

Indigenous Movements and Intellectuals in the Americas.  
A Symposium

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**Indigenous Intellectuals and Decolonizing Anthropologies:  
The Difficult Dialogue on Dissent.<sup>1</sup>**

By Stefano Varese<sup>2</sup>

***Summary.** Since WW II, and increasingly during the last three decades, the Americas have witnessed repeated efforts of establishing a fair and just dialogue between indigenous intellectual/activists and the anthropological establishment. What Huamán Puma began more than four centuries ago as the first attempt of profound critique of Spain's imperial project and was continued in clandestine modes of resistance in thousand indigenous communities throughout the continent, became in the 1960' and 1970' an open and organized opposition by indigenous peoples to claims by the nation-state and mestizo citizens that "national projects" should seek modernization and unity through cultural and linguistic assimilation and full integration into the globalized market economy. The talk explores the complex intersection of epistemic, axiological, and cultural issues in the on-going ethno-political debate about governance in diversity and direct democracy or rather the continuation of the homogenizing fiction of representative electoral governance that excludes, by definition, the dissenting other.*

**Prologue.** Let me start by quoting what I wrote in an introductory note to my book *Witness to Sovereignty*. It makes sense as well for this paper....

“As I finish to write the Introduction I realize, not without embarrassment, that I have partly accomplished 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 be precisely de-centered or rather multi-centered. The indigenous voices, that I intensively sought and passionately wanted to expound, have been hushed and veiled by my own self-reflection. The intention of my Introduction was to contextualize in time and space the fifteen essays that constitute the book. I also thought that it was useful and honest to reveal the sources of my moral and political position in regard to social issues. Nor would I 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 in 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 community, the fundamental contributions of Latin

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<sup>1</sup> This talk is based on the book chapter “Indigenous Anthropologies. Beyond Barbados” that I co-authored with Guillermo Delgado and Rodolfo Meyer for Deborah Poole’s edited book *Companion to Latin American Anthropology*, to be published in 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Professor and Chair of Native American Studies at the University of California, Davis  
<svarese@ucdavis.edu>

American intellectuals to the development of independent cultural and social disciplines.”<sup>3</sup>

LET ME EXPLORE WITH YOU **two issues** that I consider essential for the construction of a common continental/hemispheric future of co-existence of cultural/ethnic diversity in just and democratic societies, in what Liberal economist Galbraith calls “The Good Society”:

- 1- The **Difficult Dialogue** between Indigenous Communities (peoples, societies, individuals) and the “dominant other” (the “White”/”Mestizos”/dominant sector of the national/international communities; and
- 2- The issue of “**the territorial and material basis**” on which indigenous peoples of the Americas are centering their struggle for autonomy and self-determination

### FIRST ISSUE: A Difficult (or Impossible) Dialogue?

*They say that we do not know anything  
That we are backwardness  
That our head needs changing  
for a better one  
They say that some learned men  
are saying this about us  
These academics who reproduce  
Themselves  
In our own lives  
What is there on the banks of  
these rivers, Doctor?  
Take out your binoculars  
And your spectacles  
Look if you can.  
Five hundred flowers  
From five hundred different types  
of potato  
Grow on the terraces  
Above abysses  
That your eyes don't reach  
Those five hundred flowers  
Are my brain  
My flesh*

J.M. Arguedas, *A call to certain academics*

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<sup>3</sup> Stefano Varese, 2006, *Witness to Sovereignty. Essays on the Indian Movement in Latin America*. Copenhagen: IWGIA-International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs.

The Peruvian poet, writer and anthropologist José María Arguedas wrote the above poem “A Call to Certain Academics” in Quechua just a few years before his death in 1969. A foundational voice in Peruvian and Latin American anthropology, Arguedas was born “white” *and* mestizo in 1911 in the Peruvian Andes. The son of a provincial middle class lawyer, as a young child he was relegated by his unloving stepmother to indigenous servants and commoners who raised and nurtured him in Quechua language and culture until he was eight years old. This short formative period of Arguedas’ life transformed him into an Andean *Runa*, a blue eyed, light skin indigenous person who could speak and write equally well in Quechua and Spanish and who soon became one of the most outspoken defenders of the millions of Andean indigenous peoples of Peru. Arguedas began to publish in Quechua and Spanish in his early twenties. At age thirty he published his first novel *Yawar Fiesta* (1941). In the following editions of the novel Arguedas included an essay that he had published in 1950 in the journal *Mar del Sur* (Arguedas, 1950). In this essay Arguedas writes as one of the very first indigenous anthropologists about the characters of his novel, the indigenous community, the Andes, the *indios*, the *mestizos*, the town, and the provincial élite. His descriptive analysis of the social setting of the novel is clearly anthropological so is his definition of some of the terms he uses throughout his work: *indio*, *Indigenista*, *Indianista*. Arguedas, however, rejects the notion that his fiction writings can be called *indigenista*. “... my novels, *Agua* and *Yawar Fiesta* have been called *indigenista* or Indian. And that is not the case. It’s a matter of their being novels in which the Andean Peru appears with all its elements, in its disturbing and confused human reality, in which the Indian is only one of many different characters.” (Arguedas 1985: XIII).

