to Mexico City, San Diego and Los Angeles.

There are indigenous living in both the cities and their communities of origin, moving back and forth according to the farming seasons. Some travel thousands of miles one, two or more times a year, from the country to the city and back again, crossing international borders to take advantage of the niches left open by an economic system that is ever less interested in the survival of markets defined by national boundaries. A growing number of indigenous people are learning to manipulate alien and complex cultural contexts, with practically no-one noticing that they are indigenous, even in environments rife with ethnic and racial tension.

This new sociology of the indigenous peoples of Latin America - transnationalized, urban, proletarian, border crossing, bilingual and trilingual, professional - poses a direct challenge to established anthropological tradition. To be indigenous used to mean fundamentally to belong to a residential indigenous community located in a marginal rural zone, to be preferably monolingual in an indigenous language, to have a strong communal and ceremonial understanding of life, to show some rejection of the logic of the market economy, and to be satisfied with the repetitive and "traditional" use of antiquated technology.

This simply does not describe a Quechua from the Andes who works on a computer, a Shuar from the Ecuadorian Amazon with a doctorate in pedagogy, a Kuna from Panama who is a medical doctor, a Tukano from Brazil with a pilot's license, an Aymara or a Zapotec who writes books on sociology and history. Are these people not indigenous? What do we do with an entire community of Mixtec who own pick-up trucks, have parabolic antennae on their roofs and VCRs in the kitchen next to the *comal*? In which of the boxes of anthropological taxonomy do they fit? Obviously, this is a problem that worries academics and development specialists a lot more than it does the indigenous. It is a sign that, in spite of an emerging anti-colonial streak, anthropology still suffers from the ideological effects of Eurocentric thinking.<sup>4</sup>

Indigenous intellectuals of course feel no obligation to maintain loyalty to the science and epistemology of their masters, even if they have studied in Euro-American universities. Tomás Huanca, an Aymara ethno-historian with a Master's degree in anthropology from the University of Florida, believes that cultural change and continuity among Andean peoples should be understood in terms of political strategy. Ethnic identity is used strategically and "opportunistically" in each context, Huanca argues. And no-one is less Aymara or less Quechua for using his or her ethnicity in an intelligent way (Huanca 1991).

A Quichua from the Ecuadorian Amazon, Valerio Grefa, a bilingual teacher and former president of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon (CONFENIAE), has elegantly and efficiently combined his training as a teacher in Ecuador's mestizo society, his militant and committed role as an indigenous of the Amazon, his experience as a modern political cadre, and his syncretic intellectual preparation. A Quichua from the Ecuadorian Andes, Luis Macas, president of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), finds it no burden to synthesize in his political activism the most progressive postures of the Catholic church, Andean socialist traditions and a firm respect for Quichua culture.<sup>5</sup>

For five centuries, the oligarchic states and societies of Latin America have been based on maximizing the exploitation of a workforce carefully organized along ethnic lines. The incorporation of indigenous ethnicity into the international division of labor gave form to class differences within ethnic groups, as well as to the inequalities among them. The result of this differential treatment of indigenous peoples and regions is a complex class structure that permeates the entire multiethnic configuration of Latin America. This class structure spawned an equally intricate panorama of indigenous organizations and political platforms, reflecting different levels of ethnic and class consciousness.

Two ideological currents have threatened to tear apart each indigenous political organization over the past two decades. The "peasant" and "proletarian" postures emphasize the class content of the indigenous social reality and struggle. The "Indianist" stance conceives of indigenous political struggle as a national liberation movement, seeking autonomy, self-determination, sovereignty, or limited or absolute independence for each specific ethnic group.

Of course, this multifaceted and dynamic political movement cannot be reduced to a simple and fixed taxonomy. There are indigenous peasant organizations which defend the economic and social rights of farmers; urban indigenous primarily concerned with the ideological debate regarding "Indianness" and class; ethnic federations primarily made up of non-peasant horticulturists particularly interested in cultural rights and ethnic autonomy; indigenous organized in unions, such as miners, factory workers, petty bureaucrats, bilingual teachers, agricultural workers and the urban underemployed; indigenous expatriates in the United States, including political refugees (Mapuche from Chile, Maya from Guatemala); and lastly, international indigenous organizations like the Coordinating Body for Indigenous People's Organizations of the Amazon Basin (COICA).

The new realities of indigenous peoples suggest that their politics cannot be understood within the old spatial, historical and structural framework of the nation-state. The nineteenth-century notion that the state should act as the founder and originator of the nation, giving a sense of unity to a heterogeneous ethnic and territorial space for the benefit of a ruling elite, is giving way, under pressure

from the transnationalized economy for a more permeable and flexible state that is less centralized, less homogeneous, less authoritarian, and thus more open to corporate penetration (Lefebvre 1974). This process relieves Latin American states of the burden of having to play an entrepreneurial role in lieu of passive national bourgeoisies or oligarchies, while at the same time threatening their very existence.

As capital flows to "freer" regions - indigenous territories, among others - where local environmental restrictions and labor organizations are non-existent or weak, state-indigenous relations seem bound to become increasingly internationalized. Questions such as territorial and resource preservation, land entitlement, migration, unionization and the operations of foreign enterprises on indigenous territory will become strategic issues of "national security". The Amazonian indigenous in COICA are already acting on this trend. Not only have they created a multinational organization to defend their rights but they are also taking their demands directly to international bodies, such as the World Bank, IMF and Inter-American Development Bank, or to the United States government, rather than addressing only regional-level states.

It is ironic that a lesson in political clarity and long-term perspective should come from a coalition of indigenous horticulturists from the Amazon. No serious social analyst would have thought that a series of fragmented "tribal bands", without a significant proletariat or bourgeoisie, and with a tiny intelligentsia, could have woven a complex transnational network of local organizations capable of addressing a gigantic and powerful enemy. Similarly, the 1990 indigenous uprising in Ecuador, which paralyzed the heart of the country for a week, was unexpectedly effective. Mexican and other Andean indigenous organizations in the United States may bring similar surprises.

Because the various indigenous nationalist movements of Latin America emanate from marginality rather than from direct historical involvement in state management, they are less conditioned by the legacies of the old liberal nation-state, and more reflective of the multiple indigenous civil societies long hidden from view. As such, indigenous peoples may be way ahead of the rest of us in articulating the political struggles of the twenty-first century.

## Notes

- 1 As I review this text in 2003 I must admit my amazement at the life history of Juan Martínez. After a few years spent in California as a migrant farm worker, waiter and employed in other odd jobs, Juan Martínez went back to Oaxaca where he was hired by a noted Mexican anthropologist as research assistant in a community development project for indigenous people sponsored by the World Bank. His contribution to the project was so successful that he was offered a job in one of the research departments of the WB. Currently Juan Martínez is directing one of the WB regional offices in Central America.

- 2 This estimate is based on a number of micro studies and conversations with academics who are following the subject (see, for example, Stuart and Kearney 1981).
- 3 According to Peruvian anthropologist Teófilo Altamirano, at least a thousand Quechua shepherds from central Peru have settled in Nevada. He found over 60 Andean cultural organizations in the United States (Altamirano 1990). In 1990 alone, 328,000 people left Peru, of whom 132,000 came to the United States. Most of them were "students" (a classification more indicative of age than anything else) or "workers". A sizeable number of these are probably Quechua. See *Latin American Weekly Report*, no. 31, 1991.
- 4 There has been a long native tradition of criticizing the Euro-American academy's approach to historical and cultural studies. One contemporary Quechua thinker put it this way: "In our analysis, we don't only use class contradictions, but also 'contradictions of civilization'. . . these are three concentric chains that colonize our people: class oppression, that of the nationalist Creole and acculturated mestizo state and lastly the oppression of civilization that the West has imposed on the Andean world... We use Marxism exclusively as a valuable tool. The principal error that Peruvian socialists commit - a result of the absence of indigenous cultural identity and the presence of an embarrassing Western cultural identity amongst the Creoles and mestizos in their ranks - is to confuse the tool with their identity and even using a foreign ideological tool as a crutch for their identity" (Lajo Lazo 1991). For a systematic indigenous critique of Eurocentric social science, see: Wankar 1981.
- 5 As of May 2003 Luis Macas is the Minister of Agriculture in the democratically elected government of Ecuador.

## GLOBAL SOVEREIGNTY AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' ENVIRONMENTALISM (1996)

### abstract

The obstinate biological and cultural continuance of the native peoples of America has to be explored through the complex dialectic of daily forms of biological resistance and cultural adaptation.\* This explains why, despite the genocide caused by the European invasion of the 16th century, they have recovered demographically to reach an estimated population of 40 million people all of whom express a different way of relating to each other and the universe. The low-profile maintenance of their biotic and biotechnological inheritance has enabled them to retain many of their knowledge areas free from the repressive measures of the invaders. Resistance has been a sustained strategy over the centuries, and has often taken the form of armed insurrection. Their capacity to adapt new cultural elements to their own socio-cultural structures has been another of their resistance strategies. Such is the case of the indigenous economy, which is based on a logic of reciprocity and ethical relations between people and with nature, complemented - for historical reasons - by an economy of exchange through the capitalist market. Use value and exchange value are thus two rationales in constant tension within indigenous society. Indigenous peoples' resistance is also expressed through modern political organisations which, in the case of South America, began to appear during the 1960s. The oldest of these, the Shuar Federation in Ecuador, was followed in other countries by many others under the names of congresses, councils, unions or associations, all of which gathered together the social forces of one or more ethnic groups of a particular river basin or wider area. This initial organisational level was followed by others grouping organisations together from one or more regions of a single country; or from a region shared by different countries (such as COICA in the Amazon); or from a variety of regions from different countries (such as the International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the Tropical Forest, which represents peoples from the Americas, Asia and Africa). Other forms of transnational organisation have linked the indigenous into broad networks, such as the Climate

\* A first version of this essay was published in Brush, Stephen B. and Doreen Stabinsky, eds., 1996: *Valuing Local Knowledge. Indigenous People and Intellectual Property Rights*. Washington, D.C., Island Press.

Alliance of European Cities with Indigenous Rainforest Peoples and the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations. This international presence has enabled them to face up to the onslaught of transnational companies exploiting the gas/oil, minerals or timber of their territories. The organised emergence of the indigenous and their ethnic demands was initially considered by the popular, intellectual and progressive organisations and left-wing parties as a divisionist attempt that lacked a *correct* class analysis. Many of these tensions, caused by ethnocentric visions, have been overcome now that the discourse of ethnic demands has been taken to national and international levels. The expansion of the indigenous world beyond its normal borders has also contributed to this, as in the case of the transnational civil society made up of immigrants to the United States coming from native communities in Mexico and Central and South America. And yet there are still issues outstanding if they are to consolidate their strength, such as communication between local, regional, national and international levels, improvements in which would deepen internal democracy.

*Is it only the people that need land? Don't the monkeys, the birds, the huanganas and deer also need land to live on?*

Juaneco, Ashaninka  
from Tsisontire, Peru<sup>1</sup>

*We Indigenous People and our lands are one and the same. To destroy one is to destroy the other .... We think of our land as continuity, without breaks or divisions, integrated and diverse whose legal guarantees do not differentiate between its diverse elements .... Our concept of territoriality presupposes another way of understanding land rights and the generation of new rights. It is not only the rights of those who have been here for centuries, it is also the rights of the water, the plants, the animals and all living things.*

Iquitos Declaration,  
First Summit Held Between Indigenous Peoples and Environmentalists,  
May 1990<sup>2</sup>

### The Struggle for Indigenous Sovereignty

During the last 500 years, the indigenous people of the Americas have resisted the process of invasion; political and cultural oppression; economic exploitation; and expropriation of land, resources, and technology. After the disastrous initial biological defeat caused by the epidemics of the "Columbian exchange" (Crosby 1972), which produced probably the highest and fastest genocide in human history (Denevan 1992), the indigenous people of colonial Spanish America began a slow climb toward demographic recuperation. By the early 1990s, indig-

enous population numbers were in the vicinity of 40 million (Mayer and Masferrer 1979; World Bank 1991), still far below the estimates of the original indigenous population of the hemisphere.

A central intriguing question, seldom asked by ethnohistorians regarding this obstinate biological and cultural perseverance of the Native American people, is related to the issues of indigenous knowledge and biodiversity. Here is the paradox: how could the indigenous outlast the European military invasion, the massive biological warfare, the systematic ecological imperialism (Crosby 1986, 1991) and the meticulous destructuring of their institutions, and still initiate almost immediately a process of cultural and sociopolitical recuperation that allowed for their continuous and increasing presence in the social and biological history of the continent? The answer has to be sought in the exploration of the complex and concealed dialectic of daily forms of biological and cultural resistance and adaptation. Four fundamental cultural domains pertain to the indigenous ethnic resilience and opposition. One is an extensive indigenous cultural characteristic we may call the moral management of the cosmos, a type of moral ecology, of environmental ethics that is undeniably the central attribute of the majority of the indigenous societies. The second is the indigenous moral understanding and praxis of economic relations, what James Scott (1976) termed a "moral economy". Related to these two cultural domains is a third characteristic: the strategic tendency of most indigenous people to hide their ethno-biological knowledge while maintaining an active exploration, investigation, experimentation and conservation of biodiversity. Finally, the indigenous people have demonstrated extreme political adaptability and a high degree of flexibility in political discourse.

The main point of my discussion relates to the challenge of establishing a new decolonized institutional framework for a political and cultural relationship among the indigenous people of Latin America. Multiethnicity and pluricultural legitimacy implies the gradual weakening and eventual demise of the 19th century nationalistic ideology and practices, which would enable the national and international political society, and the non-indigenous civil society, to negotiate with the indigenous peoples' levels of sovereignty and autonomy. The issue of intellectual property rights on biotic heritage should be treated as another sub-aspect of the more general theme of bio-cultural and socio-political sovereignty.

### Biotic Heritage

Since the European invasion, indigenous societies have attempted to keep their biotic and bio-technological heritage at a low profile of visibility. These were among the most contested cultural domains to the colonial and evangelical enterprise. For the majority of indigenous people, agricultural and food production, as well as environmental management, were activities permeated by profound sacra-

mental implications. It is well documented that the Spaniards' early ambiguous attitudes toward the Native American biotic heritage induced a series of repressive measures against the cultivation and use of certain plants and resources. The most notorious example is the Meso-American *alegría*, amaranth (called *tzoalli* and *huatli* by the Mexica), which belongs to the genus *Amaranthus* (*A. leocarpus*, *A. cruentus*) whose cultivation, trade and consumption were banned throughout New Spain during the early colonial period with the argument that it was a pagan sacrificial plant. However, medicinal and psychotropic plants and substances, stimulants like coca (*Erythroxylon coca*), animal and insect nourishments (i.e., the amphibious *axolotl*, *Ambystoma trigrinum*, of central Mexico), techniques of food preparation (i.e., *masato*, *chicha*, *pulque* and all other types of fermented beverages), and techniques of cultivation and food production (i.e., *conuco*, *chacra*, *milpa* and various types of slash-and-burn cultivation) have constituted contentious areas of cultural and political control not only throughout colonial Ibero-America but up to contemporary times. In Mexico, Bishop Zumarraga "wished to outlaw pulque in 1529 because it smacked of idolatry". (Super 1988: 75). For the missionary Zumarraga "drinking, with its ritual vestiges, was a major obstacle" to evangelical expansion (ibid.). Similar aspirations are still at the core of various types of evangelical fundamentalism practiced by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL)/Wycliff Bible Translators, the New Tribes and countless Protestant missionaries in indigenous lands (Stoll 1985). European colonialism brought to the Americas definite ideas and principles about the politics of food and food production; this ideology is still very much part of the hegemonic culture of Latin America.

### Historical Resistance and Contemporary Organizations

Indigenous peoples, however, did not simply react to colonial impositions. As already mentioned in a previous chapter, their responses reflected a variety of strategic accommodations and resistance, and it would be, therefore, presumptuous to accept uncritically that the indigenous organized political resistance in Latin America began just a couple of decades ago. The public visibility of contemporary Latin American indigenous movement is traced to the early 1960s, when Ecuador witnessed the constitution of the Federation of Shuar Centers (1964), a surprising and challenging indigenous political organization that by 1987 had incorporated 240 centers and more than 40,000 Shuar people into a unique social program of economic and cultural self-determination. Obviously the term "public visibility" in this case encloses the colonial fact that only the literate Latin American middle and upper classes and the educated sectors of the northern countries constitute the public.

Four years after the Shuar Federation was formed, the Amuesha people (Yanesha) of the Peruvian upper Amazon convened the first Amuesha Congress, which

later became a permanent political body, the Amuesha Federation. Between 1970 and 1974, in an intense succession of mobilization, the Colombian Indigenous organized into the CRIC (*Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca*), the UNDICH (*Unión de Indígenas del Chocó*), the CRIVA (*Consejo Regional Indígena del Vaupés*), the COIA (*Consejo Indígena de los Arahuausa*) and the CRIT (*Consejo Regional Indígena de Tolima*). At the same time in Peru, which was under a progressive military regime, the indigenous people of the Amazon region formed numerous local organizations and regional federations (Ashaninka Congress of the Central Forest Region, Shipibo Congress and Defense Front, Quechua of the Napo River's Organization and the *Consejo Aguaruna Huambisa*, founded in 1974). In the mountains of Ecuador, the Quichua organization of ECUARUNARI was constituted in 1972, while in the highlands of Bolivia the initial organized expressions of a strong Aymara and Quechua nationalism were being shaped by the Katarist movement. To the south, in Chile, under Allende's socialist government the Mapuche participated in the elaboration and implementation of the "*Ley de Indígenas*". The short-lived taste of multiethnic democracy ended in 1973 when the military dictatorship killed, imprisoned and exiled the Mapuche leadership (Albó 1991; Barre 1983; Bonfil 1981).

### Legitimacy

From its inception, the new indigenous movement experienced an ambiguous response from its presumed allies, the popular organizations and the progressive intellectuals and social scientists. A mixture of indifference, plain ignorance, misunderstanding and even antagonism accompanied the emergence of these organizations. From the perspective of the organized Left and populist parties, which were organizing the peasants', miners' and workers' unions, these small, fragmented, local and radical ethnic organizations were perceived as divisive, lacking the correct class analysis and, at best, as dangerous and disruptive.

