

The Territorial Roots of Latin American Indigenous Peoples' Movement for Sovereignty

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ABSTRACT: In spite of the increasing phenomena of indigenous peoples' transnational migration, de-territorialization, and the concomitant emergence of Latin American Indian diaspora, the notion and practice of community and the politics of identity are for the indigenous peoples' of Latin America fundamentally linked to the possession of "ancestral" territories. Consequently, Indian struggles for self-determination, autonomy and sovereignty are still centered around century-old political strategies of counteracting colonial intrusion and oppression. The new ethno-political Indian movement is responding to neo-liberal globalization with adapted environmental and territorial strategies.

Introduction

During more than five centuries, millions of indigenous people of 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 clandestineness 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 be always accomplished. While imperial and colonial intentions were aiming 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 knowledge and technologies. 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 the European people.

The issues I would like to address at this opportunity are the following:

- a) Land and territory as the axial theme of indigenous ethnopolitical sovereignty;
- b) The unique, non-commoditized relation 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 the 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 on 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 as "Hemispheric Latin America", a broader historical-cultural definition that extends Latin America – and the presence of Latin American communities - beyond the national frontiers into the United States 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 the University of California, Davis, with substantial collaboration of anthropologists from the University of California, Davis and the University of California, Santa Cruz.¹

¹ Native scholars Jack Forbes, Inés Hernández-Avila, Victor Montejo and myself from the Department of Native American Studies, 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:

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/placement in the social construction of ethnic identity. The classic sociological distinction put forward by F. 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 (1987) who has emphasized locality (geographical expression) as a constitutive condition of any undertaking to characterize the community. The question of locality and spatial location of “community members” may rise time and again as an organizational and political challenge even for those contemporary communities whose members are scattered around the world and have historically defined themselves through *a sense of shared identity* rather than a geographically localized social system (Worsley, 1987: 238-245). The preeminent role of space in the definition of community is particularly true in the case the indigenous people of Latin America. For the forty or so million indigenous people (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 1994; Varese, 1991), 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 the 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 identities are constructed in a tight web of meanings expressed in a specific ethnic language or in a local dialect of the national language. It is essential to recognize that for indigenous people, the territorial, spatial, locational and land issues remain at the core of any discussion about meanings of community, ethnicity and politics

Hemispheric Institute of the Americas at UC Davis. I regret to admit that in the heavily bureaucratic process of institutionalizing these ideas, the indigenous people 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 cannot afford to arrogantly ignore Native American issues.

of cultural identity, cultural reproduction and autonomy. Consequently, I am addressing my commentaries to the centrality of the notions and practices of space jurisdiction and cultural jurisdiction in indigenous communities, as well as the related issues of intellectual sovereignty and epistemological autonomy which, I intend 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, 1994a; Hale 1995), and (Kearney, 1991; Kearney, 1996; Kearney and Varese, 1995b) with a broader, more ethnopolitical 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 (Lenin, 1956 (1899)), A.V. Chayanov (Chayanov, 1986), J.C. Mariátegui [Mariátegui, 1971 (1928) #18], T. Shanin (Shanin, 1990) and the analytical school initiated by E. Wolf (Wolf, 1959; Wolf, 1966). During the last eight decades at least, indigenous people of Latin America have been treated by social scientists as peasants, that is to say they have been symbolically placed in the proverbial "sack of potatoes" of K. Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (*op. cit.*) and have thus become the prey of convoluted debates between economic theorists and anthropologists, revolutionaries and developmentalists. Questions about the cultural and economic autonomy of peasantry, the independent nature of peasants' mode of production, their crucial or marginal role in peripheral capitalism and the immanent or transitional character of their historical presence, have obscured other important cultural and political characteristics of indigenous people such as their "long historical duration" (in a Braudelian sense) as "autonomous" ethnic entities which have survived and reproduced themselves during millennia throughout different larger social formations (pre-colonial and colonial states and contemporary republican nation-states of all political coloring).