In 1963 Arguedas earned a doctoral degree in anthropology at the National University of San Marcos, Lima, with a comparative dissertation on the Spanish peasant communities and the indigenous Andean communities (Arguedas, 1963). Thereby, he officially entered in Peru's anthropological profession and academia which in the last few decades had grown dramatically under the patronage of other Andean archaeologists-ethnographers. Some of the early anthropologists, such as Julio C. Tello and Luis E. Valcárcel, were Andean by birthplace and, at least in the case of J.C. Tello, were Quechua speakers and members of indigenous communities. Before them, in the early twentieth century other intellectuals, writers and artists had contributed to the establishment of a school of thought, creativity and political activism that became known, throughout Latin America, as *indigenismo*. What is different in the case of José María Arguedas is that until very recently in modern Peru very few intellectuals (social scientists or humanists) were willing to accept in public their indigenous ancestry and much less claim a generic indigenous identity or a specific one (Quechua, Aymara, Moche, Uru) or any other indigenous affiliation of the dozens of ethnicities existing in the country. Arguedas, a "white mestizo", educated and socialized by Quechua peoples, was the first intellectual and trained anthropologist of modern Peru who was willing to openly abandon his class and ethnic origin and fully assume the despised cultural identity of the impoverished and disenfranchised natives of Peru. This existential position and political decision earned him a high degree of ostracism by the intellectual élite of Peru and arguably some level of marginalization by the literary community of Latin America (Vargas Llosa 1996, *La Utopía Arcaica*).

The dialogue that Arguedas had hoped to open between indigenous Andean and the academic anthropologists and intelligentsia of Peru failed at that time. The colonial and Eurocentric formation of Peru's intellectual constituency was unprepared to accept a conversation that implied a thorough process of de-colonization, the acknowledgement of different epistemologies, and the possibility of an indigenous anthropology: "*What is there on the banks of these rivers, Doctor?*"

In this talk, I want to discuss the artificiality of the indigenista/indigenous divide that has been underscored since the late 1940s by Mexico's governmental policy toward indigenous peoples and followed closely by most of the Latin American states with larger demographic contingents of aboriginal peoples. "Indigenismo," from Mexico to Argentina, has become the dominant discourse (and policy) on indigenous peoples elaborated and imposed by the state, while "indianismo" is increasingly meaning the Indians speaking for themselves. While indigenismo aspires to be a hegemonic argument that neutralizes alternative visions on issues of multiethnicity, indianismo, in its various and multifaceted expression, is the counter-hegemonic and pluralistic response that opens the dialogue of the whole society on the central theme of the "right to diversity and difference."

### **The Past in the Future**

Three hundred and fifty years before Arguedas wrote his poem *A call to certain academics*, Huaman Puma de Ayala, a Quechua native intellectual and scholar from the Central Andean region of Huánuco in Peru wrote explicitly for King Philip III of Spain the long treaty *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno* [1615] (Adorno 1988) as the first ever

systematic critique of European colonialism in the Americas<sup>4</sup>. Huaman Puma was blatantly opposed to the direct rule of the invading foreigners and argued strongly in favor of land and territorial restitution to the indigenous peoples as well as the restoration of the original Andean governance and polities. Strongly anticlerical and anti-bureaucratic, he condemned the rapacity, corruption, and thievery of the Spaniards, while acknowledging the ideal expectations and possible benefits of the imported Christianity. Huaman Poma's acceptance of the foreigners' faith, however, is mediated by his radical symbolic reinterpretation of Christian cosmology. In his drawing "*Mapamundi* of the Kingdom of the Indies" [1615] (Adorno 1988: 89-99) Huaman Poma reorganizes the conventional European symbolic representation of the world in Andean indigenous terms: the center of the world is now Cusco, not Jerusalem, the six cosmic axes (north, south, orient, occident, zenith, nadir) are now transformed in the four "corners" (*Tahuantinsuyu*: four *suyu*) and two cosmic poles of the indigenous *axis mundi*: upper/lower (*hanan/hurin*) which are now part of an indigenous cardinal points system that reconfigures the universe as social, cultural, "natural" home of the indigenous peoples. The indigenous Andean community, or *ayllu*, is once again recomposed and re-founded by Huaman Puma's description and analysis as a cosmic site of multiple dualities related through the principles of complementarity and reciprocity.