Since the 1970s, however, the indigenous movement has produced a substantial corpus of analysis (Bonfil 1981; Rodríguez and Varese 1981a, b). In a regional context that had been the backyard battleground of the Cold War, cultural debate was saturated with inflexible ideological positions. Contention over the indigenous movement centered around two main issues: are these new organizations legitimate and is their autonomous presence divisive within the popular movement? For the last 20 years these questions have been the core of a polemic carried on by social scientists, mestizo and criollo political activists, politicians and policy makers. Only occasional invitations to participate in the discussion were extended to indigenous leaders and intellectuals. After repeated failed attempts by traditional parties to manipulate and assimilate the indigenous movement, most of the indigenous finally opted for keeping mainstream parties at a prudent

distance.<sup>1</sup> The political parties' response has been to accuse the indigenous movement of illegitimacy and demand that the indigenous organizations subordinate to a non-indigenous-run political project. This has been the locus of contention and struggle in the complex process of construction of civil societies in Latin America. I stress the plural in the Latin/Indo/Afro-American countries (as Carlos Fuentes suggests our region should be called) because the idea of a singular civil society emanates from the recent central European historical experience of nation-state building out of reputed ethnic uniformity. Such homogenous ethnic conformation of the civil society is an illusion practically everywhere in the Americas (Hale 1992; Varese 1988).

The indigenous people, meanwhile, have multiplied, expanded and consolidated their organizations (Albó 1987, 1991; Barbados 1971; Barre 1983; Bonfil 1981; Grupo de Barbados 1979; Juncosa 1991, 1992; Rivera Cusicanqui 1992; Stern 1987). In view of the critical situation of the organized Left, the demise of the socialist bloc, the profound cultural crisis of the Marxist Utopia and the hallucinatory escapism of the self-appointed communist Messianism (the Shining Path guerrilla of Peru) one can argue that the indigenous ethno-political movement of the early 1990s in Latin America constitutes a strong, coherent – although multifaceted and plural – articulate opposition.

### Issues

This chronicle of the development of the contemporary indigenous movement reveals the reductionist perspective of the predominant social scientists' approach to indigenous social and cultural history. The indigenous movement has been seen only for what is relevant and significant to the dominant society's social agenda, therefore confining the analytical discussion politically and historically. A kind of episodic history and fragmented ethnography, circumscribed within a Eurocentric axiom, has obscured the cultural history of the indigenous and their long bio-cultural co-evolution. In this way, the political resistance of the indigenous people has no historical depth; it begins only when they behave like us and use an idiom that we recognize and validate as political.

Within this perspective, defined by J.M. Blaut (1992) as the doctrine of Eurocentric diffusionism, the indigenous people appear as barely possessing an ecological history, and they definitely lack a history of environmental resistance. The natural form of interaction between Euro-American and indigenous people is a transaction: the diffusion of innovative ideas, values and people from Europe to non-Europe; the counterdiffusion of material wealth, as just compensation, from non-Europe to Europe. Europe invents, others imitate; Europe advances, others follow (or are led) (Blaut 1992: 7).

The history of the indigenous is permeated by the ideology of expanding capitalism and colonialism claiming that intellectual and ethical innovations are always diffused from the "European" center to the uncivilized native periphery. Stagnation and savagery, reactive responses, rather than autonomous initiatives and the existence of vast uncultivated domains, mark the historical landscapes of the indigenous people.

My argument is that many more profound and radical issues have been tackled not only by the contemporary indigenous political movement but by the indigenous people of the Americas throughout the five-century-long resistance. Propositions for radical changes in the global economic and political system, criticism of the moral confine of social life imposed by Europeans and the denunciation of the relationship of humankind to nature promulgated by colonialism have all been the essence of numerous and recurrent indigenous uprisings, the substance of daily forms of resistance, and the cultural critique of the indigenous intelligentsia. In South America this resistance is revealed in the *Nueva Corónica y Buen Gobierno* of Guamán Poma de Ayala and the late writings of Inca Garcilaso de la Vega (Peru, 16th-17th centuries), and the revolutionary proclamations of Juan Santos Atahuallpa, José Gabriel Condorcanqui Túpac Amaru II, and Túpac Katary (Peru and Bolivia, 18th century). In Meso-America, examples of indigenous resistance include Jacinto Kanek and the Maya insurgents of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, the *Chilam Balam*, the *Annals of the Kak'chiquel*, the *Popol Wuj*, and the contemporary writings and declarations of indigenous intellectuals and organizations (*Abya Yala News* 1990-1994; Aldrete, Pacaldo et al. 1994; Burger 1987; Moody 1988). For five centuries the indigenous people have striven to maintain a critical distance from the colonizers' worldview and values in an effort to safeguard moral autonomy, cultural independence and political sovereignty.

The violent institutional repression of such movements has been accompanied by a sociological exegesis that has either dismissed their cultural content or disqualified the indigenous initiatives as expressions of reactionary and romantic idealism. Even the most sympathetic anthropologists have had very serious problems in dealing with indigenous radicalism. Misinterpretations of the indigenous ethno-political discourse are themselves the results of colonial modes of knowledge. Smith (1985) for instance, in his seminal article, classifies the indigenous social movement of the Andean region into three main categories: 1) the peasant-popular organizations, heavily dependent on the traditional peasant trade unions and thus lacking capacity for autonomy; 2) the Amazonian ethnic federations, the most autonomous expression of indigenous organization; 3) finally, the "indigenist" tendency, essentially an ideological movement of urbanized indigenous intellectuals, alienated from their own home communities and engaged in the discourse of the dominant society, which lacks mean-

ing for the indigenous commoners. In Smith's opinion, only ethnic federations are authentically indigenous.

A similar position is subscribed to by Brown (1993). According to his analysis, indigenism, like the *negritude* program of the 1940s, postulates an essentialist position through ideological agendas of indigenous self-vindication. These agendas intentionally rewrite the history and anthropology of indigenous societies. There is "... an 'Indian way of being' that transcends cultural particularities ... and like *negritude*, Indianism is a movement of displaced native intellectuals ... Indianism, [asserts Brown], presents ... a vision of Indian civilization as an ordered, harmonious whole in which economics, social organization, and religion fit together seamlessly. Marxism [in this movement] has been superseded by the discourse of environmentalism – an anti-capitalistic rhetoric, to be sure, but one with different valences than the socialism it repudiates" (Brown 1993: 19-20). This type of Indianism, with followers among Andean and Central American Indians but less congenial to Amazonian people, "is a movement of displaced native intellectuals, conducted in the language of the dominant society and far removed from the specific cultural meanings of functioning native societies" (Brown 1993: 20).

Both Brown and Smith's notions of displacement and urbanized indigenous intellectuals or unionized indigenous peasants are in themselves essentialist. They implicitly make reference to an exemplary indigenous community, the close-corporate entity that is static and immutable in time, socially undifferentiated, culturally repetitive, somehow impenetrable to external influences. According to this argument, this is a human community where dynamics, contradictions, social dialectic become synonymous with non-indigenous, Western cultural phenomena. But, this vision is one of a "de-Indianized" society that has lost its aboriginal prerogatives and its indigenous patrimony. By extension, the same proposition is insinuated in language. When the indigenous political idiom relies too much on non-indigenous ideas or is expressed in scholarly Spanish, the legitimacy of the content is questioned in the name of ethnic purity. As if, for example, Guamán Poma's letter/book to King Philip II of Spain criticizing the colonial enterprise would be less "Indian" because his author was Christian, of Inka noble descent and used Spanish to address the emperor.

### The Transnationalization of the Organized Indigenous Movement

At least since the early 1970s, and increasingly during the late 1980s, we have witnessed massive demographic movements of indigenous peoples, territorial uprooting, and economic and political deportation. Cyclical migrations to other rural areas of better economic opportunity, to urban centers, or to foreign countries, is now commonplace. The conventional images of indigenous people living

in relatively isolated and stable rural agricultural communities are challenged by a new and complex reality in which indigenous from Mexico, Central and South America migrate to the United States as rural and urban workers, as economic deportees and political refugees. Mixtec, Zapotec, Chinantec, Trique, Purépecha, Kanjobale, Quiché, Keqchí, Mam, Ixil, Garífuna, Miskito and even Peruvian Quechua and Ecuadorian Quichua are becoming a substantial component of the so-called Latino community of the US (Altamirano 1991; Zabin et al. 1993; Varese 1994b).

Concurrently, the transnational, transborder, trans-state character of many Native American ethnic groups can be recognized as a historical fact of long duration. In many Latin American countries the same indigenous group shares contiguous border territories belonging to different nation-states. To mention just a few cases, there are Aymara in Peru, Bolivia, Chile and Argentina; Quechua in Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru; Shuar-Aguajún in Ecuador and Peru; Emberá and Kuna in Panama and Colombia; Yanomami in Brazil and Venezuela; Miskito and Garífuna in Belize, Honduras and Nicaragua; Maya in Mexico, Guatemala and Belize; Mapuche in Chile and Argentina; Yaqui, Kikapoo and O'hotam in Mexico and the United States.

### Multiethnic Groups

Old analytical and policy units – the rural community, the indigenous region, the multiethnic areas and even the nation-state – are insufficient to comprehend ethnicities and social movements which combine the defense of local sovereignty with the struggle for human, labor, cultural and environmental rights. In a diffuse, almost clandestine manner, transnational/trans-state networks of non-state social actors (indigenous as members of the civil society) are emerging. The historically marginalized Latin American indigenous people are establishing a transnational civil society, attempting to bypass state mediation. These indigenous people are trying instead to situate the field of authority in a global civil society of a transnational character while maintaining strong ethnic, cultural and local loyalties (Brecher, Brown Childs and Cuttler 1993; Brysk 1992). This effort articulates local struggles for community sovereignty with an agenda of universal indigenous rights in the economic, political, social, cultural and environmental fields.

The existence of a transnational indigenous movement demands a change of analytical paradigm and political praxis. State assimilation exerted an exclusively economic exploitation of indigenous people without opening up to them the political institutions and mechanisms of democratic participation. The arrangement reveals the central contradiction of the Latin American liberal state's political economy. By unmasking these national policies of political discrimination against

them, the indigenous people have been able to address critically not only the specific nation-state which contains them but also the international development bodies and the global political society.

These transnational multiethnic indigenous organizations include COICA (Coordinating Body of Indigenous People's Organizations of the Amazon Basin), CONIC (Continental Commission of Indigenous Nations), the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations, and the international representatives of national indigenous organizations such as CIDOB of Bolivia, UNI of Brazil, ONIC of Colombia, CONFENIAE of Ecuador, the Amerindian Association of Guyana, the *Association des Amérindiens de Guyane*, AIDSESEP of Peru, *Organización Indígena* of Surinam and CONIVE of Venezuela. Their leadership understands clearly that the economic and political power that threatens indigenous local sovereignty is unevenly distributed between transnational corporations, intergovernmental institutions and national governments.<sup>4</sup> They understand that the proposal of a "new world order" or the neo-imperial globalization is changing the rules of the game and is debilitating nation-state sovereignties in order to open more space for transnational corporations.

### Class Structure

Most important for indigenous leadership is understanding that five centuries of colonial and republican state entrenchment and consolidation has been based on the maximization of labor exploitation carefully organized along the lines of ethnic division and territorial delineation. The economic assimilation of indigenous people into the market economy shaped both intra-ethnic class differentiation (internal stratification) as well as inter-ethnic economic inequality and differential access to political power. The result is a complex class structure which cuts across and permeates the whole indigenous multiethnic configuration. This complex ethno-classist structure corresponds to an equally intricate panorama of indigenous political organizations and platforms. Ethnicity, state organization and capital shape the ideological style, demands and political program proposed by indigenous intelligentsia and leadership.

Throughout the hemispheric indigenous movement, the organized indigenous people show a diluted and lukewarm national loyalty, a nonconformity and opposition to the nation-state's political project, not only because it is after all the élites' class expression but also because it represents the historical cultural proposition of the mestizo and creole sectors. For centuries these sectors antagonized indigenous sovereignties with racist arguments. This indigenous tendency to state denationalism constitutes, therefore, a fertile ideological and cultural terrain for expanding collective identity.

## Transnational Corporations

The search for local self-determination does not end the indigenous peoples' political struggle. The struggle has expanded to the sphere of transnational relations where indigenous organizations fight for ethnic sovereignty before transnational entities. Local and ethnic patrimony and sovereignty are being defended against the intrusion of transnational corporations counting on nation-states' complicity or indifference. The struggle of Ecuador's Amazonian indigenous nationalities against 22 transnational oil companies is a good example of this trend (SAIIC 1991). The foreign companies operate in indigenous territories under army protection provided by the Ecuadorian government, in a style reminiscent of colonial military occupation. The conflict directly engages indigenous sovereignties defending their territory, environment and natural resources with transnational entities and multilateral development agencies. The indigenous tend to avoid or minimize the mediation of a state that has repeatedly proved its incapacity as protector of indigenous people's rights and patrimony. There are numerous other examples of this new transnational dimension of the indigenous struggle.

The process of globalization of the political economy does not assign much importance to the differences in degree of national development and to the level of assimilation/integration of the indigenous people into the market economy. Factors that appear to be decisive relate rather to obtaining guarantees that the national government can maintain conditions of low intensity democracy and political control. In this manner, for example, as soon as the Sandinista government of Nicaragua was replaced, the small ethnic group of the Sumo was literally besieged by the transnational Taiwanese company *Equipe Enterprise*, which had obtained from the new government a concession of 350,000 hectares of tropical rainforest on indigenous territory. The successful response of the Sumo was to look for support among international NGOs (SAIIC 1991), avoiding engagement with the government. The Huaorani of Ecuador were able to mobilize national and international environmental groups against the planned oil exploitation of the DuPont-Conoco Oil Company on indigenous territory. The Huaorani campaign, which counted on the support of the indigenous international organization SAIIC (Oakland, CA) and the Sierra Club Legal Defense Club (U.S.), was successful and the oil company halted its operation on the indigenous' territory (SAIIC 1991). A similar victory was obtained by the Peruvian Amazonian indigenous organizations when, in September 1991, the Houston-based Texas Crude oil company canceled its contract with the Peruvian government for the exploration of the Pacaya Samiria indigenous region (SAIIC 1991).

The strategy of an international defense of indigenous rights appears to be more successful than the exclusive exercise of conventional mobilizations at the national level. Indigenous organizations have opened fronts on various levels of

international society, among environmental, human rights and legal defense NGOs, as well as financial and technical intergovernmental organizations. The World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank have been induced to reformulate their policy for indigenous regions. For over two decades, the indigenous people of the Americas have carried their struggles and debates to the United Nations arena, demanding a process of democratization of the international body as well as less nationalist positions. The United Nations' Working Group on Indigenous Populations has been working for years on a draft of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. "The draft will then be submitted for approval to all the member nations of the UN. If enough support is built, the Declaration will then be adopted by the General Assembly, and become an important instrument for protecting indigenous rights" (SAIIC 1991: 5). See also *International Labour Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples* approved in 1989 and ratified by the majority of Latin American governments (INI 1991).

## The Search for a Comprehensive Indigenous Sovereignty

The growth of the transnational indigenous rights movement permits indigenous people to turn domestic weakness and marginality into international recognition (Brysk 1992). In the contemporary world's process of globalization-from-the-top, the indigenous have been able to respond with a globalization-from-below (Falk 1993) by shifting their political targets from national government to international political and civil society. The colonial inheritance of fragmented local communities is overcome through the search for a comprehensive ethnic and multiethnic political strategy. Obviously an extended conception of ethnicity, which integrates control of territory and biocultural resources, requires dramatic changes in the indigenous political culture, social practice and methods. Larger, more complex ethno-political organizations require extensive exploration of management techniques and new indigenous democratic mechanisms. Some of these ventures have been undertaken by the indigenous people of Latin America. One that deserves close attention for its implications in the international management of issues of ethno-biological sovereignty is COICA, a multiethnic, multinational indigenous organization from the Amazon basin.

In March 1984, representatives of five indigenous organizations from the Amazonian countries of Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru founded an international organization, COICA (*Coordinadora de las Organizaciones Indígenas de la Cuenca Amazónica* - the Coordinating Body of Indigenous Peoples' Organizations of the Amazon Basin). COICA's origins can be traced to three regional community-based organizations of the early 1960s: the Shuar Federation in Ecuador, the Congress of Amuesha Communities in Peru, and the Regional Indigenous

Council of the Cauca in Colombia (Smith 1993). These initial local organizations, unknown to each other, established a model of social mobilization that gave voice to each local community over problems of territorial loss, human rights abuses and cultural oppression. Throughout the 1970s, numerous new organizations emerged among the Amazonian indigenous people and began to establish occasional contacts with sympathetic Catholic missionaries, pro-indigenous NGOs and groups of environmentalists. In 1984, representatives from Indian organizations in Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil, Peru and Colombia established COICA as a coordinating body. Its purpose was to present a common policy position before national governments and the international community on issues of territorial and environmental rights, human, cultural and linguistic rights, and rights to economic and political self-determination. COICA's main political objective was to represent the organized indigenous of the greater Amazon basin before the region's governments and the international community (Smith 1993; Varese 1991b).

COICA has been active in the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations, in the discussions on ILO Conventions 107/169, and in various committees of the Amazon Treaty Cooperation sponsored by the Inter-American Indigenous Institute. This involvement has brought the members of the organization into contact with international bureaucrats, advocates, indigenous support groups, other ethnic minorities leaderships, labor movements, the European Green movement, and funding agencies. By 1986 COICA had won an ecological prize: the Right Livelihood Award, which brought the organization to the front pages of the international press and gave it major exposure in official circles. In 1989 a COICA mission was received officially by the World Bank and, in the same year, the organization established contact with the European Community in what can be interpreted as unequivocal signs of the serious reputation achieved by the Amazonian indigenous coalition. By 1991 COICA had gained official advisory status with the Indigenous Commission of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty. Between 1990 and 1991, COICA was among the founder members of the Climate Alliance of European Cities with Indigenous Rainforest Peoples, along with more than 100 European cities from five countries (Smith 1993).