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 purpose of labor control and ideological and political domination. The process produced ruralization, "campesinización"/peasantization of the Indians, 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 throughout the last five centuries of colonial and neo-colonial occupation (and what could be defined as permanent processes of ethnogenesis) have a series of cultural and social characteristics which goes well beyond limited, if not simplistic, economic

analyses framed in terms of Euroamerican 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; Scott, 1985) and “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 society². The axis around which the whole society rotates is the production of value for exchange. The language of this system is the language of individualism and, increasingly, the language of profit; its *ethos*, or its moral code is, or has been since Max Weber told us in 1905, the spirit of capitalism (Weber, 1976). 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 phrase it (Escobar, 1995). 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 the development of indigenous people.

An indigenous epistemological and axiological approach to the relation between individual and society uses instead, to paraphrase Lakota scholar Elisabeth Cook-Lynn, 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 naming of things, space, objects, plants, animals, living people and the dead, the underworld and the celestial infinity evoke 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 number of principles and a cultural logic or a cultural topology that privileges diversity and heterogeneity over homogeneity, eclecticism over dogma, multiplicity over bipolarity. As I write these lines, I can sense the reaction of the intellectual

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 which is followed by Karl Marx’s *Capital* (1867-94).

audience ready to disqualify these ideas as “romanticism”, “idealization of the 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 allow me to discuss with 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 Euroamerica 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 easily exploitable.

A corollary of this remark is that the analytical frame 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 under Euroamerican expansionism, must be a global and a hemispheric one. The locality (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 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 Euroamerican 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, like 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 ethnohistorical 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 Mesoamerican *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, throughout thousands of miles and 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, chilies, potato, manihot, sweet potato, amaranth, peanuts, 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 equally diverse and multiple uses 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 (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 Euroamerica), but rather diversity itself expressed in the multiplicity of deities with their polymorphic characteristics and at times contradictory functions. The ancient Mesoamerican Quetzalcoatl is serpent, bird and human at the same time. He is a 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 jades and butterflies instead of human offerings. He certainly does not stand at the center of the Mesoamerican 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 Indians of the Southern Mexican state of Veracruz, the tender sprouts of corn and beans 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, at their initial stage of growth, the symbol and image of the archetypal twins sacrificed at the beginning of times 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 Euroamerican worldview which establishes a confrontational relation 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 separated from the rest of nature and struggle to control it. Recently James C. Scott (Scott, 1998) has explored extensively the cultural obsession of homogenization in societies ruled by élite 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 as the Mexica-Tenochtla, the Mixtecs, the Zapotecs, the Maya or the Inca, just to mention the most renowned, do not show any indication of having had an 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 Euroamerican anthropocentrism, for millenia the indigenous people of the Americas seem 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 (goods, 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 (Van Der Leeuw, 1955) many decades ago synthesized splendidly 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. And that these societies have established their ethnic distinctiveness on gathering, hunting and fishing activities, or in more recent colonial and neo-colonial times, in a “mixed” economy that has combined wage labor, petty mercantile activities and sub-subsistence horticulture. At the end of thousands of years of evolvement and their incorporation into social and cultural formations that advance opposite values, the majority of indigenous people of the Americas who 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 the logic of homogenization and individualistic profit, is fraught with tremendous ambiguities and conflicts. This tension between two logics, two sets of principles, which can be summarized as *culture of economy of use* and *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 that are now confronting the Mayan Zapatistas of Chiapas with neo-liberal bureaucrats turned into aspirant bankers, reveals at a magnified scale the degree of penetration of capitalist *weltanschauung* into every interstice of the world’s societies.

Allow me to bring forth an example that is becoming increasingly familiar in vast areas of the United States. There are currently thousands of indigenous migrants from Latin America in the United States and especially from Mexico. For transnational Indian migrants who come from Mexico to the United States, the issue of “communal citizenship” is of vital importance.

Indian migrants can spend many years as farm workers or cooks in California and maintain their social position within their home community in Mexico as long as they contribute annually to the communal well-being by participating in the *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 organization of the community. None of these activities are 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 bearer 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 link that exists between all its members and wants to assure 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 some 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 is 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 capitalist economy and world-view 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 Mesoamerica, Central 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 greatly rely 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 in this typology to disclose the presence in 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 may be found among the Isthmus Zapotecs of Mexico and the Guajiro of Venezuela).