Huaman Puma's dictum: "Pachacama, maypim canqui?" ("Creator of the world, where are you?) refers to both the loss of the knowledge of God by previous indigenous generations, and the chaos or inversion of a world order which has been brought about by the European conquest. The fact "that there is no God and no king. They are in Rome

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<sup>4</sup> For this section on Huaman Puma de Ayala we draw on Rolena Adorno's (1988) excellent study.

and in Castille” (Adorno 1988: 140) marks, for Huaman Poma, a theological and ontological disconnection, as well as a political distance separating Andean indigenous peoples from any form of legitimate authority. It is this distance—symbolized by the far off European king and the dismembered and buried Inca monarch--that causes Human Pumas to doubt the possibility of dialogue across barriers between differing civilizations (Adorno 1988: 141-142). Toward the end of his “Letter to the King” and after having produced hundreds of pages of writings and drawings of critical indigenous ethnography and colonial sociology, Puma becomes a skeptical anthropologist who mistrusts the prospect of ever achieving cultural communication between the indigenous and the Spanish worlds, separated by fundamental ontological difference. His final conclusion is that European modes of thinking are inadequate to recount and decipher American indigenous experiences before and after Spanish invasion. This indigenous anthropological precursor rejects the fundamental Christian concepts of theology, history and justice as well as the narratives that support such world views, while unmasking the intellectual and philosophical enterprises that were all created to justify and memorialize the colonial domination and oppression of indigenous peoples (Adorno 1988: 142-143). Two hundred and fifty years later Europe would witness, with Karl Marx, a similar radical disclosure of the profound reasons for doubting the honesty and trustworthiness of the intellectual undertaking of European élites in regard to the poor and the non-European world.

At this point a preliminary accounting is due regarding what we can call *Indigenous Anthropologies*. On one hand José María Arguedas, a white/mestizo Andean person is reshaped into an indigenous *Runa*, (Quechua speaker and anthropologist) who

expresses in tragic manner the radical difference of cultural values co-existing in modern Peru as well as the extreme difficulty of communication between the two worlds. In these worlds indigenous and non-indigenous peoples in Peru, divided by racist and ethnic prejudices, are equally oppressed by a delusion of illegitimacy brought about by a false sense of history and cultural misrepresentations; all of which are sanctified by and are immersed in a “scientific” anthropology that can hardly acknowledge epistemic cleavages and separate rationalities. What good does it do to study years of anthropology if your own culture, your mother tongue, your history, your peoples are all concealed by a scientific apparatus that makes your own indigenous reflection an alienated endeavor? On the other hand, Huaman Puma, one of the first American indigenous critics of colonialism failed at that time in his anthropological enterprise, while still accomplishing a monumental ethnography of Andean society. In his effort to translate and interpret both cultural worlds, Huaman Puma was coerced into using the invaders’ language, Spanish, and with it, all of its intellectual and scholarly arsenal. Huaman Puma’s ethnography remained hidden in the archives of Europe for three hundred years, when a few members of the intellectual élite of Latin America, Europe and the U.S. rediscovered the text, interpreting it not as a complex hermeneutics of the indigenous peoples’ world but rather as a historical document helpful to interpret the colonial establishment.

Here arises the paradox of indigenous anthropologies in Latin America. Anthropology, as a discipline of modernity, is founded on the rationalist paradigm that was brought to its full development by the European enlightenment. The modern model of science, however does not help the understanding of an anti-ontological subject/object such as diverse human societies and cultures in time and space, precisely because these

subjects/objects do not possess a constant permanence, in strict sense they are not “ontologies.” In the same manner the monologist science of modernity does not allow for a conversation with nature, the world, the landscape, and the cosmos. “Science, according to Kant, does not dialogue with nature, it imposes its language upon her.” (Costa Lima 2003: 30). The fundamental goal of this mode of knowledge/science is to achieve technical domination over nature and the universe. J.M. Arguedas and H. Puma’s failure to achieve a dialogic communication between the indigenous worlds and the colonial/neo-colonial world is based on a dichotomy between a relational indigenous approach as opposed to a Western hierarchical rationality. There is a split between a relational intelligence that approaches the cosmos as a web of relations seeking its meaning through acts of partnership, and an opposite Western logos. Western logos analyzes the cosmos in attempting to understand it, addressing it as an inanimate entity ruled by laws that can be expressed mathematically, manipulated, and subdued to the ruling principles of modern capitalist cosmology: surplus value and the “market laws.” As Max Weber wrote in 1915 “The more the cosmos of modern capitalist economy follows its own immanent laws, the more it becomes inaccessible to any thinkable relation with a religious ethics of brotherhood ...”<sup>5</sup>. (cited in Costa Lima 2003: 42, our translation).