All this relatively rapid success, nevertheless, also brought to light some shortcomings in this transnational indigenous organization. It is structurally weak in representativeness of its constituency. It lacks means and methods for an efficient vertical communication between the community-based units, the regional and national federations and the central administrative body of COICA, as well as horizontal communication between the various constituent units. Finally, there is a tendency of the central administration to assume an autocratic leadership (Smith 1993). Expectations of agencies such as the World Bank, the UN and national ministries for responses and decision-making induced a style of impatience and authoritarianism in indigenous leadership. By 1992 a general congress of COICA had unanimously decided to reorganize in a less hierarchical

form and to facilitate communication and accountability. Decision-making was decentralized. COICA's headquarters were also moved from Lima to Quito.

### Lessons from Experience and Perspectives

With the exception of a brief mention in a few indigenous declarations (Juncosa 1992), the intellectual property right issue *per se* does not constitute a central pre-occupation of the Latin American indigenous movement. The topic is woven into the general rights to territorial and resource sovereignty. Ethnic self-determination and autonomy implies full control of lands, water and resources included within the newly defined ethnic boundaries. The recuperation of ethnic territories is conceived along three axial principles:

1. The historical depth of the claim. Current territorial fragmentation and reduction is the result of centuries of colonial and post-colonial expropriation, therefore restitution and/or reparation are part of the grievance.
2. The ethno-biological integrity of the territorial claim. Bioregion and ethno-region were coincident before exogenous disturbance. There is no such thing as natural, untouched landscape: indigenous presence during the millennia has shaped and molded the environment and the biotic resources. The biodiversity of the tropics is as much natural as cultural (Declaración de Panamá 1989; Declaración de Iquitos 1990; Declaración de Penang 1992; Chirif et al. 1991).
3. The repudiation of any solution to territorial and environmental claims that would rely exclusively on mechanisms of commoditization of nature. "It is our nature - and it's not our debt" has declared an indigenous leader, objecting to the celebrated debt-for-nature swaps arranged by Northern environmentalists (Brysk 1992). This generally accepted principle, closely related to the use value economy and the sacramental and moral management of the environment, may be contested on an individual basis by some members of the indigenous people but it continues to be an essential component of indigenous ethics and ethno-political agenda. What seems to be rejected is the idea that the indigenous community must completely surrender its worldview and the corresponding resource management practices to the hegemony of commoditization. Within an indigenous conception and treatment of the environment and its resources, all sorts of arrangements for the collective compensation and re-distribution of intellectual property rights could be devised. A mentality of anti-commoditization of nature does not preclude indigenous people from understanding and using the benefits of fair trade and equity.

Respect of these three principles must constitute the frame of any political and economic negotiations taking place between nation-state, the international community and the indigenous people on issues regarding resource sovereignty. There are, nevertheless, many practical aspects regarding specific issues of ethno-biological intellectual property rights that will have to be jointly addressed by indigenous and non-indigenous. Let me mention briefly just a few of these issues.

### Social and Spatial Definition of the Indigenous People/ Community/ Group

According to the various national "indigenistic" legislations, the indigenous ethnoses are legally defined by their individual constituent local communities (i.e., *Resguardo* in Colombia, *Comunidad Nativa* and *Comunidad Campesina* in Peru, *Comunidad Indígena* and *Ejido* in Mexico, etc.). The ethnic group, even if legally recognized, does not constitute a juridical subject. The indigenous organizations of Ecuador have succeeded in obtaining the state's recognition of the term "nationalities" for the various indigenous peoples but this is definitely an exception in the Latin American landscape.

### Coherence on Basic Ethnosocial Definitions and Boundaries

It would be advisable to address two levels of sovereignties which are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary:

1. *Communal sovereignty*, usually legally recognized by the state. At this level there are local indigenous institutions, authorities, clear social-ethnic boundaries, but rather murky and more complicated biotic boundaries and therefore a more complex problem of genetic and resource sovereignty.
2. *Ethnic sovereignty*, constitutionally nonexistent in the majority of Latin American nation-states but increasingly sought and accepted by various indigenous peoples. Ethnic sovereignty is substantiated and represented in numerous indigenous organizations (of mono or multi-ethnic composition) that have been successful in establishing an institutional existence within the nation-state. In this case, compensation, formal contracts, brokerage must include the local community/ies, the ethnic organization, the external/scientific parties and state representatives.

In instances of this type the issue of biotic boundaries should be easier to solve since there may be an approximate coincidence between ethno-political and bio-

regional boundaries. By ethno-political boundaries, I mean the historically traceable ethnic frontiers even if they are not actually under ethnic control and they are being re-appropriated by the indigenous organization as an ideal political goal.

### Legality and Representativeness of the Indigenous Ethno-political Organizations

This seems to be a rhetorical question based on ethnocentric bias. Democracy is not equivalent to market economy, in spite of the current neo-liberal ideological climate. The scientific and business communities can seldom certify the democratic accountability of non-indigenous representatives. The globalization-from-above nurtured by the transnational corporations is not usually interested in issues of accountability and entitlements. Community, ethnic, multiethnic and transnational indigenous organizations are long-standing institutions that have exercised forms of aboriginal democracy for centuries and decades. It is the responsibility of their constituencies to guarantee that their voices are respected by the organization.

### Operationalizing any Form of Compensation

This issue should be addressed bearing in mind that besides the local (community), regional (federation, regional organization) and transnational levels of indigenous peoples' organizations (i.e., COICA), there are already in place inter-governmental institutions such as the Indigenous Peoples' Fund.<sup>5</sup> These institutions could be used for receiving compensation (a certain percentage) and redistributing it to the indigenous peoples. The Fund, created in 1991 by the Latin American and Spanish and Portuguese governments, is designed to ensure the direct participation of indigenous people. Regional governments, indigenous people of each regional member state and extra-regional government will be equally represented on the General Assembly and the Board of Directors (SAIIC 1993). The funds for biological resource compensation could certainly be directed toward projects of ethno-territorial stabilization, *in situ* conservation and expansion of biodiversity, education and training of indigenous scientists and, in general, towards self-managed projects of ethno-development.

### Notes

- 1 Quoted in Chirif, A., P. García Hierro and R. Ch. Smith 1991, SAIIC, Dec., 1990 and *The Iquitos Declaration SAIIC Newsletter*, 5 (3 & 4) Dec. 1990. [Ed. note]

- 2 *SAIIC Newsletter*, 5 (3 & 4), Dec. 1990. [Ed. note]
- 3 It is obviously risky on my part to generalize such a complex and diverse reality into one single broad statement. I believe, however, that it can be argued that the indigenous organizations of Latin America, with the exception of those of Mexico, have perceived political parties as an extension of the neocolonial state, either in power or aspiring to state power; see Smith, R. C. 1985 and an inspiring analysis by Guillermo Delgado 1992.
- 4 COICA (*Coordinadora de las Organizaciones Indígenas de la Cuenca Amazónica*), founded in Lima, Peru, in 1984 by a few Amazonian indigenous leaders, today has more than 100 interethnic confederations of Amazonian indigenous peoples from Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Surinam, Venezuela and French Guiana. COICA represents approximately 1.5 million indigenous people (Chirif et al. 1991; Smith 1993). Regarding COICA member organizations, refer to note 3, in *Buried Gods: The Politics of Indigenous Resistance*, chapter I, this volume. For information on the Latin American indigenous organizations, see the seven volumes of *SAIIC Newsletter* (South and Meso-America Indigenous Information Center, Oakland, California); since volume 7, the Spanish title of the newsletter has been *Noticias de Abya Yala*, 7(1, 2) July/August 1993, Oakland, CA.
- 5 Created at the First Ibero-American Summit in Guadalajara, Mexico, in July 1991, by the governments of Latin America, Spain and Portugal, the Fund is coordinated by an Ad-hoc Secretariat jointly housed in La Paz, Bolivia and at the Environment Protection Division, Inter-American Development Bank in Washington, D.C.

## TRANSNATIONAL INDIGENOUS MIGRANTS DIASPORA, IDENTITIES AND COLLECTIVE RIGHTS (1996)

### abstract

The globalization that has taken place since the end of the 1970s has been accompanied, in Mexico and other Third World countries, by reforms that have meant cuts to social services and state development banks, the privatisation of public companies, the division and sale of indigenous lands and a drastic reduction in the State apparatus.\* One expected result of the measures that has not occurred was the commoditization of communal lands. On the contrary, the indigenous response in Mexico has been to strengthen collective ownership and reaffirm citizenship of their communities. And yet emigration to the United States has increased ever since. Once there, the immigrants have regrouped in their new locations, where they have reconstructed their history and recreated their indigenous project. They have extensive experience in this field because their spaces were first "globalized" in the 16th century, with the European invasion. Since then, they have learned to reconstruct their own identity. So what is new in this recent globalization that the indigenous did not experience in earlier stages? There are a number of things: the expansion of the mass means of communication, the indigenous peoples' capacity to coordinate their response to aggression, the end of the illusory nationalist and integrationist state and the emergence of ethnic nationalism and regional autonomy. The transnational migration of indigenous people from Oaxaca state to the United States has increased and changed this latter's demographic, economic and cultural outlook. This can be seen in the fact that an estimated 80 languages are now spoken in California, in addition to English and the country's dozen or so own indigenous languages. This reality means that the concept and practice of citizenship now needs to be reconsidered. Globalization "from above" can explain the increased migration from countries of the periphery to those of the centre, a process which - in the case of Mexico and the United States - has been taking place since the late 1800s. Phases of legal (for the building of railways or to replace agriculture labor during the two world wars) and illegal immigration have been interspersed throughout this period. In both, however, discrimination and racist aggression, low salaries to the benefit of the business class, the State's evasion of its responsibility to provide basic services and the fuelling of a xenophobic atmosphere have

\* A longer version of this text was published in Spanish under the title "Identidad y desierto: los pueblos indígenas ante la globalización", *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana*, Year XXIII, no. 46, Lima-Berkeley, 2nd semester of 1996 (19-35). Some sections of this essay were also published in Spanish under the title "Migración indígena transnacional, diáspora, identidades y derechos colectivos", in an official report produced by the government of Oaxaca state, Mexico, in 1999: *Coloquio Internacional sobre Políticas Públicas de Atención al Migrante. Memoria*.

always been constants, always useful for releasing internal tensions. As a survival strategy, the immigrants have regrouped into "sister communities". These help people to keep the costs of their move low, provide them with a place of reception and also help them to find work once there. In addition they have their own social mechanisms, adapting them to their new situation. For example, monetary income is redirected from the family towards social welfare institutions. A raft of political measures are still needed to address the situation of immigrants. For example, US recognition of the concept and practice of multiple citizenship for the indigenous, in-depth changes to rural development plans in Mexico and the establishment of an agreed policy between the two countries for the legal, economic, social and cultural support of migrants.

The transnational migration of indigenous people from the Mexican state of Oaxaca to the United States has been increasing at a stable rate since the expansion of globalization at the end the 1970s. In Mexico, globalization reveals itself through constitutional and institutional state reforms that imply the progressive dismantling of the welfare state, growing pressure toward privatization of the productive infrastructure and the lands of social interest, lands of indigenous communities and *ejidos*, the annulment of governments agricultural credits and the radical shrinking of the state's role in rural development.

One of the expected results of these state reforms and of their impact on indigenous and rural sectors is the commoditization of lands and communal resources through the allure of its privatization and sale. Since the reform of article 27 of the Constitution of Mexico and its political and economic implementation beginning in 1997, however, the expected process of privatization and sale of indigenous and rural people's lands has not come about.

The indigenous communities of Oaxaca have responded to the economic, political and structural attacks by holding on even more tightly to communal property and reaffirming their indigenous communal citizenship, which is founded on the collective possession and administration of the territory and the right to exercise communal jurisdiction over it.

How to explain then, that in the face of these renewed attacks on indigenous lands and resources over the last decades there has been an increase in indigenous rural-urban and transnational migration? Can we assume that indigenous collective control over the territory is becoming weaker and more vulnerable because of these massive outgoing movements of indigenous peoples? On the contrary, it seems that migration is increasingly becoming part of a community's survival strategy, which does not imply the structural abandonment of the territory or a permanent deterritorialization of the migrants. The temporary absences of indigenous transnational migrants seem to reinforce, instead, the sense of territoriality and communal-territorial citizenship as much in the migrants as in

those that remain behind. There are no obvious indications that the transnational migration is causing the territorial-structural dissolution of the community. This is a hypothesis that should be empirically investigated and quantified. Nevertheless, all qualitative approaches to this issue indicate that transnational migrants remain strongly attached to their community and tend to practice circular migration in seasonal cycles tightly intertwined with agricultural and ceremonial activities that take place in the sending community.

The *Law on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples and Communities of the State of Oaxaca* (Decree no. 266 of 17th July 1998) is proof of the success of the indigenous peoples' persistent struggles to maintain or regain control over their territories and resources, as well as their full jurisdictional powers. It is important to note that the law on territorial protection and indigenous self-determination was achieved as a result of the organized political struggle of the indigenous communities and people during a period in which the level of migration to the United States of America and to the urban and agroindustrial zones of Mexico was in full expansion.

These facts seem to indicate that, instead of deterritorializing indigenous citizenship, globalization – and transnational migration as one of its consequences – is re-establishing its roots and territorializing it.

### Indigenous People and Globalization

Since the mid-eighties, the analysis of post-modernity has insisted on pointing out that the growing expansion of globalization as a "logical consequence of late capitalism" (Jameson 1984) is accompanied by a relaxation of the culture and popular politics of territoriality. The more ductile and malleable notions of a territorial reference point seem to take the lead in cultural reproduction and in the reconfiguration of ethnic identities which, before the exodus, were almost always conceived of in unison with their own "natural" primordial space. "Groups migrate," points out Appadurai (1991:191), "they re-group in new locations, reconstruct their history and reconfigure their ethnic projects. The ethnos in ethnography takes on a slippery, dislocated quality. The groups aren't tightly territorialized or especially tied down any more..." The symbolic and concrete processes of de-territorialization and re-territorialization seem to become the axis of the dynamic of cultural reproduction in ethnic and regional diasporas. For millions of citizens of the world and indigenous people of the Americas, the territorial environment, which served both as their cultural and cosmological scaffolding and as an imminent paradigm to which all celebration of social continuity referred, has been globalized by the effects of communication, migration and return. Bifocality and multifocality of life become the norm for those who migrate cyclically and are existentially involved in one, two or multiple cultural spaces, living vicari-

ously in all of them in the hope of living fully (and dying) in their own primordial place.

The globalized territorial space, whether it is that of a Mixtec or Zapotec community in the Sierra Madre of southern Mexico, Fresno or Los Angeles, or a community of Quechua shepherds in Wyoming, is becoming more and more a scene of fluctuations, of transit and of cyclical temporalities whose rhythms depend less and less on autochthonous nature and more on inscrutable market forces. The experience of the location thus becomes a transitional, precarious and uncertain experience.

In the words of the Zapotec poet, Víctor de la Cruz, "Exile is difficult in the beginning, but once it starts, it is even more difficult to end; and we exiled will go from town to town in search of that place which detains us, that gives us roots, branches and fruit" (de la Cruz 1984:19). But why the displacement, why the exile? Is it the deterritorialization, the questioning of the primordial stability of one's own "natural" and socially historical space caused by the latest blows from the globalist project, that is causing the circular, massive dispersal of the rural indigenous people of the Americas?

Obviously, when formulated this way, the question irritates the economists, sociologists and possibly anthropologists who have not yet declared themselves post-modernists. It seems to me that it is ingenuous and unhistorical, however, to propose that displacement, exile, economic deportation, migration, territorial "internationalism", spatial and ecological imperialism and, in a word, the dismantling of the indigenous spatial/cultural cosmos for the subjugation of its people, are a recent "new world order" or neo-imperial phenomena. The story, as is well known, began long ago and with different names, but with very similar content.

### New Lands for Ancient Exiles

Indigenous space was, in fact, globalized in the 16th century. And from one period of violence to another, "the return of their Gods" was never seen again, except in the sporadic and insufficiently depicted episodes of indigenous rebellions that managed to recover brief local autonomies or wider margins of ethnic sovereignty. Consciousness of the rupture, of the intrusion, of the dismemberment and of the dispersion of the social and cosmic indigenous body appears with great clarity in the indigenous narrations and annals of Taki Onquoy, Inkarrí, Guamán Poma de Ayala, the Inca Garcilaso, Blas Valera, the Chilam Balam, the Annals of the *Kak'chiquel* and in all the indigenous American literature from the 16th century on.

*Broken spears lay on the road  
... Cry, my friends,*

*Let us understand that with these events  
We have lost the Mexicatl nation<sup>1</sup>*

New de-Europeanized readings of Inca Garcilaso de la Vega (Ortega 1992) and Guamán Poma de Ayala (Adomo 1988) recover the content of a radical critique of colonialism conducted through the indigenous chronicle of the intentional dismemberment of the cosmic-territorial Andean order. In Guamán Poma's eyes the ordering axes of the *imago mundi* of the Tawantinsuyu (the Inca nation world and cosmic territory) have been dislocated and broken by European irruption and the ensuing separation and scattering of the indigenous people. "*Pachacamac, maypim canqui?*" exclaims Guamán Poma before the chaos: "Creator of the world, where are you?"

Five centuries later, thousands of miles north of the Andean worlds, another indigenous critic of colonialism, the Zapotec poet Víctor de la Cruz, is asking the same questions:<sup>2</sup>

*... Why don't we write on green leaves,  
on clouds, on water,  
on the palm of our hands.  
Why on paper,  
Where was paper born  
That it was born white  
And entraps our word  
The word sculpted by our ancestors  
Sang in the night  
When they danced  
Adorning their houses  
Inside their temples  
In their royal palaces.  
Who brought the second language  
Came to kill us with our words  
Came to trample our people  
Like worms  
Fell from the tree, thrown on the ground.  
Who are we, what is our name?*

What has changed for the indigenous people of the Americas in this late phase of global capitalism? What is there, in these processes of spatial and cultural breakdown and restructuring directed by the unseen hands of the market economy and the transnational corporations, that has not already been experienced by the indigenous people during the last five centuries of subjection? To put the question another way: what are the new living, cultural and indigenous identity conditions

that arise at the opposite end of the long and twisted pyramid of economic exploitation and ethnic oppression that was established by colonialism five centuries ago, refined by a century and a half of neo-dependent national capitalism and finally re-articulated on a worldwide scale by the late capitalism of global corporations?

I will attempt a first, partial response before developing, somewhat descriptively, the characteristics of indigenous neo-globalism.