How did the process of transformation of the indigenous people take place during the last few centuries? and how are the transformations produced today by the 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 at this opportunity. I postulate, nevertheless, that a historical analysis within 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 and cultural characteristics that have survived and have adapted to many radical social and economic changes that occurred through millennia of pre-colonial time, centuries of colonialism-imperialism (which produced fragmented mosaics of territorialized "Indian community", the early Indian diasporas and Indian proletariat), more than one century of nationalism (which accentuated the expansion and penetration of capitalist market in 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 is important to emphasize the understanding of a formative period of millennia of pre-Colombian, pre-European, pre-invasion, pre-conquest or "independent indigenous evolvement" as that of the construction of polycentric cosmology as well as polycentric social practice that 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 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 an indigenous people's culture.

As discussed previously, *reciprocity* is the associated and homologous social and cultural principle of biodiversity. It is 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 y guelaguetza*, the Nahuatl *tequistl*, *tequio*, the Quechua *mit'a*, *ayni*, the Ashaninka *ayumparii* are only a few examples of terms that refer to elaborate cultural institutions of diversity and reciprocity. Even in historical societies that were organized hierarchically in social classes like those of Mesoamerica and the Andes, the logic of reciprocity was at the basis of every exchange of goods, services, labor, tributes, gifts. The tributary system was based on the principle of reciprocity, which could be symmetrical, asymmetrical and/or deferred. 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 agroecological system based on the 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 larger numbers of people separated by thousand of miles (Varese, 1983). Mesoamerica expressed the same principles of reciprocity, diversity and complementarity through the "solar market system" which articulates the people of numerous and

diverse villages and regions in periodic encounters for the exchange of goods, ideas, ceremonies and culture (Wolf, 1959).

Until a few decades ago, the Campa-Ashaninka of Peru's upper Amazon, who live in hamlets scattered throughout a vast territory of tropical rain forest, used to achieve and maintain social and cultural cohesion by performing a cyclical ritual pan-ethnic encounter called *parawa*. At this large gathering, hundreds of Ashaninka would meet to celebrate and renew their common ancestry, their kinship and community ties, their collective identity and the complex web of debts and credits, of gifts and services, which bond every Ashaninka adult male in a tense relation 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 diversity³. I use this ethnographic case as an example, among possibly hundreds, 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 Mesoamerica there is 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 is an indication of the ability of indigenous cultural formations to deal with diversity also on the conceptual and ideological level (Wolf, 1959). I have argued the same for the case of the pre-Andean Amazon region (Varese, 1983).

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 the evidence that even the most oppressed and exploited sector of civil society can enrich the political counter-culture and the

³ See: *La Sal de los Cerros* (Varese, 1967). More than thirty years ago, when I was doing my research among the Campa-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, I discover with dismay my arrogance and the missed opportunities.

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. 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 territorial 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.

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 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 is the right and the authority the indigenous community has to interpret and apply its own law within the limits of its own controlled territory.

As far as I know, in Latin America there is only one clear-cut case of state legislation that recognizes indigenous territorial jurisdiction: the *Bill of 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 an indigenous legal system within their territories are recognized and recommended to nation-states. The OAS *Declaration* cannot be enforced, nor can the International Labor Office (ILO) Covenant 169, even when 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 the safeguard of the 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 and 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 multi-ethnicity is coming now from the increasing trend of 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 á 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 neo-liberal global projects which require 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 police force.

At this point of the journey, it seems that the defense of the indigenous peoples' rights is left in their own hands and in those of broad-based, pan-indigenous alliances within the national and "global civil society". That "globalization from below" (mentioned by Richard Falk) emerging with increasing force in grassroot 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 organizations such as the WB, the IMF, the WTO, etc. have systematically failed to respond to indigenous peoples' historical claims of territorial recognition and their demands for stricter enforcement of human, political and cultural rights. After many years of debates 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 the Resolution 1994/45 *Project of United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples*. In yet another demonstration of their unwillingness to recognize any specific cultural rights and degrees of autonomy for the indigenous peoples, the project 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 the stateless peoples) to begin to organize a global united indigenous people organization that can counter-balance **the authoritarian international political society with a democratic and multiethnic civil society** that represents, defends and secures indigenous sovereignty.

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