### **The Dialectics of Liberation**

José María Arguedas’s death in 1969 marks symbolically for Peru and Latin America the end of a long era of nearly impossible realization of an equitable and

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<sup>5</sup> Max Weber, “Zwischenbetrachtung”, (1915), republished in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, v.1, Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr, 1988, p 544, citado en Luiz Costa Lima 2003: 42, our translation from Spanish.

profound dialogue between indigeneity and anthropology. This in spite that in the Andean countries and in Mexico long before Arguedas there had been many attempts to seek a reflective dialogue with indigenous peoples by mestizo and indigenistas who brought to the attention to their national communities powerful Indian discourses on culture diversity, racism, and nation building. A few names of these intellectuals and leaders that acted as designated voices of thousand of indigenous communities: Uriel García, the Churata brothers (Quechua, Peru), Pascual Coña (Mapuche, Chile) Eduardo Nina and Fausto Reynaga (Aymara, Bolivia), Dolores Cacuango (Quichua, Ecuador), Quintín Lame (Paez, Colombia), Nele Kantule (Kuna, Panama), Antonio Rodríguez Suysuy (Moche, Peru). However, none of these indigenous intellectuals were ever taken into serious consideration by anthropologists as valid interlocutors in the debates on ethnicity and nation-state formation. Even post-revolutionary Mexican intellectuals had difficulty acknowledging the presence and contributions of indigenous intellectuals to Mexican history and culture. In 1940, during his last year as President of Mexico, Lázaro Cárdenas convened the First Inter-American Congress of Indigenous Peoples (*Congreso Indigenista Interamericano*). The Congress gathered some of the most visible indigenous intellectuals of the continent, with the noticeable and unfortunate exception of Mexico's delegation that was formed by non-indigenous anthropologists and politicians (Tellez Ortega 1987).

By the early '70s, Latin America witnessed the growth of an incipient but strong indigenous peoples' liberation movement that would soon gather reputation on the international scene, prompting a reduced number of Latin American anthropologists to call for an action anthropology and urgent ethnology. Some very important meetings of

indigenous peoples and anthropologists took place during this period, precisely when indigenous peoples were striving to internationalize themselves as a social movement and assert their political relevance before the various national arenas. Spearheaded by the 1971 Barbados Group of dissident anthropologists, a more equitable dialogue began to take place between anthropologists and indigenous leaders and intellectuals. In this renewed and tense conversation issues about the decolonization of knowledge and its social practice assumed a position of centrality while authoritarian Western social science with its dominant Eurocentric perspective was slowly displaced into an area of critical re-evaluation (Acosta 1972; Bonfill Batalla 1981; Nahmad 1977; Rodríguez and Varese 1981a, 1981b; Varese 1977, 1978).

The year 1977 celebrated for the first time a dialogue between a dozen ‘formally trained’ Latin American anthropologists and seventeen indigenous intellectuals and leaders (Grünberg 1979). The indigenous participants in the Second Meeting of the Group of Barbados; Barbados II) demanded the decolonization of anthropology, turning it instead into a social science committed to the struggle for liberation of indigenous peoples. By calling into question the arrogant centrality of “scientific objectivity,” native intellectuals and activists dislodged European presumptions of knowledge reproduction and established a new intellectual domain - open to indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, for the encountering and sharing of cultural and political creativity. At the Barbados II meeting the indigenous participants proposed that researchers *accompany* (rather than to objectify) the struggles of indigenous peoples. The goal of both indigenous peoples and anthropologists was to galvanize a renewed sense of humanity in the social contract, based on three main points collected, at the time, by French anthropologist

Michel de Certeau in his now prophetic article (Certeau 1976). De Certeau summarized the following points in the already on-going indigenous peoples' struggle: First- The passage from a *micro-politics* (of self-managing communities) to a macro-politics (federations and multi-level organizations); Second- The *collective contracts* with the earth and nature in general, in their dual aspect as economic (cooperatives, collectives) and ecological (harmony with nature); and Third- *cultural pluralism*, not monoculture but pluricultures, as an essential component to the self-management perspective.