Clearly the radical, distinguishing mark of the contemporary globalization that constitutes modernism (and post-modernism) as opposed to the "internationalization" of previous periods, is found in the unheard of, massive, omnipresent growth of mass communication. There are parabolic antennae and satellite dish connections, video cassettes, communication via internet, fax and radio in some of the indigenous communities of this hemisphere. There are parabolic antennae in the Sierras of Oaxaca. The most notorious and paradigmatic case is that of the Mayan Zapatista insurgents of the Lacandon Forest whose masked faces appeared all over the world on the second of January 1994 thanks to the television network, CNN, and whose anarcho-poetic newsletters arrive in real-time on every computer terminal via the internet and the World Wide Web. But there are more modest anecdotes about Mapuche indigenous leaders from southern Chile who communicate by fax with government offices in Santiago, or the Quichuaruna leader from CONFENIAE in Ecuador who travels with his laptop computer, modem and e-mail connection, or the Kayapó of the Brazilian Amazon who use video cassettes to denounce the abuses of those who invade their lands to the international community and the government of Brazil.

A second distinguishing point: indigenous people form part of the growing movement in civil society that is articulating responses "from below" to the globalization imposed "from above".

The events of the last decades of the 20th century have demonstrated, in Latin America as in other parts of the world, the end of the nationalist integrationist illusion and fiction. We are witnessing the last throes of an assimilationist nation-state model that is obsolete, even for the new global capitalism project.

The end of assimilationist nationalism is accompanied by a crisis in state nationalism and the resurgence of local nationalisms.

The proliferation of ethnic nationalisms and regional autonomies, even in their unfortunate, most fundamentalist and dogmatic versions, has created a political-cultural environment that favors the processes of redefining ethnic identities in autonomous and sovereign terms.

### The Context of Migration

Starting with Mexico's economic crisis of the early 1980s, a growing number of indigenous people have joined the ranks of Mexican migrants to the United

States. The population of undocumented Mexican migrants was estimated at 1.9 million in 1994, with an average of seven to nine people without legal documents crossing the Mexico-USA border per day (Barry et al. 1994: 27, 129).

A calculation of the indigenous proportion of this population of undocumented migrants is highly precarious and based on estimates made recently by a research team under the coordination of Michael Kearney (Runsten and Kearney 1994; Zabin, Kearney et al. 1993). It is estimated that by the mid-1990s there were between 20,000 and 30,000 Mixtec indigenous people working in the farmlands of California as day laborers; that is, between 5% and 10% of the agricultural labor force of California. By 1998 we estimate that, in the whole United States, there may be between 130,000 and 250,000 Mexican indigenous people working on farmlands, in the packing industry, in various types of manufacturing plants and in different types of urban services. The geographic areas of greatest concentration of migrant indigenous people are the West Coast of the United States, especially the states of California, Oregon and Washington, part of the Southwest and southern states such as Arizona and Texas, the state of Florida, the states of the southeast such as Georgia and the Carolinas, New York City and Chicago and in the states of Illinois, Iowa, Colorado and even Alaska.

In the state of California alone, there are currently 80 languages spoken besides English. To these foreign languages we must add several dozen languages of the Native Americans of the United States and more than a dozen indigenous languages from Mexico, Guatemala, Central and South America. In a non-statistical survey that I carried out a few years ago (Varese 1994b) I detected representatives of the following indigenous groups in California: from Mexico: Purépecha, Chinantec, Mixtec, Zapotec, Trique, Nahuatl, Otomí, Yucatec Mayan, Tzeltal, Tzotzil and Mam from the Highlands of Chiapas; Kankobal, Quiché, Kak'chiquel and Ixil from Guatemala; Mikito and Garifuna from Nicaragua and Honduras; Quichua and Quechua from Ecuador and Peru, and Mapuche from Chile.

The question that could be asked is: why has there been a massive increase in indigenous migrants to the United States? What are the new causes that provoke this migration? What characteristics does the indigenous migration have as opposed to traditional Mexican mestizo migration, and how does this migration impact on the process of transnational migration in general as well as the sending indigenous communities? Is there a need to reconfigure new national and bilateral policies in relation to this migration, which has particular ethnic characteristics?

It seems to me that the new transnational indigenous migration presents us with great challenges for the sociological imagination and with demands for creative solutions in the areas of social and economic development, in the area of human rights, and in the area of support and solidarity for the emergence of new forms of local and global communities. At the same time, and as a consequence, this transnational indigenous migration requires the reformulation of the concept

and practice of citizenship. The transnational migration of indigenous Mexicans is part of the great end-of-the century phenomenon of the indigenous exodus from America and other parts of the so-called developing countries, which expresses with great symbolic force one of the major effects of the "globalization forced from above" (Falk 1993). There are reasons for restructuring the global economy that tend to present themselves as the most important for explaining these phenomena, and there are reasons that are fundamentally political that tend to be invisible in the macroeconomic analyses favored by neo-liberal economists and social scientists. The first reasons cause economic deportation, the second political deportation and exile. Economic deportation requires reforms and restructuring in the field of economy and social justice; political deportation requires deep processes toward democratization on national, regional and local levels. It is obvious, however, that social injustice, economic exploitation and poverty are inevitably accompanied by an absence of democracy and fundamental flaws in mechanisms of political participation.

Saskia Sassen (1992), an expert in globalization phenomena, affirms that the global restructuring carried out by large transnational companies, governments of the central states, multilateral organisms and free trade treaties (NAFTA, WTO) in order to accelerate and guarantee the mobility of capital and facilitate foreign intervention also encourages the mobility of labor. "When the political and economic systems of nations become interconnected, the labor force tends to flow toward the country where there is less social stratification and a higher standard of living." (Sassen quoted in Barry 1994:33). "Economic expansionism (international commerce, investments, financial negotiations) together with an interventionist foreign policy contributes to establish the context for international migration" (Barry 1994:33).

The central role played by the United States in the emergence of a global economy during the last 40 years constitutes the central reason why people migrate to the United States in growing numbers. The efforts of the United States to open up its own and other countries' economies to the flow of capital, goods, services and information have created the conditions for the mobilization of populations for migration and has formed ties between the United States and other countries that eventually serve as a bridge for migration. (Sassen in Barry 1994:33).

If the phenomena of "globalization from above" explains the increase in migration from the periphery to the central countries, in our case from Mexico to the USA, we must, however, understand the mechanism that provokes the transnational migration of specific sectors of the population of Mexico, such as the indigenous people. These, according to conventional anthropology, have been defined as fundamentally rural dwellers, tied to and circumscribed by a stable territorial community, reluctant to change, impermeable to the demands of modernization, in a word, culturally and ideologically conservative. According to this stereotypical anthropological vision of the indigenous community, the communal peas-

ants, rooted in their own community, in their land, with a parochial and timorous view of the world, would not risk a dangerous adventure of thousands of kilometers of travel to an inhospitable and incomprehensible foreign land. To explain the phenomena of transnational migration and of the indigenous exodus, one must understand the history of the migration of Mexicans to the USA and the recent history of indigenous migration. Or as Marx would say, "To understand the problem of history, one must understand the history of the problem".

Graffiti on a wall in Tijuana declares a socio-political truth that is obvious to popular perception but nevertheless kept in obscurity by the political classes on both sides of the border: "*Neither illegal nor criminals: International workers*" (Barry 1994:28). The presence of Mexican-international workers in US companies dates back to the last decades of the 1800s. For more than 100 years, thousands, if not millions, of Mexican workers have given the best years of their lives to the development of the United States, and the profitability of North American companies. In 1880, the Southern Pacific and Santa Fe railroad companies had an insatiable appetite for cheap Mexican labor. Around 1910, approximately 20,000 Mexicans were recruited each year by railroad company agents. Part of this Mexican population was made up of indigenous Yaqui (Yoeme), Cora and O'otam who were brought to North California for railroad construction. The Yaqui and O'otam indigenous people settled in the border area of Arizona. Other industries began to contract Mexican labor using illegal contractors and smugglers of Mexican workers who, in a few years, became the fundamental axis of the cotton agrobusinesses in the West and of the growth of the large plantations of fruit, vegetables and sugar beet. On a smaller scale, Mexican workers contributed to the development of the copper mining industry in the southwest.

During the First World War, Mexican workers played a central role in supporting the economy of the United States (Barry 1999:28-29). There was no gratitude from the United States for these contributions of the Mexican people, rather the decade of the 20s saw the most violent forms of discrimination and racist aggression against Mexicans. While veterans of the war and the most disenfranchised of the North American population attacked the Mexicans at work, in their homes, in the streets, the farmers, the railroad companies, the steel and car industries continued to contract Mexicans for starvation wages. A form of illegal residence that left the Mexicans extremely vulnerable was institutionalized on the basis of collaboration between businessmen, the federal and state governments, and the most impoverished sectors of the North American people.

The intentional ambiguity of this arrangement has been a constant in the relations between migrant Mexicans and the United States. Mexican workers are put in a permanent situation of vulnerability to the aggression of the most impoverished sectors of the country, with no type of legal protection, in constant fear of being reported and deported. Obviously, the vulnerability of the Mexicans with regard to the government and other social sectors directly benefits businessmen

by keeping salaries below subsistence level, exempts the state from providing basic services and creates a xenophobic and racist atmosphere that can be politically mobilized every time it is convenient for the politicians of the moment. This modality of "management of the Mexican immigrant problem" was installed in the 1920s and extended through the Great Depression of the 1930s, continuing until our own times in a dialectic relationship between federal and state politics and the cycles of the USA and Californian economies. The only relative alteration to this modality of migratory policy occurred, as is well known, between 1942 and 1964 when a shortage of labor due to the Second World War pushed the US government to establish the Emergency Farm Labor Program, the *Braceros* program which, in the 1950s, reached the level of almost half a million farmhands working legally on US farms. The program was obviously convenient not only for US businesses and government but also for the government and economy of Mexico, which began to systematically benefit from the shipments of dollars that entered the country (Barry 1994:28-30).

Technological innovations such as the tomato harvester and a reduction in the demand for manpower on farms caused the cancellation of the farmhands program. In this same period, however, the migration of undocumented Mexican workers increased, permitting the US government to instrument the so-called Operation Wetback in 1954. In 1953, the Immigration and Naturalization Service deported 900,000 undocumented foreigners, with this number reducing to 250,000 in 1955 and 88,000 in 1956. By 1976, the deportations had reached more than one million (Barry 1994:28). In the 1970s, the connection of greatest economic importance between US companies and migrant workers became a relationship of mutual interdependence based on the seasonal need for farm labor (Barry 1994:30).

It was the dramatic change caused by the crisis in the Mexican economy in the 1980s that altered the structure of Mexican migration to the United States. The radical contraction in Mexico's national budget, the cutbacks in national services, the capital flight abroad, the reduction in exports and the suspension of subsidies and support for farms all produced a drastic increase in unemployment and a mass exodus from the farmlands to the city and from the center of the country toward the northern border in search of work in the factories and the agroindustries of Sinaloa and Sonora.

Two substantial changes that affected indigenous Mexicans' transnational migration occurred at this time:

1. Non-indigenous Mexican migrants increasingly departed for the United States of America from urban centers or provincial cities rather than from the small towns of farm workers. The expulsion from farmlands to the city due to the crisis of the 1980s produced an impact on the urban and rural-urban sub-employed who began to move toward the northern border and the United States. These migrants began to occupy job niches in the service

sector (restaurants, hotels, car washes, gardening, domestic work) or in the garment industry, canning and construction. Although the majority of these new migrants were still thinking in terms of seasonal stays in the United States, others were now migrating with the idea of staying permanently.

2. This new type of migrant, with more urban employment aspirations, left niches free in the agricultural job market, especially in the fields of California's agroindustries and in the fruit and grape growing farmlands of California, Oregon and Washington. This is the space that the indigenous migrants came to occupy, especially the Oaxacans: Mixtec, Trique, Zapotec and Chinantec. Almost immediately, Nahuatl from Guerrero and Puebla and Purépecha from Michoacán joined these indigenous groups.

One of the most important conditions for a member of an indigenous farming community to be able to migrate to the United States of America, undertaking a trip of thousands of kilometers to arrive in a totally unknown place and be able to find a job that allows him to survive, is that he must have access to a network of relationships with members of his own community, region and/or ethnicity. The existence of a network based in the community of origin is an almost indispensable condition for a successful migration with reduced risks. In the case of indigenous people, the bases of some of these networks were established during the final phases of the *Bracero* program: indigenous Zapotec, Mixtec and Purépecha formed part of the contingents of farmhands. The community, regional and ethnic networks developed "daughter communities" in the United States that were tied to the sending communities, allowing the new migrants to reduce the cost of migration, assuring a place of reception and receiving help in the search for work.

Another characteristic that indigenous migrants share with non-indigenous rural migrants is the position in the social stratification of the community. Indigenous migrants, especially those of the first migration waves, come from the middle and upper middle strata of the community: they have the economic resources and the support of family and relatives, including monetary loans, that allow them to undertake the long, risky trip in search of work.

The peculiar cultural characteristics of the indigenous Mexican migrant, who is thus distinguished from the non-indigenous Mexican migrant, can be synthesized in the following way: the indigenous migrant belongs to an indigenous community clearly defined in terms of territorial and political jurisdiction. The indigenous migrant has a specific indigenous citizenship (he is a "Benxon" of Yojovi, a Zapotec of the Yojovi community or the Juárez Sierra) with concrete community rights and duties, these rights being imprescriptible and obligatory. He has the right to a piece of land to settle his home on and

grow corn, his *milpa*, although in many cases this is insufficient even for family subsistence. He has the right to participate in the system of government of his community (now regulated officially by the state of Oaxaca as the Right to Uses and Customs by the Law on Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Communities of the State of Oaxaca, passed on 17th June 1998). He also has obligations to the rest of the community, such as participating in the *tequio*, *manovuelta* or *guzun* (obligatory community work), hosting patron saint festivals and ceremonies and marrying other members of his community. His communal citizen's membership is what gives him a personal and collective identity, particular and exclusive, that associates him with and makes him supportive of other members of the community and, possibly, on a second level, with members of other communities of the ethnic region before others from the rest of the country.<sup>3</sup>

Inspired, among others, by the British historian E.P. Thompson (1963) and by the classic works in economics by Karl Polanyi (1957), anthropology has recently produced several analyses of the organizational ways of communal and indigenous farm workers, which are based on the principles of moral economy. To put it very concisely: this relates to the organizational and economic principles of communities not totally absorbed by the logic of the market economy which, instead of being guided by individualistic values, dominated by the exchange value and favoring the logic of profit and accumulation tend, on the contrary, to govern themselves by the principles of reciprocity and use value. In this "community culture", mutual help, the system of reciprocity of services, the squandering of ceremonial expenses as a mechanism of "investment in the social fund and political prestige", and the moral mandate to contribute to the collective well-being of the community play an important and socially controlling role that disputes the superiority of the opposing values propagated by the market economy culture. In the indigenous peasant communities of Mexico, resistance and opposition to the consolidated socio-economic forms of differentiation is not necessarily an exclusive function of poverty and limited access to goods and resources but rather an intentional cultural proposal, to a greater or lesser degree, on the part of the members of the collective.

In her study of the Zapotec community of the Valley of Oaxaca, Teotitlán del Valle, Lynn Stephen (1991) shows how this community, totally involved in the capitalist market through the manufacture and sale of rugs and *serapes*, international tourism and transnational migration, has been able nevertheless to reorient the monetary income of the family units toward the communal institutions of "social welfare". That which the modern Mexican state has not been able to bring to the rural Zapotec community, the state of social welfare as a promise of post-revolutionary and now neo-liberal modernity, is currently a project intentionally constructed by the community. The partial redistribution of wealth occurs with greater frequency and intensity through the multiplication of festivals in which wide sectors of the village have a right to participate. Remittances

and earnings from transnational migrants are partially redistributed among the community in distribution and circulation ceremonies and in *tequio* systems of duties and collective works for the good of the community. The whole system tends to reinforce the ethnic/cultural loyalty to Teotitlán, the ethno-communal identity and the territorial roots, in spite of the attraction toward the outside and the United States. In a magnificent example of this dynamic of reinsertion and rootedness in the community, Stephen describes a *mayordomía* (the hosting of a patron saint festival) in which the daughters and sons of the *mayordomo* return to Teotitlán from Chicago to participate with their work and resources in a long and sumptuous communal festivity. In almost perfect English, one of the *mayordomo's* daughters describes her absolute loyalty to her community and her Zapotec culture. There is no hint of an intention to migrate definitively and uproot from the community and their Zapotec culture.<sup>4</sup> The contemporary ethnography and the analysis of indigenous migrant communities confirm these anecdotes (see Kearney 1996; Esteva and Prakash 1998: 80-87).

One of the most important results of this community culture, of this language of locality, and the politics of community space that characterize the indigenous villages of Mexico is that transnational indigenous migrants tend to reconstruct their ethnic and community space in their host country, in the United States. The Oaxacan Mixtec, Zapotec, Trique and Chinantec in California identify and reformulate themselves as member-citizens of their communities of origin, in a second instance they rediscover themselves as belonging to a greater and encompassing ethnolinguistic unit (the *Nuu-savi* or Mixtec ethnicity) and, finally, as *Oaxaqueños*, looked down on and discriminated against by their own expatriated Mexican compatriots or by the Mexican-Americans, Chicanos and Latinos with a long, legal residency in the U.S. This conscious and voluntary choice of ethnocommunal citizenship is expressed in a greater organizational capacity and a political and labor militancy somehow more politically engaged than that of non-indigenous, mestizo migrants (on this phenomenon, see Kearney 1996; Kearney and Varese 1995). The FIOB, the Binational Oaxacan Indigenous Front, has a web-site at [www.laneta.apc.org/fiob](http://www.laneta.apc.org/fiob) and a telephone with a free 800 number and a message recorded in Mixtec and Spanish explaining the services of assistance to migrants that the FIOB can provide. Other examples of the organizational capacity and personal achievements of the Mixtec include Radio Bilingüe in Fresno, CA, whose founder and director is a Mixtec with a law degree from Harvard University, and the achievements in education where Mixtec in the school district of Madera, CA. had the educational system contract several trilingual Oaxacan instructors who spoke Mixtec, Spanish and English – to support the education of Mixtec children and youth.