The concrete rise of indigenous anthropology in contemporary Latin America can thus be attributed to the confluence of collective indigenous politics, state policy, and the deeply fractured character of most Latin American societies. On one hand, indigenous communities and individuals sought acknowledgement and full admittance into the national community without having to repudiate their history and culture, and on the other hand the white/criollo/mestizo communities were expressing a series of national-cultural goals which contradicted radically the ideal coexistence of cultural diversity. The "Right to Difference", the famous manifesto by French Marxist philosopher Henry Lefebvre, was just becoming known in Latin America about these times (1970s), broadening the debate and the struggle for social justice from a strictly class oriented and mostly economic one to a deeper political commitment to a future society where social equality could be constructed on the bases of legitimate cultural difference and diversity (Bonfil Batalla 1991; Varese 1977). What soon became a domain of contention in the Latin American struggle and dialectics of liberation was the radically different weight given by indigenous peoples and White/Mestizos to analytic, programmatic, and strategic apparatuses. While the progressive White/Mestizos were relying on strict Marxist class

analysis to organize and mobilize the people toward social changes, indigenous leaderships and organizations were bringing to the forefront of their struggles a radical critique of European and North American colonialism and imperialism, extended their criticism to include Marxism and the insensibility of Latin American Marxists to issues of cultural sovereignty and ethno-political autonomy (Bonfil 1981; Rodríguez y Varese 1981a, 1981b).

### **The Indigenous Peoples and the Anthropologists**

Formal academic training became a necessity for some native intellectuals. The co-workings of non-Indigenous and professional anthropologists and so-called “informants” generated among some indigenous peoples, the need to perpetuate, for the generations to come, a desire to preserve narratives of cultural origins and resistance, acknowledging the force of linguistic agency, but also the memory of territorial restoration. It is worth noting the fact that admissions of indigenous students at national universities constituted unspoken veto. Their absence was through exclusion and often by self-denial, at the same time their presence was simply not welcomed, and their levels of retention, when accepted, were very low.

Yet, in the face of those concrete constraints and the intentional marginalization of rural and urban indigenous peoples, western anthropologists more than other academic professionals, made their practices, methods, and aims known or filtered to the “native informants” (soon to become research partners) through actual fieldwork and close collaboration. An ethics of solidarity has largely been present in the anthropological ethos of various anthropologists, in spite of the not infrequently tarnished involvement and misbehavior of a few, as in the infamous case of the Camelot Project in Chile and the

documented participation of some U.S. anthropologists in counterinsurgency research in Viet Nam and Latin America. Despite the presence of other practitioners of disciplines such as sociology and economics, or archaeology for that matter, anthropology had a natural appeal and possible accessibility to indigenous peoples. After all, ethnographizing meant the careful practices of “thick description” that inspired other forms of dialogue and assistance between professionals and ‘informants.’

On the other hand, by the end of the 1940s, archaeologists such as A. Posnansky, J. C. Tello and A. Lipschutz in Bolivia, Peru and Chile, or J. Imbelloni in Argentina and A. Caso in Mexico had already carved a niche to study the archaeological remnants of “Ancient” cultures. Intricate iconographies, stone carved pieces, codices, and monumental urban centers, constituted to the eyes of indigenous peoples, empirical confirmation that something worthy and important belonged to their pasts and immediate lives. The nation-state would appropriate the honorable Indian past to graft it in the recreation of its ‘imagined community’, but to the detriment of the actual presence of indigenous peoples. Leftwing political parties focused on the possibility of transforming the ‘indigenous masses’ into revolutionary cadres, and/or potential members of the early industrial unions in urban and mining centers. Not only that, it was also clear that they, as indigenous peoples, were not part of the dialogue in designing or controlling their own cultural resources as may have been the case for other forms of popular resistance. Indigenous ideologies and practices, such as the ayllu system in the Andean area, accommodated to the aims of unionism, and Marxist doxa found its equivalent in indigenous social practices of communal life and utopian ideologies such as the “Return of the Inka” (Flores Galindo 1987).

Once this social process of re/membering started in different regions of indigenous Latin America during the 40s, 50s and 60s, it slowly influenced the designing and implementation of various schools of anthropology especially in the Andean countries and Mexico. Obviously, the very heavy Western bearing of the anthropological discipline with both its traditions of materialist and more metaphysical components affected those indigenous peoples touched by the presence of national and foreign professionals doing research on indigenous peoples' materials. Issues of social inequality, cultural and racial discrimination, economic exploitation, and political oppression became the focus of indigenous intellectual activists engaged as assistants or "informants" in anthropological studies. Early indigenous intellectual leaders and activists were calling into question the aggressive impact of modernization, trying to understand this renewed confrontation with the nation-state, now allegedly post-colonial in its structure but discriminatory in its practices.

### **The Indians and the Christians**

It is interesting to note that since the 1940s the notorious Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) and its evangelical branch, the Wycliffe Bible Translators, were present and very active in most countries of Latin America. Their well financed project of translating the Bible into indigenous languages was intended to promote the conversion and "salvation" of indigenous peoples' souls, in addition to easing their assimilation into a U.S. version of Western modernity (Aaby and Hvalkof 1981). Yet, the real effects of this proposal could not be controlled as geared only to inspire 'salvation' in another world, while suffering in this one. Instead it furthered legitimization of indigenous languages as valid systems of thought, even theological, and broader political

communication. In a twist of irony that did not escape the attention of the SIL evangelical directives, some of the most radical indigenous political leaders of the Amazon region had been trained as preachers by the Institute (Espinoza 2004).

Parallel to this extensive process of neo-colonialist Evangelical missionizing on indigenous communities, the sixties and early seventies witnessed {also} the incursion of the ecumenical movement of Liberation Theology and the openness brought in by the Vatican Council II (1962-1966) regarding other forms of conceptualizing the sacred and alternative and interrelated forms of indigenous religious practices (Gutiérrez 1973). These western Christian religious institutions of all shapes and forms can be considered responsible, intentionally or not, for the formation of “organic intellectuals” amidst the early manifestations of organized indigenous movements. As a result of the influence of Liberation Theology that emphasized social rather than individual sin, priests and missionaries affected by the Christian-Marxist dialogue of the post-war worked on securing leaders rather than converts among indigenous activists (Garaudy 1970). Some of the tools shared by these newly trained indigenous leaders were ethnographic methods as well as anthropological theory that recentered traditional knowledge.

### **The Ethopolitics of the Indigenous Movement**

The political program of the new indigenous movements included demands concerning language, culture and religion, and history and ethnography, all organized along the central issue of decolonization. It was clear that, behind the native languages that have resisted forced ‘castellanization’, and colonial languages in general, another indigenous view of history and indigenous culture was kept at the core of the collective memory and the indigenous project of autonomy and equality. Castellization could also

be equated to another unidirectional concept in vogue at the time: acculturation. A hegemonic social practice that fuses together the notions of social change, progress, development, modernization and national integration without implementing the notion and practice of citizenship. Any resistance to acculturation could be interpreted by the national élites as conservative traditionalism or as an irrational attachment to archaic and obsolete cultural practices. This despite the fact, that Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz had already published his famous *Contrapunto del azúcar y del tabaco* (1947), where he formulates the notion of transculturations as the correct approach to address non-intrusive cultural changes and exchanges. This was understood as a process in which something is always given in return for what one receives, a system of give and take, a term that does not contain the implications of one certain culture toward which the other must tend, but rather an exchange between two or more cultures cooperating to bring about a new reality (Malinowski [1940] 2002: 125)

These formative decades of indigenous anthropologies were accompanied by processes of ethnogenesis or the formation of “new” or, in some cases reborn, indigenous ethnicities. This was the case, for example, of the Cocama, Cocamilla in the Peruvian Amazon, the Zenues in Córdoba, Venezuela, and some new “tribal” communities in North Eastern Brazil. In most of these cases the interaction between anthropologically trained indigenous peoples and their communities gave rise to territorial demands and specific cultural rights based on collective claims of indigeneity re/membering after a cultural and historical introspection. In truth, some of these new claims of indigenous legitimacy became linked to a growing trend in agrarian legislation throughout Latin

America which acknowledged specific land and territorial rights to indigenous communities.

### **Knowledge as Resistance**

Indigenous peoples intellectual and ethno-political projects inevitably answer to five centuries of colonial and neo-colonial occupation and oppression of “Indian Country” in the Americas. Any attempt to separate analytically indigenous intellectual endeavors and counter-hegemonic constructions from indigenous peoples re-appropriation of their knowledge, their history, their collective identity, their intellectual sovereignty, and their political autonomy, is bound to fail. Since the early sixteen century invasion of their lands by European powers the indigenous peoples have resisted colonial domination by preserving their forms of knowledge.