### Unresolved Questions and Modest Proposals

The cultural characteristics of the indigenous people of Mexico are such that they allow for the extrapolation of the indigenous migrant from the group of Mexican migrants as a whole and the proposal of measures on local, regional, state, federal and bi-national policies that refer exclusively to this sector of migrants. By way of a suggestion, I will mention some points that deserve attention from the political society as well as from organized civil society in Mexico and the United States. Obviously, the theme is one of such complexity that it requires further study and shared reflection with substantial participation from the indigenous activists, intellectuals and professionals involved in these processes.

In the first place, it seems important to understand the role that home, land, territory and community of origin play in the process of construction and reconfiguration of the individual and collective identity of the indigenous migrant. What are the most important emotional and rational ties of the indigenous transnational migrant in relation to the community of origin? What are the mechanisms exercised by the community to retain the loyalty of the migrants and to strengthen this sense of "distant belonging" that is demonstrated in their will to return, in the economic generosity of the migrants and their contribution to the social wellbeing of the community?

I think that the symbolic capital of the indigenous people, of each indigenous community, plays an essential role in the reproduction of specific cultural identities. The symbolic capital is expressed in the language, cultural representations, festivals and ceremonies, particular forms of socialization and education, music, dress or what remains in the minimal distinctive clothing of the community. The symbolic topography of one's own cultural identity gives meaning to the roots, the nostalgia for one's own land and the hope of return, even if it is provisional. Land, community and a sense of belonging activate the "symbolic capital" of the ethnocultural community itself. These are the areas of the indigenous world that require the substantial support of the political society, the state and of the rest of civil society. In the area of political practice, I think that the Mexican state, at the federal and state level, must develop, implement and operate specific policies of social, economic, cultural and educational attention to the indigenous people's exodus and growing diaspora.

The indigenous community in Mexico with its territory and its full territorial jurisdiction and autonomous administration (at the municipal level as well as at lower levels) should be reinforced institutionally, politically, economically and socially. Profound legislative reforms at the state level, of the type promoted by the Government of Oaxaca, must guarantee communal rights and citizenship rights to the indigenous peoples of the entire Mexican Republic. Reforms to the Constitution of the Mexican Republic must reflect the sum and whole of the various states' reforms in relation to the rights of the indigenous communities and people.

The country must recognize and institutionalize the concept and practice of the multiple citizenship of indigenous people with rights and duties that are specific and exclusive, without lessening their rights and duties to Mexican citizenship. In this context, it is not absurd to think that, as is occurring in the European Union with the implicit recognition of the dual citizenship of migrants, an indigenous migrant from Mexico in the United States could claim the same preferential rights as the North American indigenous people (Native Americans), who enjoy tribal sovereignty and a direct, bilateral relationship with the federal government of the USA.

A radical change is required in the plans for national rural development (farming, forestry, fish-farming, mining, etc.) that fully involves the indigenous communities in all phases of the process and allocates investment and resources for development to indigenous regions. Rural development, especially agricultural, has been abandoned almost completely to its fate by the Mexican state, under the hegemony of neo-liberal economics. There is no valid reason for not re-establishing a principal role in national development for indigenous farmers. With lands, water and resources for infrastructure and commercialization, the millions of indigenous families of Mexico could transform the country back into the breadbasket of Meso-America.<sup>5</sup> A national development and investment plan aimed at the recuperation of indigenous agriculture would drastically reduce internal and transnational migration.

While the indigenous people continue to migrate en masse to the United States, it is imperative that the state and federal governments of Mexico establish a coherent and dynamic policy of legal, economic, social and cultural support for the indigenous and non-indigenous migrants that covers the following points. a) Reducing the transaction costs for remittances and money transfers; b) Establishing a national trust fund to support migrants' social and economic reinsertion in their communities; c) Providing the legal services necessary for the migrants in the US; d) Establishing a system of labor, medical and social insurance for the indigenous migrants; e) Supporting and developing an indigenous educational system for the migrants with particular attention to their bi- or tri-lingual situation.

Finally, the Mexican government and the government of the United States will have to renegotiate a binational migratory policy in which the principle of multiple citizenship and compliance with human, political, labor and cultural rights is fully recognized by both countries for the indigenous circular migrants.

## Notes

- 1 My free translation from Miguel León Portilla, 1987, *Visión de los vencidos*, México, UNAM.
- 2 Víctor de la Cruz. *Tu laanu, tu lanu, Quiénes somos, cuál nuestro nombre?*, in *La flor de la palabra. Guié sti' didxaza. Antología de la literatura zapoteca*, edited by Víctor de la Cruz, 1984. Bilingual edition, México: Premiá Editora.

- 3 I am using consciously the masculine gender in my writing of this paragraph because in the large majority of Mexican and Meso-American indigenous communities there is a strong patriarchal tradition that excludes women from participating in most of the public functions of citizenship. The issue is complex and requires refined analysis, differentiated by region, ethnic group and degree of political mobilization of women, see Chiñas 1973, Kearney 1996, Stephen 1991.
- 4 Documentary film *Mayordomía*, Lynn Stephen and Julia Barco, producers.
- 5 The small and mid-sized farmers of Chile and Peru are exporting their products to the United States, the Mayan small farmers of Guatemala are also exporting selected organic vegetables to the United States, and the Mayan organic coffee growers of Chiapas - ISMAM - export their coffee to Europe, the same as the Zapotec coffee growers of the Isthmus - UCIRI - do with their coffee.

## POSTSCRIPT TRANSNATIONAL INDIGENOUS MIGRANTS (2006)

As we reach the end of May 2006, the issue of undocumented migrants in the U.S. is becoming a heated topic in the approaching campaign for the mid-term elections.<sup>1</sup> The old xenophobic and racist rhetoric that has marked the history of the U.S. is resurfacing in the public debate around immigration and pushing a very offensive and dangerous wedge into Mexican pride and its relations with the U.S. Relations between the U.S., Mexico and other Latin American countries are being deeply affected by the threat of a congressional law that would *de facto* criminalize undocumented migrants from Mexico and Latin America. Of the estimated 12 million "illegal aliens" in the U.S., 9.5 million are Mexican and the remaining 2.5 million are from Latin America, Asia and Africa. By extrapolating the proportion of indigenous people in Mexico – between 10% and 15% – to the number of undocumented Mexican migrants in the U.S., we can estimate that 950,000 are from indigenous communities. These numbers are probably close to the reality, given that in the State of California alone, the U.S. Census of 2000 established that there were more than 180,000 indigenous people from Latin America. These are the individuals who were willing to provide information to the Census officials, maybe risking deportation if they were found to be without legal immigration documents. In a series of studies published recently (Varese and Escárcega 2004:57), researchers have established that indigenous informants from the State of Oaxaca could identify the presence of other Oaxacan Indians in 23 states of the U.S. and Canada. Anecdotal information gathered informally by social scientists and journalists interested in these topics shows that there are possibly indigenous migrants from Mexico in every single state of the U.S., including the islands of Hawaii. This massive presence of indigenous peoples from Mexico and Latin America in both rural and urban areas of the U.S. is beginning to alter the equation of political power in favor of the indigenous peoples: they are no longer invisible, their voice is heard by the U.S. authorities and especially by Mexican politicians, their claims of indigeneity and for specific ethnic aspects of human rights are becoming part of their struggle and political organizations.

The presence in the U.S. of at least half a million indigenous peoples from Mexico is part of the ambiguous situation that, for many decades, has confronted

both the U.S. government, the agricultural industry and labor market of the U.S., and the Mexican government as well. According to the Central Bank of Mexico, indigenous migrants, like other Mexican migrants, on average send US\$348 per month to their families in Mexico. April 2006 saw the highest remittances of U.S. dollars to Mexico yet: US\$844.2 million. For the indigenous state of Michoacán, the migrants' remittances represent 13% of the state's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), for the state of Oaxaca migrants' remittances represent 8% of the state's GDP. In 2005 Mexico received more than 20 thousand million dollars from migrants and, by the end of 2006, the country is expected to have received 24 thousand million dollars from its migrants. Only India receives more remittances (see Roberto González Amador in Mexico's newspaper *La Jornada*, June 2, 2006). In an economy of this size, it is obvious that there are contradictory forces pulling the issue of undocumented migrants in different directions. The agricultural industry, especially in the West Coast states, is interested in maintaining the current flow of migrants, particularly indigenous migrants from Oaxaca, Guerrero and Puebla, because of their excellent reputation as hard-working farm laborers. Indigenous migrants are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and human rights abuses because of their illegal status. Indigenous workers do not cause labor problems and are willing to accept low pay well below the minimum wage. The same can be said for the construction and garment industries, the canneries where fruit and vegetables are packed, and for service industries such as restaurants, gardening and housekeeping. On the part of the government and politicians, it is clear that the political pressure of the entrepreneurs to maintain the *status quo* is moderating the attraction that xenophobic policies could have for the Anglo public. The Mexican government, too, is interested in maintaining and fostering the situation because of the economic advantages represented by this exploitative system of hidden taxation of the poorest and weakest sectors of the population.

On the morning of May 18, 2006 the Mixtec migrant leader Moisés Cruz was coming out of a small restaurant in his community of San Juan Mixtepec, Oaxaca. With him was his wife. At around 11:00 am, two gunmen intercepted Cruz and shot him repeatedly. He died in front of his wife. The two gunmen escaped through the fields and have not been yet been apprehended. According to witnesses, the two individuals were not from the community and acted as professional killers. Why was Moisés Cruz murdered? Cruz was a respected Mixtec leader who had fought for decades in the U.S. and Mexico to defend the human and labor rights of his people, the Mixtec, in the diaspora and in their territory in Oaxaca. Recently, he had been involved in organizing his community in the U.S. and in San Juan Mixtepec to take control of the remittances, millions of dollars sent every year by the migrants to their families and which are systematically skimmed off by local "caciques" or political bosses who control the five exchange agencies and small banks of the community. Moisés Cruz is just one of the hun-

dreds - if not thousands - of indigenous leaders and activists in Mexico and the Americas fighting for social justice and autonomy.

### Note

- 1 Of the estimated 12 million undocumented migrants, most of them from Mexico, 2 to 3 million are farm workers, mostly Mexicans. Of these, between 960,000 and 640,000 are indigenous people. In California there are approximately 250,000 to 300,000 indigenous people from Mexico (representing the states of Puebla, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Chiapas, Yucatan, Michoacán, and the Estado de Mexico). In ethnic numbers there are approximately 80,000 Mixtec in California, mostly working in agriculture. Another 80,000 to 90,000 Zapotec are working in service, restaurants, construction, sweat-shops/"maquiladoras". Other indigenous people from Mexico are: Chinantec, Trique, Nahuatl, P'urepecha, Yucatec Maya and Afro-Mexicans from the Costa Chica of Oaxaca and Guerrero.

The US CENSUS of 2000 in CA registered 181,000 Latin American Indians.

California (2000)		
Total population	33,871,648	(100%)
American Indian and Alaska Native	333,346	(1%)
Hispanic/Latino (any race)	10,966,556	(32%)
Mexican	8,455,926	(25%)
Latin American Indians	181,000	(0.5%)
No-Census data		
Undocumented indigenous people from Mexico	250,000	(0.7%)

## LANGUAGE AND PRAXIS OF PLACE (2001)

### abstract

The struggle of America's indigenous peoples to maintain or recover their independence forms part of a history that dates back more than five centuries.\* This struggle focuses on territorial ownership, the exercise of collective jurisdiction over it and political and moral responsibility at a time when globalisation is on the increase, dismantling the conventional state and social protections. The community is, first and foremost, a geographic space in which their relatives and ancestors were born and are buried; a space with its own history and geography and specific cosmological references. Nevertheless, the special conditions imposed on many human groups have led to an enrichment of the concept of community, prioritising its definition as *a sense of shared identity* rather than a *localised social system*. Many cases illustrate this, such as that of the Mixtec, Chinantec or Zapotec who live in California but feel an obligation to return to their communities in the south of Oaxaca to fulfil significant responsibilities. This behaviour highlights the moral strength of the collective demand to be an active participant in the life of one's own community and forms a mechanism of reciprocity that is adapted to the new conditions. For decades, indigenous peoples have been considered peasants by social scientists, and this has obscured other cultural and political characteristics such as their long historical duration as ethnic entities. The great pre-colonial ethnic diversity was reduced by the Europeans via the homogenizing concept of "Indians" whose workforce remained in a dominated position. It is clear that this process produced peasantization but it also caused the proletarianisation of the indigenous, who enlisted as miners, workers and agricultural labourers, and later led to their urbanisation. The fact that, under these conditions, they have continued to recognise themselves as members of an indigenous community shows that purely economic analyses of this process, biased by ethnocentric perspectives, are insufficient to understand this reality. Globalisation is not a new phenomenon, for it began more than five centuries ago and, since then, the indigenous peoples have developed strategies to adapt, to recreate their culture and defend their freedom. To understand indigenous peoples, the concepts of oneness and plurality must be seen in parallel because, despite the diversity of local cultures, there are principles that unify them, such as the logic of reciprocity, the pre-eminence of use value over exchange value, the belief that one is a part of the universe and not the centre of it, and the belief

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that one must not try to dominate nature but relate to it in order to share. Of these, the logic of reciprocity comes before that of individual accumulation. Indigenous communities throughout America are a solid testimony to the strength and resistance of their own civilizing project.

### Introduction

For more than five centuries, millions of indigenous people in the Americas have struggled to maintain or regain their independence in the social and economic spheres, their political self-determination and, fundamentally, their ethnic sovereignty - understood and practiced as an exercise of authority and dominion over their autonomous intellectual, spiritual and cultural life. Forms of combined active and hidden resistance have been collectively and individually practiced in the realm of intangible culture, in the secrecy and clandestinity of their inner personae, where language, culture and consciousness intersect in the daily task of reading the universe, and living and acting in it. As we well know, under colonial occupation this immense indigenous labor of interpreting, stewarding and nurturing the world could not always be accomplished. While imperial and colonial intentions were aimed at controlling the totality of the subjugated peoples - their spirit, their reason, their bodies, their labor - the larger more systematic and continuing effort has been directed toward the expropriation of land and resources, and the associated indigenous systematic knowledges and technologies. And this is the reason why even a superficial revisionist look at the history of indigenous people's resistance to imperialism reveals the centrality of both the territorial issue and the "environmental" question since the very beginning of the Indians' opposition to Europeans.

The issues that we would like to address on this occasion are the following:

- a) Land and territory as the axial theme of indigenous ethno-political sovereignty;
- b) The unique non-commoditized relationship that indigenous people maintain with the territorial landscape (beyond land and resources as conditions of production);
- c) The absolute necessity of each indigenous community to exercise collective jurisdiction over their territory as a condition for the maintenance of cultural sovereignty;
- d) The question of political and moral accountability in an era of growing globalization in which conventional state and community safeguards and safety nets are being dismantled and trampled over by transnational corporate interests.

I will focus my discussion on the indigenous people of that part of the continent that has been conventionally defined as Latin America and, more recently, "Hemispheric Latin America", a broader historical-cultural definition that extends Latin America – and the presence of Latin American communities – beyond national frontiers and into the U.S. and Canada. This hemispheric approach to the concept of Latin America and the indigenous people of Latin America has been developed by a critical mass of scholars in Native American Studies at UC Davis with the substantial collaboration of anthropologists from UC Davis and UC Santa Cruz.<sup>1</sup>

### The Indigenous Community as a Place in the Universe

Any discussion on indigenous communities and the territorial basis of their sovereignty raises some old sociological questions regarding the definition and scope of community, as well as more recent debates on the function of location/place-ment in the social construction of ethnic identity. The classic sociological distinction put forward by F. Tönnies (Tönnies [1887] 1955, cited in Jary and Jary 1991) between *Gemeinschaft* (the community of close, intimate relationships where kinship, a bound and shared territory, and a common culture dominate the social relations) and *Gesellschaft* (translated in English as "society", where relationships are impersonal, contractual, transitory and calculative rather than affective), has been enriched by contemporary British anthropologist Peter Worsley (Worsley 1987) who has emphasized locality (geographical expression) as a constitutive condition of any definitional undertaking. Even for those contemporary communities (whose members are scattered around the world) who are defined as a type of relationship where communality is expressed as a *sense of shared identity* rather than a localized social system, the question of locality and spatial location of "community members" may rise time and again as an organizational and political challenge (the Jewish community comes to mind) (Worsley 1987: 238-245).

The pre-eminent role of space in communal definition is particularly true in the case of the indigenous people of Latin America. For the forty or so million indigenous people (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos 1994; Varese 1991a), belonging to more than four hundred ethno-linguistic groups, living in thousands of rural communities spread throughout all sorts of geographical and environmental zones, issues of territory, land, resources, nature and the world are intrinsically tied to the cultural conception and social practice of community. The community is in the first place the village, the geographical space where one was born or where one's parents and ancestors were born and are buried. This communal space, with names, stories, history and cosmological references, is where the individual and collective identity is constructed in a tight web of meanings expressed in a specific ethnic language or in a local variety of the national language. It is essential to recognize that for indigenous people, territorial, spatial, loca-

tional and land issues remain at the core of any discussion about the meaning of community, ethnicity and politics of cultural identity, cultural reproduction and autonomy. Consequently, I am addressing my comments at the centrality of the notions and practices of spatial and cultural jurisdiction in indigenous communities as well as the related issues of intellectual sovereignty and epistemological autonomy which, as I have attempted to demonstrate elsewhere, are a set of tightly interwoven questions (Varese 1999).

Recently the question of Latin American indigenous people's land/territory has been revisited by anthropologists (Díaz Polanco 1991; Hale 1994, 1995; Kearney 1991; Kearney 1996 and Kearney and Varese 1995) with a broader more ethno-political approach and a less peasant productivist focus, which has been the dominant mode of study of Latin American indigenous communities since the founding analyses of K. Marx (Marx 1963 [1852]); V.I. Lenin (1956 [1899]); A.V. Chayanov (1986); J.C. Mariátegui (1976 [1928]); T. Shanin (1990) and the analytical school initiated by E. Wolf (1959, 1966). For at least the last eight decades, indigenous people of Latin America have been treated by social scientists as peasants, that is to say that they have been put symbolically in the proverbial "sack of potatoes" of K. Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1963) and have thus become prey to convoluted debates between economic theorists and anthropologists, revolutionaries and developmentalists. Questions about the cultural and economic autonomy of the peasantry, the independent nature of their mode of production, their crucial or marginal role in peripheral capitalism, and the imminent or transitional character of their historical presence, have obscured other important cultural and political characteristics of the indigenous people such as their "long historical duration" (in a Braudelian sense) as "autonomous" ethnic entities that have survived and reproduced themselves for millennia throughout different larger social formations (pre-colonial and colonial states, and contemporary republican nation-states of all political colors).

It is well known that the extreme civilizational and ethnic diversity of pre-colonial Native America was reduced by European colonialism to the homogenized and generic sub-alternity of "indios" for the purpose of labor control and ideological and political domination. The process produced ruralization, "campesinización" / peasantization of the indigenous but also proletarianization (through labor in mining, "obrajes" or sweatshops, *haciendas* and plantations) and the concurrent phenomena of Indian urbanization. These new multiple indigenous ethnoses that have reconfigured themselves over the last five centuries of colonial and neo-colonial occupation (and which we could define as permanent processes of ethnogenesis) have a series of cultural and social characteristics an understanding of which goes well beyond limited, if not simplistic, economic analyses framed in terms of Euro-American and Eurocentric perspectives and interests.

It is obvious, for instance, that the formalist-substantivist debate of the early 1960s about pre-capitalist societies, the neoclassical-Marxist ongoing dispute

about Third World rural development/revolution, and even the more updated contributions of the "Moral Economy" à la James Scott (Scott 1976, 1985) plus "The Rational Peasant" à la Samuel Popkin (Popkin 1979) are all analytical approaches that privilege a fundamentally Western (and philosophically Enlightened) conception of individual social life and economy: "value" as determined by labor and exchange is at the ethical center of life in civilized society.<sup>2</sup> The axis around which the whole society rotates is production of value for exchange. The language of this system is the language of individualism, and increasingly the language of profit; its *ethos*, its moral code is, as Max Weber told us in 1904, the spirit of capitalism (Weber 1958). The cultural language of this system is also spatially disembodied, it is valid and performable anywhere, in any deterritorialized space. Increasingly the space of the "exchange value" is uprooted, ungrounded, ethereal, or "cyberial" as Arturo Escobar would say (Escobar 1994). Indigenous communities and people scrutinized with this cultural lens make very little sense. In fact this type of analysis constitutes a splendid instrument for increasing the frustration of economists, social scientists and institutions involved in indigenous peoples' development.

An indigenous epistemological and axiological approach to the relationship between individual and society uses instead, to paraphrase Lakota scholar Elisabeth Cook-Lynn (1999), the "language of place": a language embedded in the locality, in the concrete space where culture is grounded and reproduced in a familiar landscape; where the naming of things, space, objects, plants, animals, living people, and the dead, the underworld and the celestial infinity evokes the total cosmic web as an awesome and mysterious social and divine construction. This is why a paradigmatic shift that accentuates "*topos*" rather than "*logos*" is needed to understand indigenous people. This is also why I believe that the beauty of our particular discipline, our intellectual endeavor, is that it does not solve all mysteries: it announces them.

The indigenous cultural language is constructed around a few principles and a cultural logic or cultural topology that privileges diversity and heterogeneity over homogeneity, eclecticism over dogma, and multiplicity over bipolarity. As I write these lines, I can feel the reaction of an intellectual audience that is ready to disqualify these ideas as "romanticism", "idealization of indigenous people" or simply "populist idealism", and "political and economic *narodnism*" (in the old Leninist language). *Déjenme curarme en salud*, "Let me heal myself while I am still healthy", as they say in Mexico and let me discuss in some detail the historical formation of what I believe are the central components of the indigenous people's civilizational projects.

One initial central idea that needs to be clarified is that *globalization* is not a new political, economic and cultural phenomenon but rather a five-century-old arrangement of the world imposed by Europe and Euro-America upon the multiplicity of local social and cultural expressions as a permanent attempt to configure and reconfigure people and resources into an acceptable and naturalized order of things that is easily exploitable.

A corollary of this remark is that the analytical framework for understanding the local people of this continent, the indigenous people in all their various localized/communal/territorial expressions, who since the 16th century have succumbed to Euro-American expansionism, must be a global and a hemispheric one. The local (each indigenous people, culture, ethno-historical formation) acquires full meaning as long as it is perceived as dialectically constructed within the structure and configuration of colonial and neo-colonial power which, since its inception, has manifested itself as a program of global domination. As a consequence, while the theoretical need for a *global approach* to the study of indigenous people has its foundations in the logic of the political economy of power (fundamentally the understanding of the role played by indigenous people's labor, culture, science and technologies in the monumental accumulation of wealth and power of the Euro-American élites), the need for a *hemispheric approach* is based on the recognition that the Native People of the Americas in all their cultural diversity share and are part of a common and unique civilization. The most obvious analogy that can be made to illustrate this statement is one drawn from the cultural history of Europe and the Mediterranean area, where many local cultures developed historically within one civilizational matrix (Amin 1989). In the Americas, as in the Mediterranean, many peoples and many cultures shared one civilizational unity grounded in millennia of co-development.

I would like to expand on this idea of unity and plurality, commonality and diversity among indigenous people by providing some observations with a few strokes of a broad ethno-historical brush. While *polyculture* (the practice of biodiversity in agricultural production) seems to be found prevalently in the tropical and subtropical regions of the world, it is among the indigenous people of the Americas of different and varied ecosystems where this technology has reached an astounding level of refinement. The Andean and Amazonian *chacra* and *conuco*, the Meso-American *milpa* and the "three sisters" or "sacred triad" of Eastern and Central North America and the South West constitute some of the expressions of a common indigenous conception, over thousands of miles and throughout hundreds if not thousands of ethnic groups and cultures. This conception holds that concentrating, nourishing and developing diversity in the reduced space of human agricultural intervention as well as in the larger space of economic activity of the entire group, is the most appropriate way of dealing with land, water, animal, botanical and resource conservation and, in general, with the preservation of the environment and the nurturing of nature.

Clearly, Native American agricultural biodiversity and environmental management are millennial practices and sciences that resulted from early intentional and planned domestication of plants such as corn, beans, squash, chilis, potato, cassava, sweet potato, amaranth, peanut, coca, tomato, avocado, tobacco and thousands of other cultigens and semi-domesticated plants. What needs to be pointed out is that the extreme variety of indigenous cultigens and semi-domesticated plants is

matched by an equally diverse and multiple use of the environment and a systematic cultural preoccupation for maintaining and increasing the diversity of the biosphere. Polyculture and the intentional maintenance of biodiversity are historical realities, but also metaphors of the indigenous people's cultural gravitation toward diversity rather than homogeneity, eclecticism rather than dogma.

Polyculture, the nurturing of biodiversity, and the multiple use of the environment, seem to constitute the crucial conception of what has been called by James Scott (1976) the "moral economy" of peasants-indigenous people. This axial cultural notion, which operates along the "principle of diversity", accompanies and shapes the whole cosmology of innumerable Amerindian societies that place at the center of the universe not the man (the anthropocentric, patriarchal, dominant character of both the sacred and secular history of Euro-America) but rather diversity itself expressed in the multiplicity of deities with their polymorphic characteristics and, at times, contradictory functions. The ancient Meso-American Quetzalcoatl is serpent, bird and human at the same time. He is an historical cultural hero on his way back to repossess the stolen Indian world and he is the Morning Star. He is also the fragile and vulnerable humanistic holy principle that privileges the sacrifice to the gods of jade and butterflies instead of human offerings. He certainly does not stand at the center of the Meso-American Indian cosmologies because there is no center but rather an intricate polyphony of symbols and values, a "spiritual polyculture", a "sacred *milpa*", a "holy *chacra*", an infinite domain for the encounter and interaction of diversity.

Today for the Mixe-Popoluca of the southern Mexican state of Veracruz, the tender sprouts of corn and bean planted together with squash in the *milpa* (that chaotic polyculture despised and misunderstood by modern agronomists) carry the same name during the early period of their germination. They are, in their initial stage of growth, the symbol and image of the archetypal twins sacrificed at the beginning of time by their grandmother for the good of humanity. Each year, each growing season, each corn and bean in each *milpa*, is a sacrament of memory and hope, and a tribute to diversity.

The Biblical and Judeo-Christian foundations of the anthropocentric Mediterranean and Euro-American worldview which establishes a confrontational relationship between humans and nature, men and animals, forests, mountains, jungles and deserts, have been analyzed thoroughly by recent studies (Amin 1989; Sale 1991), among others. This representation of the world and the resulting human positioning in it demands the homogenization of the surroundings and of nature in order to control, subjugate and exploit both. Even Marxism, as the secular revolutionary version of the Judeo-Christian utopian thought, pays homage to this dichotomous view of the world where humans are separate from the rest of nature and struggling to control it. Recently James C. Scott (1998) explored extensively the cultural obsession of homogenization in societies ruled by elite classes engaged in state-building projects. The simplification, and thus the legibility and

possibility of administrative manipulation, of nature and society is a *sine qua non* condition of every political system that aims at centralization and concentration of power and the concomitant subjugation of local autonomy and epistemological sovereignty. Pre-colonial indigenous states such the Mexica-Tenochtla, the Mixtec, the Zapotec, the Maya or the Inca, to mention but the most renowned, do not show indications of having had interest in homogenizing the conquered natural and social space. In fact, it has been well documented that pre-colonial indigenous tributary states practiced a sort of cultural, ideological and spiritual inclusive eclecticism that contributed to the constant growth and increasing complexity of their multicultural societies (Clendinnen 1995; Murra 1978).

In contrast to Euro-American anthropocentrism, the indigenous people of the Americas seem for millennia to have constructed cosmos-centric and polycentric cosmologies based on the logic of diversity and the logic of reciprocity. A diverse cosmos, in which no center is privileged, no singularity is hegemonic. A world that is constantly enriched by the interaction of each of its elements, even those that are antithetical, requires a moral code (a customary code of behavior) based on the logic of reciprocity. Whatever is taken has to be returned in similar and comparable "value". Whatever I receive (good, gift, service, resource) I will have to reciprocate at some point with similar and comparable value. What I take from the earth has to be returned, what I give to the earth or to the gods or my human counterparts will be given back to me. Sociologist of religion G. Van Der Leeuw (1955) synthesized splendidly many decades ago this civilizational logic with the Latin formula: "*Do ut possis dare*", "I give so that you can give".

It would be simplistic and reductionist to argue that this whole millennial civilizational proposition of the indigenous people of the Americas could be condensed in the descriptive equation that these are "agricentric societies" which have historically favored agricultural development at the expense of other areas of social and cultural growth. I am suggesting, instead, that both *the principles of diversity* and *the principle of reciprocity* have been and are present in the economic, social, political and cultural life of indigenous societies that have established their ethnic distinctiveness on gathering, hunting and fishing activities or, in more recent colonial and neo-colonial times, on a "mixed" economy that has combined wage labor, petty mercantile activities and sub-subsistence horticulture. At the end of thousands of years of evolvment and their incorporation into social and cultural formations that advance opposite values, the majority of indigenous people of the Americas that have not been totally destroyed by the dominant national societies (and their capitalist *weltanschauung*) are still struggling to live their social lives guided by these principles.

Obviously, for contemporary indigenous people, life in the midst of a permanent contradiction between the "culture of use value", guided by the logic of diversity and reciprocity, and the "culture of exchange value", guided by the logic of homogenization and individualistic profit, is fraught with tremendous ambi-

guities and conflicts. This tension between two logics, two sets of principles, which can be summarized as a *culture of economy of use* and a *culture of economy of profit*, characterizes the social, economic and cultural life of the great majority of indigenous people and communities of Latin America. The acrid polemics that for decades have torn apart substantivists and formalists, Marxists and neo-classical economists and which are now confronting the Mayan Zapatistas of Chiapas with neo-liberal bureaucrats turned into aspiring bankers, reveals on a magnified scale the degree of penetration of capitalist *weltanschauung* into every interstice of the world's societies.

Let me bring in an example that is becoming increasingly familiar in vast areas of the United States. In the United States there are currently thousands of indigenous migrants from Latin America, and especially from Mexico. For transnational Indian migrants who are coming from Mexico to the U.S., the issue of "communal citizenship" is of vital importance. Indian migrants can spend many years as farm workers or cooks in California and keep their social position within their home community in Mexico as long as they contribute annually to the communal well-being by participating in *ceremonies of reciprocity*. *Reciprocity* may consist of performing different annual social and political tasks, sponsoring one of the Patron Saint "*fiestas*", participating routinely in communal public service or carrying out civic responsibilities within the community organization. None of these activities is paid for, on the contrary each activity and commitment may cost a small fortune to the community's member. Why does a Mixtec or Chinantec or Zapotec living in California feel obliged to return to his/her community in the southern state of Oaxaca to perform an onerous, burdensome and expensive duty? What is at issue here is the moral strength of the collective demand of being an active participant in the life of one's own community. Indian communal citizenship has to be renewed and nurtured by its carrier through a series of ritualized acts and social functions that are based on the logic of reciprocity. Each member of the indigenous community is aware of the linking that exists among all its members and wants to make sure that everyone else recognizes his/her contributions to the well-being of the collective body. Here the logic of reciprocity overrules the opposite logic of individualism and accumulation/profit that leads and regulates social life outside the indigenous community.

In a previous work, I tried to define the intricate links that exist between culture and production and I argued that in the case of indigenous people it was important to look at "decisions about production ... (and about) consumption, ideas about both moments of a social reproduction and decisions, and fundamental definitions concerning surplus. For every people and every historical moment has defined surplus differently, assigning to it a qualitatively different use, which at the end has also defined, through its uniqueness, the group and its civilization" (Varese 1985).

There are, however, some central questions that require further analysis: how much of these indigenous civilizational principles and logic are still present in

contemporary indigenous peoples? How has the expansion of the capitalist economy and worldview affected the various indigenous people? Can we naively assume the existence of numerous indigenous people-communities relatively unadulterated by the opposite logic of individualism, profit, commoditization, primacy of "exchange value" over "use value"?

Let us assume the hypothesis that the thousands of indigenous communities of Latin America (40 million indigenous people and hundreds of ethnolinguistic groups) can be divided into the following schematic typology:

- 1 Agrarian-peasant communities of Meso-America and the Andes (increasingly relying on external wage labor and circular migration). In this category we find a whole range of levels of subsistence economies, from sub-subsistence to a few cases of affluent subsistence;
- 2 Indigenous communities of horticulturists of the lowlands of South America and Central America (who still rely very much on hunting and gathering and an historically dynamic involvement in the local labor and commodity market). Again, here we find a whole range of levels of subsistence economies, from sub-subsistence to a few cases of affluent subsistence; and finally,
- 3 Proletarianized rural and urban indigenous people who rely mostly on wage labor at the level of sub-employment and/or temporary employment (with incomes that are complemented by cyclical returns to the community and the practice of some agricultural activity).

Clearly a class analysis must be introduced into this typology to disclose the presence, within most of the indigenous ethnic people, of a small élite of intelligentsia and professionals, a petty bourgeoisie linked in most cases to nation-state bureaucracy and services and, in some cases, of a flourishing bourgeoisie (some clear examples are to be found among the Isthmus Zapotec of Mexico, and the Guajiro of Venezuela).

How has the transformation process of the indigenous people taken place over the last few centuries? And how are the transformations produced today by globalization and the induced transnational migration and diaspora affecting the indigenous people's relation to their territory, their homeland? Obviously, these are questions that would require much more space and time than I have in this opportunity. I postulate, nevertheless, that a historical analysis from Ferdinand Braudel's perspective of the "*Longue Durée*" / Long Duration is absolutely indispensable if we are to understand not the "eventful history" but the more permanent cultural and social characteristics of indigenous societies.

As we consider indigenous people, we are looking at millennia of accumulated history, trends, cultural characteristics that have survived and adapted to many radical social and economic changes that have occurred throughout the millennia of pre-colonial times, centuries of colonialism-imperialism (which pro-

duced fragmented mosaics of territorialized "Indian communities", the early Indian diasporas and Indian proletariat), more than one century of nationalism (which accentuated the expansion and penetration of the capitalist market into indigenous territories) and, finally, a few decades of transnationalism and globalization (which is inducing Indian neo-diasporas, transnational migration and processes of cyclical deterritorialization).

In this schematic chronology, I think it important to emphasize an understanding of the formative period of millennia of pre-Columbian, pre-European, pre-invasion, pre-conquest or "independent indigenous evolvement" as being that of constructing a polycentric cosmology as well as a polycentric social practice, which Eurocentrism would later call polytheism and misinterpret by confusing diversity with chaos and disorder. This is the complex of bio-cultural diversity that has been attributed by anthropologists to the early indigenous social formation of hunters and gatherers, horticulturists and agrarian societies which evolved in the tropics. Is bio-diversity an exclusive function of the tropics? It is evident that there is more bio-diversity in sub-tropical and tropical zones; however, even in temperate climates and sub-arctic regions, bio-diversity seems to be the central characteristic of indigenous people's culture.

As discussed previously, *reciprocity* is the associated and homologous social and cultural principle of biodiversity. A principle that supports the whole logic of social interaction as well as the whole moral of cosmic transactions, those arrangements that take place between humans and the rest of the tangible and intangible universe. American Indian languages are repositories of these intellectual and practical constructions and hundreds of terms can be found in Amerindian semantic fields that refer to reciprocal social and cosmic transactions. The Zapotec *guzún* and *guelaguetza*, the Nahuatl *tequistl*, *tequio*, the Quechua *mit'a*, *ayni*, the Ashaninka *ayumparii*, are just some examples of terms that refer to elaborate cultural institutions of diversity and reciprocity. Even in historical societies that were organized hierarchically into social classes, such as those of Meso-America and the Andes, the logic of reciprocity was at the basis of every exchange of goods, services, labor, tributes and gifts. The tributary system was based on the principle of reciprocity, which could be symmetrical, asymmetrical and/or differing. In any case, *complementarity* is the logical and practical concurrent principle of diversity and reciprocity that allowed, for instance, the Andean peoples to build the elaborate and monumental agro-ecological system based on a combined vertical use of different ecosystems or "ecological floors" distributed at different altitudes of the Andes (Murra 1978; Dollfus 1981). In the case of the Amazon region, a similar principle made it possible for indigenous people to establish a macro-system of horizontal complementarity in a large geographical area in which scarce and scattered resources such as salt, stone axes or the hunting poison "*curare*" could be circulated and exchanged by large numbers of people separated by thousands of miles (Varese 1983b). Meso-America expressed the same principles of reciproci-

ty, diversity and complementarity through the "solar market system" which articulates the people of numerous and diverse villages and regions in periodical encounters for the exchange of goods, ideas, ceremonies, culture (Wolf 1959).