Dismemberment of civilization, utopia and secrecy mark the thoughts and historical memory of the indigenous peoples and constitute the ideological and spiritual structure of their centuries-long cultural resistance, as well as of the cyclical manifestations of their ethnic nationalism. Throughout five centuries of colonial domination, indigenous peoples have repeatedly rebelled. The historiography of these rebellions has only recently begun to be written. Alicia Barabas (1987, 2002) analyzes 56 Indigenous rebellions of messianic character for Mexico between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries; Taylor (1979) studies 142 Indigenous rebellions for a period of 131 years in only three regions of Mexico: Mexico Valley, 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 Cardenas (1987); Rappaport (1990); Stern (1987), Varese (1987, 2002), Wankar (1981).

This thick collective memory of opposition and resistance constitutes the foundation of indigenous social thought and its use of anthropology as a tool borrowed from the dominant society. As already pointed out by Bonfill Batalla (1981) more than twenty years ago the indigenous liberation movement is centered around seven fundamental processes of cultural reclamation/recuperation that imply a profound knowledge of the historical relation between the colonial occupiers and the indigenous societies. First: at the forefront of its strategy of liberation the indigenous peoples put the reclaiming of time, the recuperation of their own history. Second: the recuperation of place/space/territory/lands and resources. Third: the recuperation of voice, language and the right to use it creatively and politically. Fourth: the recuperation of knowledge, both indigenous and exogenous. Fifth: the recuperation of the “moral ecology”, as a relation of stewardship, partnership and nurturing of “nature”, and the world. Sixth: the axiological recuperation as the reclaiming of the moral, ethical, spiritual primacy over materialism. Finally, the recuperation of the indigenous aesthetics: music, dances, performance, weaving, art, literature.

Some of these processes of cultural recuperation and affirmations resulted from a forthright collaborative alliance between indigenous intellectuals and anthropologists. Guillermo Bonfil Batalla’s creation, in the early 1980s, of the program of Indigenous Ethnolinguistics (a M.A. graduate program directed at members of indigenous communities located initially in Patzcuaro, Michoacán, later in Tlaxcala, and later in Mexico City). The program has awarded numerous M.A. degrees to indigenous intellectuals and activists mostly from Mexico, but also from other countries. The intellectual production of the “etnolingüistas indígenas” has been an outstanding

contribution to the development, in Mexico and other countries, of a corpus of materials for bilingual education and printed materials in indigenous languages. A certain number of these indigenous linguists have earned doctoral degrees in linguistics and anthropology (see Bartolomé, 2003).

In the early 1980s under the leadership of three Mexican anthropologists, Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, Rodolfo Stavenhagen and Leonel Durán, the Mexican government established a national program of Popular and Indigenous Cultures with the mandate of training members of indigenous communities and “mestizo” social scientists, humanists, and natural scientists in transcultural dialogue and the establishment of joint projects of culturally appropriate ethnic development. Some of the indigenous participants in this program have become active intellectuals, writers, and spoke persons of the indigenous autonomy movement in Mexico (Castellanos 1994, 2002, 2003).

Between 1969 and 1975 Peru witnessed a progressive governmental push to recognize Andean peasants’ land rights, as well as the territorial claims of indigenous peoples of the Amazon region. The process of defining and titling indigenous territories in the Amazon required both a massive mobilization of the communities themselves and the self-training of leadership cadres knowledgeable and ethnically committed with their own peoples. The process and interaction of social scientists and Amazonian Natives around central issues of territoriality, management and governance generated intellectuals and activists who later organized themselves in national and international ethnopolitical organizations (Brysk 2000; Varese 1994).

### **History, Ecology and Indigenous Resistance**

Two disciplines seem to have demonstrated more sensibility than anthropology and other social sciences regarding the indigenous peoples political emergence and their intelligentsia. On one hand, we are thinking of the historians who, by epistemological mandate and necessity of method, position themselves at a prudent distance from events and, as a consequence, perform 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) for 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 they refer to indigenous societies. One can not help but suspect that in the case of historians the class category of *campesino/peasant* takes precedence displacing other factors of ethnicity and of collective identity to secondary levels.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, we see the ecological approaches of a recent generation of biologists and eco-economists, especially in the case of studies on indigenous people in Mexico, who have known how to recount more sensitively the indigenous peoples'

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<sup>6</sup> The Andean bibliography that bears witness to a greater sensibility of historians to the question of ethnicity and "Indianness" of the historical subject is, however, relatively abundant. Suffice it to cite only a few of the most relevant texts: first, the foundation works of Murra (1975, 1978); Flores Galindo (1986, 1987); Ossio (1973); Pease (1973); and Stern (1987.) For the case of the Andean jungle of Peru, see the study by Zarzar (1989) on the pan-Indian rebellion of Juan Santos Atahualpa in the eighteenth century as well as the new revision on the same insurrection by Stern (1987) and my own work from some years ago (Varese, 1973, 2002). 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), Fariss (1984); Taylor (1972 and 1979); Whitecotton (1977), among many others.

struggles to defend and preserve their autonomy, concretely by focusing on the indigenous resistance in the field of ethnic and ecological knowledge transformed into political strategies (Altieri et al., 1987; Caballero, Mapes, 1985;; Posey, 1984; Toledo, 1976, 1980). We 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 native peoples that has often escaped socio-anthropological attention. Finally, environmentalist concerns have become - perhaps only through imitative osmosis- part of the cultural interests of Latin America's middle classes and, as a consequence, it was to be expected that a rediscovery of the "noble savage" turned into "noble environmentalist" should have occurred sooner or later.