Until a few decades ago, the Ashaninka of Peru's Upper Amazon, who live in hamlets scattered throughout a vast territory of tropical rainforest, used to achieve and maintain social and cultural cohesion by performing a cyclical ritual pan-ethnic encounter called *parawu*. In this large gathering, hundreds of Ashaninka would meet to celebrate and renovate their common ancestry, their kinship and community ties, their collective identity, and the complex web of debts and credits, of gifts and services which bonds every Ashaninka adult male in a tense relationship of reciprocal complementarity with numerous and distant members of his people. In a manner similar to the nineteenth century Sundance ceremony of the Plain Indians (Albers and Kay 1987), the Ashaninka used this opportunity to re-negotiate their collective identity, re-configure spatial and social boundaries, establish alliances, reclaim new and old debts and assert the validity of this social arrangement while assuring, expanding and developing diversity.<sup>3</sup> I use this ethnographic case as an example, among possibly hundreds of others, to highlight the permanence and continuity of the principles that I characterize as constitutive of the indigenous people of the Americas. More than forty years ago, Eric Wolf argued that in Meso-America there was a further correspondence between biocultural diversity and multilingualism. He pointed out that the presence of many areas of development, maintenance and coexistence of different languages in regions, communities, villages and families was an indication of the ability of indigenous cultural formations to deal with diversity also on a conceptual and ideological level (Wolf 1959). I have argued the same for the case of the pre-Andean Amazon region (Varese 1983b).

### Spatial Jurisdiction

Indigenous communities, throughout the Americas, are an essential component of civil society. In fact indigenous citizens/communities are one of the most critical elements of civil society since they are the permanent testimony of the strength and endurance of alternative and diverse cultures and civilizational projects. They are evidence that even the most oppressed and exploited sector of civil society can enrich the political counter-culture and the popular counter-hegemonic social project. The political society, on the other hand, has been a banned territory for indigenous people in colonial and neo-colonial situations. In this political territory is where the rules of the game are established, where rewards and punishments are determined, where the hegemonic societal vision is generated and imposed as the exclusive social truth. It is within this polar and dialectical context that the issue of indigenous sovereignty and the prerogative of exercising territo-

rial jurisdiction must be analyzed, especially in relation to the protection mechanisms that must be in place to safeguard the powerless from the powerful.

It is obvious that the fundamental conditions for the full exercise of indigenous sovereignty lay, in the first instance, in the **collective ownership of the land/territory** and jurisdictional control over that territory/land.

Only the full exercise of territorial jurisdiction can guarantee the remaining elements of indigenous peoples' independence such as:

**Political self-determination:** the determination by the indigenous people of a particular territorial unit to have their own political status;

**Social autonomy:** the right of the indigenous people to self-government-;

**Economic independence:** the right of the indigenous people not to be subject to economic control and exploitation by others; and

**Indigenous sovereignty:** the recognition that there is no external supreme and absolute power over the indigenous community but that it is in the community, in the collective body, in the body politic that sovereignty resides. These are all conditions that cannot even be addressed unless indigenous territorial possession and full jurisdiction are in place.

**Jurisdiction:** the right and authority of the indigenous community to interpret and apply its own law within the limits of its own controlled territory.

As far as I know there is, in Latin America, only one clear-cut case of state legislation that recognizes indigenous territorial jurisdiction: it is the *Law on the Rights of the Indigenous People and Communities of the State of Oaxaca, Mexico* (enacted by the State Congress in June 1998). This law resulted from the struggle of indigenous organizations and the Oaxaca State government's preoccupation after the Maya Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas (1994). The Organization of American States (OAS), during its 95th Regular Session of February 1997, proposed the *American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* in which the rights to self-government and the application of indigenous legal systems within their territories is recognized and recommended to nation-states. The OAS *Draft Declaration* cannot be enforced, nor can International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 169, even though ratified by various governments of Latin America. It is only under specific national legislation (or state legislation in case of countries with federal governments like Mexico) that indigenous communal territorial titles can be given with the clause that the title includes community jurisdiction.

A major question remains: what political institution (national, international, global) is accountable for safeguarding indigenous peoples' rights to sovereignty? The neo-/post-colonial nation-states in Latin America were built on the ethnic-assimilationist assumption and the explicit goal of homogenizing all the citizens included within their boundaries into one national culture, one national language. Two hundred years of failed attempts have modified some of the tenets of the Latin American nation-state. Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador and Bolivia are beginning to re-think their constitutions, opening some space for a new more

inclusive and pluralistic definition of the nation-state that allows for the expression of ethnic diversity within the nation and its institutions. The challenge to the implementation by the nation-state of policies of multiethnicity is coming now from the increasing trend towards globalization and its manifestation at the national level: the dismantling of the welfare state, the growing political intrusion of transnational corporate interests and the diminished accountability of national and local government vis-à-vis its multiethnic communities. As the nation-state is reconfiguring itself to finally accept the multicultural composition of the various **peoples** that form the nation, the same state is being transformed and minimized in its protective role to serve the interests of a neo-liberal global project which requires uncontrolled, de-regulated, subservient national administrations with no power to protect and safeguard the diverse communities and citizens of the country. I want to make it clear that the dismantling of the protective state does not mean the reduction of its repressive apparatus, in fact this may even increase, sometimes through the privatization of the police force.

At this point on the journey, it seems that the defense of indigenous peoples' rights is being left to them and to broad-based pan-indigenous alliances with the national and "global" civil society. The "globalization from below" (mentioned by Richard Falk) that is emerging with increasing force in grassroots movements and organizations in the northern hemisphere but also, once more, with revolutionary strength in what used to be the periphery or the Third World, is probably the new scenario of indigenous organized resistance. The nation-states - and their international political organizations such as the UN or financial institutions such as the WB, the IMF, the WTO, etc.- have systematically failed to respond to indigenous peoples' historical claims to territorial recognition and their demands for stricter enforcement of human, political and cultural rights. After many years of debate at the UN, within the Sub-commission for the Prevention of Discrimination and the Protection of Minorities, on October 28, 1994 the indigenous peoples presented Resolution 1994/45 *Draft United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. In yet another demonstration of their unwillingness to recognize any specific cultural rights or degree of autonomy for the indigenous peoples, the draft has been rejected by the nation-state governments' delegates. The time seems to be appropriate, and some of the signs are visible, for the indigenous peoples of the Americas and the world (all stateless peoples) to begin to organize into a global united indigenous peoples' organization that can counter-balance the authoritarian international political society with a democratic and multiethnic civil society that represents, defends and secures indigenous sovereignty.

## Notes

- 1 Native scholars Jack Forbes, Inés Hernández-Avila, Víctor Montejo and myself from the Department of Native American Studies (NAS) have been actively developing a hemispheric approach

to the study of Native Americans and supporting this analytical approach with institutional building such as the establishment of a Graduate Program in NAS, the formation of the Indigenous Research Center of the Americas, and the establishment of a hemispheric fellowship program for indigenous intellectuals and activists. In collaboration with anthropologists Carol Smith (UC Davis), Charlie Hale (UT Austin) and Guillermo Delgado (UC Santa Cruz), these ideas came to fruition in the anthropological area in the early 1990s with the establishment of the Hemispheric Initiative of the Americas (HIA) based at UC Davis. Since 1999, the Initiative has received the support of the administration and HIA now stands for: Hemispheric Institute of the Americas at UC Davis. I regret to admit that in the heavily bureaucratic process of institutionalizing these ideas, indigenous peoples' issues and the NAS Department's central role in generating these perspectives have been marginalized by more mainstream departments and scholars. In this predictable process of expropriation of indigenous discourses and projects, however, I see some progress: historians, anthropologists, sociologists, economists and even political scientists can no longer afford to arrogantly ignore Native American issues.

- 2 This is the line of thought established by Adam Smith's *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776) and followed by Karl Marx's *Capital* (1867-94).
- 3 See *La sal de los cerros* (Varese 1973b). More than thirty years ago, when I was doing my research among the Ashaninka, I did not pay much attention to the stories I heard about the *parawa* ceremony. In my juvenile ignorance I relegated them to a field note booklet filled with what I considered, at that time, exotic but useless information. Today as I review my old field notes for an updated English translation of the book (Varese 2002a), I discover with dismay my arrogance and missed opportunities.

## INDIGENOUS EPISTEMOLOGIES (2002)

### abstract

The aim of this essay\* is to summarise the main points of the debate taking place between indigenous academics, indigenous and non-indigenous activists and intellectuals in the United States, Canada and Latin America in relation to defining and positioning Native American Studies and Indigenous Studies within the more general framework of the humanities and social sciences. When epistemology is approached from outside the dominant Euro-American paradigm, not only the "mode of knowledge" must be explained but also what could be called the "ecology of knowledge", in other words, the interrelationship between the agent and its nature, culturally defined. This requires a diachronic and synchronic approach, along with the elaboration of a social and political context. The politics of space is of fundamental importance to indigenous peoples, their cultures and knowledge systems. By identifying a set of premises we are able to understand the relationships between modernity, Western European/American colonialism, capitalism, contemporary science and knowledge, and show how eurocentrism became established as the hegemonic mode of thought and action among elites the world over. The "ecology of knowledge" approach explains the fundamental importance of territory in indigenous life and places the epistemological discussion in the context of the struggles the indigenous peoples have fought to defend it. This central relationship with territory arises in cases of migrations, deportations and transnational diasporas, in which globalisation has not managed to destroy the peoples' roots in their territory and create a labor market of dispossessed indigenous. Quite the opposite, these processes have created greater bonds between the indigenous and their land and territory, increasing the number and intensity of communal rituals of local identity and belonging. An approach is necessary that contrasts local epistemologies with the Western theory of knowledge. This latter is *deterritorialized*, with neither space nor community and thus with an anonymous moral and social responsibility. It claims to be universal and is focused on exchange value. In contrast, indigenous knowledge systems are deeply rooted in the territory, the community and in concrete cultural and socially constructed spaces. There is a need to define a new generation of indigenous human rights that guarantee, both in the biosphere and in society as a whole, the existence, protection and development of autonomous indigenous territories, cultural diversity and linguistic and epistemological specificity, along with the right of indigenous peoples to dream of their future in their own civilizational terms.

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### Positioning

In this essay, I will attempt to summarize the main points of a debate that is taking place among indigenous scholars/intellectuals/activists and non-indigenous intellectuals/scholars/activists of the U.S., Canada and Latin America in relation to the definition and disciplinary position of Native American /Indigenous Studies within the larger framework of the humanities and social science. It should be noted that while Native American studies have gained a certain level of academic legitimacy in the US and Canada, at least since the 1970s "ethnic studies reform", in Latin America "*los estudios indigenas*" practically do not exist. In this text I do not pretend, however, to describe the vast and profound series of topics that concern Native American /Indigenous Studies. Instead I will focus my analysis on those themes that in Euro-American academic terms can be typified as epistemological. Epistemological inquiry, when exercised out of the dominant Euro-American cultural paradigm, must be concerned not only with the "mode of knowledge" but also with what could be called the "ecology of knowledge": the interrelationship between agency and his/her culturally defined nature. Mode and ecology of knowledge require diachronic and synchronic approaches, therefore a historical-cultural as well as a socio-political contextualization.

I should add that I accept the challenge implicitly in convoking this theme of discussion not so much as a demand for defining the multi/inter/cross or neo-disciplinary attributes of Native American/Indigenous Studies (an issue certainly of great academic importance and concern), but rather as an opportunity for re-asserting the epistemological and ethical uniqueness of the study (and praxis) of the indigenous people of the Americas. This claim of uniqueness and divergence from other humanities and social science fields is based not on scholarly arguments but on the long-standing trajectory and praxis of indigenous intelligentsia as critics and censors of the lies of colonial and imperial academia who, since the sixteenth century, have constructed a distorted self-serving version of history, morality and justice.<sup>1</sup> Native American /Indigenous Studies, however, are more than revisionist history, subaltern studies, or a combination of ethnic, cultural studies and post-colonial anthropology, they are rather the systematic attempts by millions of indigenous of the hemisphere to reconfigure their nationhood, their sovereignty, their intellectual independence, their ethnic, cultural, social and political project.<sup>2</sup> Theory and practice, history and culture as they intersect daily in the thousands of indigenous rural and urban communities, become the nucleus of this enterprise which, in the U.S. and Canada, is called Native American Studies-NAS and in Latin America is still condemned to alienation at the margins of anthropology. If the nuclei of indigenous studies are the issues of nationhood, sovereignty, independence, autonomy and a contested, however larger and more inclusive, definition of citizenship, then two areas of discussion

must be re-introduced vis-à-vis the current struggle of indigenous people of Latin America:

- 1 The issue of cultural and intellectual sovereignty of indigenous peoples and thus the related issue of their epistemological autonomy as peoples with their own grounded and spatial(ized) history;
- 2 The related question of territoriality, land, resources and their rights to exercise political and cultural jurisdiction over them. Space, place and memory are intertwined in indigenous societies that have not been totally uprooted by colonialism. They constitute what can be termed "the inhabited culture" which is asserted always with the "language of space", even when the specific locality has been lost.

### Prologue and Premise

This paper is based on the following eight principles:

- 1 Modernity is equivalent to, and an integral part of, Western Euro-American colonialism;
- 2 Modernity and colonialism are ontologically constituted by, and express themselves through, capitalism;
- 3 Contemporary science and knowledge (thus theory of knowledge and epistemology) are an integral part of the socio-ideological complex of modernity-colonialism-capitalism;
- 4 Ergo modernity, colonialism, capitalism and science express and practice themselves in Euro-American cultural and linguistic values (Indo-European) which are fundamentally Eurocentric;
- 5 Euro-American scientific and epistemological values are incapable (structurally disabled) of approaching, dealing, understanding, being sensitive to non-Western cosmologies ("weltanschauung"), cultures, languages and epistemic structures;
- 6 Commoditization of nature, territory, land, and all the components of the world, has been the permanent strategic threat to indigenous people. The socially constructed indigenous spaces have been under the threat of commoditization since the early 16th century.
- 7 Commoditization, and the logic of exchange value, have pervaded every domain of social life, including tangible and intangible cultural configurations, knowledge and science;
- 8 Internal opposition from Marxism, post-structuralism, colonial critique, subaltern studies and post-modernist critiques in general are offshoot of

Euro-American scientific methods which have abdicated, since their foundation, from engaging themselves with the "others," in this case, the indigenous peoples. Once established, such a dialogic engagement would induce the development of autonomous analytical tools, that is, decentered, non-Eurocentric epistemologies generated by indigenous organic intellectuals in dialogue with dissident Euro-American intellectuals.

### First Vignette

J. S. Spotkin, who died in 1958, was an anthropologist who conducted his research among the Menominee indigenous of Wisconsin. He was also a Peyotist, a member and officer of the Native American Church, the chief congregation of Peyotists. In his article "The Peyote Way", he tells the following story:

*... During the (Peyote) rite each male participant in succession sings solo four songs at the time. Recently a Winnebago sitting next to me sang a song with what I heard as a Fox text (Fox is an Algonquian language closely related to Menominee, the language I use in the rite) sung so clearly and distinctly I understood every word.*

*When he was through, I leaned over and asked, 'How come you sang that song in Fox rather than Winnebago (a Siouan language unintelligible to me)?'*

*'I did sing it in Winnebago,' he replied. The afternoon following the rite he sat down next to me and asked me to listen while he repeated the song; this time it was completely unintelligible to me because the effects of Peyote had worn off. (Tedlock and Tedlock 1975: 101-102)*

### Second Vignette

Marcos Sandoval is a Trique indigenous from San Andrés Chicahuaxtla, Oaxaca, Mexico. He was selected to give the welcome speech to Spain's royal family when they recently visited Oaxaca.

*We have been studied with the Western perception, in its different forms, but we have not been understood; it is still imposed on us with the Western form of development, its civilization, its way of seeing the world and relating to nature, thus denying all the knowledge generated by our different peoples. We have domesticated the corn, that sacred plant that gave us existence and we continue to improve it. But even so, whenever an agronomist come to our towns, he tells us that the corn numbered and produced in his research center is better; if we build a house with our knowledge and materials, an architect comes to tell us that a dignified house can only be built with industrial products; if we invoke our old gods, someone comes to tell us that our faith is superstitious. (Esteva and Prakash 1998: 57)*

### Third Vignette

For millennia, the Wintu occupied most of the valley of the Sacramento River in California. Today only a handful of Wintu people has survived the massacres and cultural genocide of the last one hundred years. Between the 1920s and the 1940s, philosopher and anthropologist Dorothy Lee, who studied their language, cosmology and knowledge system visited them. Here are some of Dorothy Lee's observations regarding the Wintu language and consequently their epistemology.

*A basic tenet of the Wintu language, expressed both in nominal and verbal categories, is that reality – ultimate truth – exists irrespective of man. Man's experience actualized this reality, but does not otherwise affect its being. Outside man's experience, this reality is unbounded, undifferentiated, timeless ... To the Wintu, the given is not a series of particulars, to be classed into universals. The given is unpartitioned mass; a part of this the Wintu delimits into particular individual. The particular then exists, not in nature, but in the consciousness of the speaker. What to us is a class, a plurality of particulars, is to him a mass or a quality or an attribute ... For the Wintu, then, the essence or quality is generic and found in nature; it is permanent and remains unaffected by man. Form is imposed by man, through act of will. But the impress man makes is temporary. The deer stands out as an individual only at the moment of man's speech; as soon as he ceases speaking, the deer merges into deerness ... Recurring through all this – asserts Dorothy Lee – is the attitude of humility and respect toward reality, toward nature and society. I cannot find an adequate English term to apply to a habit of thought which is so alien to our culture. We are aggressive toward reality ... Our attitude toward nature is colored by a desire to control and exploit. The Wintu relationship with nature is one of intimacy and mutual courtesy. (Lee [1959] in Tedlock and Tedlock 1975: 130-140)*

### A Short History

By the end of World War II, modernity and its travelling companion colonialism, had finally achieved the establishment of Eurocentrism as the hegemonic mode of thought and practice among the world's social minority, the elites of every single country of the globe. Neither Marxist socialist tradition nor the Third World nationalist movements were exempt from Eurocentric views, analyses, discourses and praxis (Prakash 1994: 1475). By the mid-1960s, George Gurvitch (1971) could write with total impunity his taxonomy of the sociology of knowledge in which, by using a social evolutionary scheme, he disqualified forms of knowledge linked to and based on the immediate apprehension, understanding and organization of the locale, the concrete locus of cultural experience and re-

production. By then L. Lévy-Bruhl had produced *The Primitive Mentality* (1923) in which he proposed, and imposed on non-Westerners, pre-logical forms of primitive mentality associated with corresponding rudimentary levels of technological and social organization.

E. Durkheim and M. Mauss had formulated in 1903 their famous proposition that "the classification of things reproduces the classification of men" (Bloor 1984: 51) based on a Zuni indigenous classificatory system, but their hypothesis was immediately challenged on the basis of their ethnographic value. What in fact was being challenged by Western science was the validity of so called "primitive societies" materials as empirical samples of human rationality. Nor was the herodox position expressed by ethnographers like Maurice Leenhardt (1937) sufficient, who highlighted some of the most complex and sensitive traits of non-Western indigenous thought, or the ensuing revolution of C. Lévi-Strauss (1963, 1966) whose comparative and contrastive method of analysis of indigenous myths, rituals, kinship systems and social practice allowed for a structural inquiry of non-Western worldviews and knowledge as highly complex and organized systems of meaning. Lévi-Strauss, in fact, may have followed the methodological road indicated by German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1966, cited in Tedlock & Tedlock 1975: XV-XVI) who proposed the existence of *contemplative* thought, common among indigenous societies, as opposed to *calculative* thought, the dominant form in capitalist and late capitalist societies. The first oriented toward meaning, the latter toward results.

As the sociology of knowledge was approaching philosophy and this, as epistemology, was increasingly becoming more sociological, it was clear that both disciplines were distancing themselves from the rich comparative materials gathered by ethnographers in indigenous regions and were especially incapable of accepting that there were other systems of knowledge, other epistemologies and innumerable clandestine histories of non-Western, indigenous intellectuality (Bloor 1984; Luhmann 1984).

By the time ethnoscientists had re-visited, in the 1960s, the issue of indigenous knowledge systems "discovering" the extreme rationality, analytical depth and practicality of indigenous classificatory systems, it was too late. The hegemony of a superior Euro-American thought, "logos" and "scientific" system was well established and rooted in the minds and institutions of First as well Third World hegemonic classes. Modernization theories, proposed by analysts and policy makers of the empire such as T. Parsons (1951) and W. Rostow (1960) and US functionalist sociologists, were devastating any possibility of self-determination and intellectual sovereignty of the indigenous people and the peasants of the world. Nothing of what the indigenous local people knew had any value. Indigenous cultures, peripheral and marginalized, were considered to be empty vessels, or rather obsolete urns of dead and heavy heritage that had to be substituted by Euro-American education, technology, forms of governance and economic or-

ganization. The latter being obviously the most important point, since Eurocentrism has placed the economy at the center of every social existence and Euro-American historicism has projected the West as History (Prakash 1994: 1475), moreover as Universal History. The main tenets of structural-functionalist modernization theory, particularly as referring to indigenous people, were that "traditional society" is hindering economic development, that Third World countries need agents to help them to break out of the jail of tradition, that such agents may be either recruited from within the society (modernizing elites, co-opted leadership) or may be imported from outside via educational models and capital injection, that dual economies may co-exist in Third World countries, and finally that the desired outcome of modernization politics are societies similar to those in Western Europe and the United States.

It is well known that the criticism of modernization theory came principally from within the dominant Western sociological and economic theoretical models, albeit from its radical dissenting Marxist version (Frank 1967, 1969; Cardoso and Faletto 1979). During the 1960s and 1970s, dependency and underdevelopment theorists argued that modernization analysts had ignored the effects of colonialism and neocolonialism on the structure of Third World societies, that traditionalism itself had been a colonial creation resulting from centuries of subordination to the colonial metropolis, that dualism was a misrepresentation of Third World countries because the so called traditional sector had been part of the national (and sometimes international) economy for centuries and, finally, that the evolutionary model of development (or rather the social neo-Darwinism) imposed upon every single society of the world was impeding and denying the possibility of novel forms of society emerging from post-colonial reconstruction. The political context of this criticism was obviously the demobilizing and counter-revolutionary objectives of US ideological theorists and governmental advisors explicitly committed to curtailing the impact of the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and the spread of socialist ideals in Latin America.

Significantly, the majority of US and Latin American anthropologists stayed out of this polemic either for political reasons (most of their professional training was realized within the structural-functionalist sociology and neo-classical economics) and/or because even with Marxist analytical tools they were methodologically unprepared to represent claims of legitimate "scientific" knowledge and rationality on behalf of indigenous people and peasants. The drama of two generations of anthropologists who came to intellectual maturity in the 1960s and 1980s was that the hegemony of scientific Eurocentrism had nullified their capacity to apply the new hermeneutics suggested by Thomas Kuhn in his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) to non-Western indigenous cultures and knowledge systems. They, as well as the indigenous people for whom or with whom they were supposed to be speaking, had been silenced on the central issue of the local, communal, ethnic indigenous intellectual sovereignty. That is to say, the

intellectual and political task of identifying and establishing the enormous epistemological significance of alternative, non-Euro-American systems of knowledge of the indigenous people for their own collective survival and future development and for the amendment of Western science was simply abdicated from by one of the main disciplines of colonialism and post-colonialism.<sup>3</sup>

It is true, however, that a handful of Latin American anthropologists and indigenous intellectuals were establishing fragile alliances and retrieving the autonomy of the indigenous people as historical subjects and their cultural and political sovereignty. In 1971, during the tenuous socialist experiments of Chile with Salvador Allende and the progressive nationalist government of Juan Velasco in Peru, a group of Latin American social scientists challenged conventional anthropology by asserting the fundamental rights of the indigenous people to struggle for their self-determination and liberation in their own autonomous terms, using their own intellectual sovereignty freed of hegemonic compulsion from without and from the theoretical supremacy of Western academia (Barbados I 1971). Again in 1979 and 1993, the Group of Barbados (Grupo de Barbados 1979; Grünberg 1995), now enlarged to include indigenous intellectuals, activists and militants, insisted on voicing the epistemological rights of the indigenous people to organize their liberation movements and their ethnic and social projects independent of both Euro-American liberal and socialist models.

### Indigenous Peoples Take the Initiative

What had been happening in Latin America, at least since the 1960s, was the emergence from clandestinity of a strong ethno-political indigenous movement that was claiming self-determination and cultural sovereignty predicated on the long historical intellectual autonomy of each indigenous society. Although the indigenous people of the Americas had been struggling against colonial powers for five hundred years, it was mainly after World War II that they initiated political mobilization on a national and international scale in order to resist oppression and land expropriation. There were obviously hundreds of indigenous insurrections, messianic movements and ethno-nationalist independence rebellions that took place during the Iberian colonial administration and the following Republican period, as well as many other examples of early indigenous political activism expressed in "modern" terms in the various national territories of Latin America. However, it has only been over the last five decades that evidence of a substantial national and international indigenous movement can be seen in the massive proliferation of native organizations and supporting of civil society institutions (NGOs).

The structural reasons for the rise of an international indigenous movement can be traced back to what has been called post-World War II Pax Americana,

characterized by the massive expansion of the industrial base in the "core" countries, the dependent development efforts in Latin America with the connected expansion of the internal national frontier in search of energy resources, and the readjustment of the nation-states' structures in order to facilitate national integration and ethnic assimilation. Explorations and resource exploitation of peripheral regions by multinational corporations and their local national representatives suddenly became the single most threatening event for indigenous people and territories that had enjoyed relative isolation and autonomy. In the course of a few decades, indigenous people of the relatively marginal areas of the lowlands of Central and South America became "internal refugees of underdevelopment". The traditional strategy of retreating to isolated areas, "zones of refuge", became less and less viable, forcing the indigenous to go on the offensive while recognizing the changing characteristics of the antagonistic forces now increasingly transnational and relatively out of the control of the regional elite.

### State Nationalism and Transnationalization

A basic paradox appears in this process of transnationalization of the political economy of Latin American nation-states. On one hand, the programs operated by transnational corporations in Latin America relieve Latin American states from the burden of having to play the entrepreneurial role by substituting the national oligarchies and bourgeoisie, which have been traditionally passive. On the other hand, the multinational corporate project creates a problem of national security for the state by precisely challenging a weakly integrated and vulnerable national entity. Two antagonistic forces thus came into play in the Latin American scenario over the last few decades:

- 1 A strong trend toward national consolidation in which the state continues to act as the founding and generating principle of the nation, reshaping and attempting to give a sense of unity to heterogeneous territorial and ethnic spaces for the benefit of the ruling class; and
- 2 The need of the same state, under pressure from the transnationalization of the political economy, to transform itself ideologically and objectively from a liberal 19th century institution (centralized, authoritarian, homogenous) into a more permeable, flexible, less "nationalistic" entity, open to corporate penetration and transnational forces.

The expected result of this contradictory trend has increasingly been the movement of transnational capital to less controlled areas, to open regions: indigenous territories, not yet totally exploited, where environmental regulations, labor un-

ions and political organizations do not exist or are weak and controllable. Concurrent to this process of internationalization of capital, labor and the environment, the privatization of the state becomes a key requirement. Even basic state functions such as police control are increasingly posited in private terms resulting, during the 1980s, in a proliferation of "privatized police" and paramilitary forces in charge of repression and control. The ideology and actual process of national integration and ethnic assimilation of the indigenous people therefore comes under the ambiguous jurisdictions of a neo-dependent state formally in charge of defining the terms of citizenship for each member of the national community, and the informal, hidden and powerful authority of transnational capital.

### Indigenous Sovereignty, Territories and Globalization

In this new globalized and complex political environment, however, the central struggle of the indigenous people is still the old one: *the defense of their lands and territories*. The renewed massive circular migration of indigenous people to *fin-cas/haciendas* /plantations, to industrial regions, to urban centers and to transnational labor markets has not alleviated their objective need for land nor their political demands for territorial consolidation. It could be argued, in fact, that indigenous migration/deportation, even when practiced for many years, does not necessarily result in permanent immigration to the host region/city/country but rather in renovated efforts of the indigenous migrant to consolidate his/her communal citizenship by complying with ceremonial and civic demands and by expanding his/her access to communal lands and resources (see Stephen 1991). Circular migration, especially the transnational one with its relative higher level of earnings, produces extra demands over the limited territorial and land resources of the community. It is interesting to note that six years after the enactment of the infamous modification of Art. 27 of the Mexican Constitution, which allows *ejidos* and communities to rent or sell their lands, practically no transaction has taken place: peasants and indigenous people are tenaciously holding on to their lands.<sup>4</sup>

Economic deportation, migration, transnational diasporas and the effects of globalization have not brought to an end the process of uprootedness, deterritorialization and creation of a labor market of dispossessed indigenous that was expected by the elites. The processes have rather linked and secured the indigenous people to their land and territory even more, producing an increase in number and growth in intensity of communal rites of local identity and belonging (Stephen, 1991).

Even a superficial look at the numerous indigenous organizations and movements that have emerged since the 1960s in Latin America shows that while the demographics of temporal territorial displacement are increasing, the politics of ethnicity and class are expressed in local and grounded terms, in the language of place, the

language of spatially rooted time: a socially shared experience where people's history can be read in the signs of land and space. The language of place, which is always ethnic, linked to concrete cultural and linguistic symbols of space and time, permeates the political discourse, platform, agenda and strategy of most of the indigenous organizations. Even organizations like FIOB (the Indigenous Bi-national Oaxacan Front), which arose out of Mixtec, Zapotec, Chinantec and Trique indigenous migrants to the U.S. and their experience of deterritorialization, diaspora and the alleged hybridization process that would accompany these phenomena, are not producing political organizations and activism that are de-linked from the issue of homeland. Preoccupations of land/territoriality and the autonomy of local government and management of the land and resources are still at the center of these transnational organizations. Oaxacan indigenous migrants to California are strong economic and political supporters of indigenous candidates at local municipal elections in their regions of origin, and similar commitment has been expressed for the Zapatista Mayan insurgents of Chiapas.

Until the Mayan rebellion of Chiapas in 1994, the issue of indigenous people's sovereignty was unspeakable in Latin America. The terms sovereignty, territorial autonomy, self-determination in reference to indigenous people could be barely whispered by anthropologists and indigenous intellectuals and could easily carry the accusation of subversive proclamations. Following a strict Napoleonic tradition, in Latin America the notion of sovereignty is applied exclusively to the nation-state. After almost a decade of public debate in Mexico and throughout the world via the Internet, the concepts and possibilities of indigenous people's sovereignty and ethnic rights to self-determination and territorial autonomy have become part of the reluctantly accepted general political discourse. The specifics of what may constitute ethno-sovereignty rights are still in the making and need to be addressed in each specific regional and national case. First there is the important question of the social and spatial definition of indigenous people and groups.

### **A Return to Local Epistemology**

The socio-ideological complex of modernity-colonialism-capitalism has established the hegemony of a theory of knowledge which is de-territorialized, spaceless, without community, and thus with a limited, anonymous moral and social responsibility. In its pretension to be "universal", Western theory of knowledge claims one single epistemology which is centered on the exchange value, and thus is "econocentric", monetized and commoditized. It is an epistemology whose main accountability lays finally in the market place. On the contrary, at the periphery, at the margins of the modernity complex, in what is at the same time anti-modern and post-modern, the indigenous systems of knowledge are deeply rooted in the land, in the community, in the culturally concrete and socially con-

structed places. Places with ancient names and histories, landscapes of millenary dialogues between humans, animals, plants, soils, water, rocks, winds and stars.

There was a purpose in my roundabout journey of the Latin American indigenous ethno-political movements: my intention was to show the fundamental importance of the politics of space for indigenous people, cultures and knowledge systems. No other individual or collective relationship has historically played, and still plays today, a more important role in indigenous life than the one they have, or they long to re-establish, with their space, their community, their land, their territory, their homeland. To be rooted to the land, even when exile is the temporary condition, means to be organically linked to the matrix of reference, the cultural (and linguistic) framework which sustains the whole interpretative system of life. Land means production, consumption, sacred celebration, mirror of divine creation, and what allows for the human creation of the mirror too. To maintain social and cultural dominion over the territory means to exercise jurisdiction over the concrete, historical manifestation of one's own place of culture, one's own system of knowledge, one's own epistemic structure and the mode of praxis that is linked to such belonging. To be linked epistemologically to the locale and to exercise its praxis does not mean to abdicate from the cosmopolitan and ecumenical worldview; it means to recognize that one's own universe is just a fragment of a "pluriverse" (not only a universe) with which each society and individual must learn to live. Communication between the diversity of systems is not only possible, it is a must. However, it requires mutuality and equity, a moral world system based on principles of symmetrical reciprocity, at least at the level of intellectual and spiritual coexistence if not in the economic and political domain.

A final thought. I am personally a strong advocate of the politicization (or ethno-politicization) of indigenous people as the primary and fundamental tool for their liberation and autonomous development. I see this process of politicization (through local, regional, national and transnational organizations) as the opportunity for indigenous people to make individual and collective choices and decisions that are based on a critical knowledge of their own culture/politics and the culture/politics of the dominant national/global society. The critical (and comparative) recognition-consciousness of one's ethnic identity presupposes the use of one's culture as a dynamic repository of resources that can be mobilized for the achievement of a collectively defined covenant. It is in this sense that we should, as members of the global civil society, make a call for the definition of a "New Generation of Indigenous Human Rights" that would guarantee, in both the global biosphere and the global society, the existence, protection and development of indigenous autonomous territories, cultural diversity, linguistic and epistemological specificity as well as the indigenous people's demand to dream their future in their own civilizational terms.

## Notes

- 1 See Elisabeth Cook-Lynn (1999), and Inés Hernández-Ávila and Stefano Varese (1999).
- 2 There are in Latin America an estimated 40 million indigenous peoples subdivided into 400 major ethnolinguistic groups with possibly more than a thousand languages and dialect variations. When we say Latin America we expand this area-notion to a hemispheric, trans-border, nationally untied conception and practice of occupation of the continent by peoples who come from the conventional delimitation of Latin America. Hence, the few hundred thousand indigenous peoples from Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, the rest of Central America and most of the Andean countries of South America who, together with millions of "mestizo" and "criollo" people from countries south of the border, are currently living in the U.S. and Canada (with documents or without them) constitute the "Latin America within", which is radically transforming both the Anglo America as well as the Latino America.
- 3 In 1995, Swiss-Canadian anthropologist Jeremy Narby published a revolutionary study on the Peruvian Amazon Ashaninka shamanistic knowledge which challenges conventional Western notions of science, theory of knowledge, nature and especially biophysics and molecular biology (Narby 1995; Dubochet, Narby and Kiefer 1997). Narby's study may be considered the first serious attempt by contemporary anthropology to analyze and validate alternative and radically different indigenous forms of knowledge. His study qualifies for what T. Kuhn called a revolutionary "paradigm shift". In a public debate with microbiologist Jacques Dubochet held in Geneva in June 1997, Narby summarized his study: "At the beginning of my research I studied the botanical knowledge of these peoples (the Ashaninka). It is an astounding knowledge, because the Amazon rainforest contains half of the plants of the world, and the indigenous have an almost encyclopedic knowledge of them. I asked my consultants how they acquired their knowledge about the plants. They answered that nature has intelligence, that she is animated by identical essences in all forms of life, and that these essences are the origin of their knowledge. They told me that to communicate with nature the shamans drank a mixture of hallucinogens and spoke, in their visions, with the essences of life... After years of reflection I noticed that there were astonishing similarities between these essences and DNA. To begin with, the molecule of genetic information is found in each cell of every living entity. And shamans associate the animated essences with the form of the double helix, which is found in fact in the design of their visions. Now, DNA has exactly this form, which is fundamental for its functioning... Obviously the Amazon Indigenous do not speak of DNA, but I propose the hypothesis that there is a correspondence at various levels between the animated essences that the shamans perceive, and what we call DNA" (Dubochet, Narby and Kiefer 1997: 13-14).
- 4 Personal communication on July 2002 by anthropologist Carlos Moreno, Director of the *Procuraduría Agraria* of the State of Oaxaca.

Photo: WYCA archive



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