The paradox in this story is that, precisely during these last 30 years, anthropology in the metropolis (especially the US) has become involved increasingly in an effort to define ethnicity, and the formation, meaning and deployment of identity categories, especially in regards to the political and economic dimensions of social organization (Williams, 1989). So, while anthropologists are trying to untangle a complex network of theoretical and methodological problems derived from the redefinition of the boundaries 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 scholars in the hegemonic social sciences

seem to want to realize this. Yet anthropology, like all social sciences, is not only a field of study but also a field for social struggle (Bourdieu quoted in Kearney, 1990). In its epistemological and methodological definitions, in the choice and definition of the "object" of study, in the paradigmatic construction of the "other," anthropologists, despite their best wishes, therefore express the hegemonic project— in the Gramscian sense of a struggle- of the class and ethnicity of which they form part.

### **Organization as Resistance**

More than fifteen years ago, in July of 1990, the representatives of 120 Indian nations met in Quito to celebrate the Continental Meeting "500 Years of Indian Resistance". The Declaration of Quito begins with these words: "We the American Indians 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 Indian organizations. These negotiations marked a truce in one of the strongest Latin America Indigenous uprisings of the past few years. According to independent analysts, it was the most important popular mobilization of the country's last decade (*Andean Report*, London 1990). More than 100,000 Indigenous people participated in the 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 Indian self-government were the central demands of the uprising and were taken up again in the Continental Meeting.

**Analyses of the long conclusions and resolutions of the Meeting reveal that the political platforms of the organized indigenous peoples of the hemisphere are basically identical to the demands that have driven indigenous struggles during the last five centuries:**

- ∞ Recovery and recuperation of the territories lost because of the colonial and national occupation;
- ∞ Defense and recuperation of the natural resources and the environment destroyed by mercantile exploitation;
- ∞ Right to maintain, reestablish and develop the 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 of Christian evangelization and colonizing educational systems.

Organized indigenous peoples 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 Indian 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 Indian 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 projects are 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 Indian 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, commons good, solidarity, autonomy and self-determination only represent obstacles to exercising imposition, exploitation and domination" (Resolutions: 6). In light of these reflections ... 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" (Resolutions: 6).

The achievements of Quito 1990/911 can be seen as a continuation of the dialogues of the 1971 and 1977 Barbados meetings between Indians and committed anthropologists. The visible “object” of ethnography, the Indians of the Americas, answers back with full agency. The dialogue built in the Barbados meetings reached far. The object of research, at this point, cannot be disciplinary anymore: A new concretely *decolonizing* anthropology -holistic and interdisciplinary- creates the coming together of new forms of problematizing reality, but it is also committed to offer solutions to--rather than simply analyses of--given situations. Indeed the Barbados dialogues and the agency of Indigenous Peoples have very much been represented by a 21<sup>st</sup> century anthropology that has relinquished “studying” the Indians of the Americas. Self-reflection has become a necessary way to rethink human prejudice and Western intellectual prerogative. In a sense, Indigenous Peoples forced anthropologists to historize, self-reflect and risk the comfort of writing the predicament of culture.

### **The Dialectics of Dissent**

The continental indigenous peoples resistance movement is disinterring its gods. It has done it over and over again in the last two decades: in Chiapas, Mexico (Zapatista Maya insurrection and Oaxaca Insurgency), in Bolivia (Cocaleros struggle, “water wars”, general uprisings against neo-liberalism and finally electoral victory), in Guatemala (Maya civil war resistance and post-war reconstruction), in Colombia (constitutional reforms, anti-war movement), in Chile (land recuperations), in Venezuela (political organization in support of social reforms). The movement is taking the utopian ideals out from the 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 privileges an ecological concept of the cosmos and nature above the utilitarianism characteristic of European “modernity.” This moral 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 the ecological spheres as the central axis of the political-cultural platform and project itself, reveals an idealist and--why not?—a utopian tone.

An alliance between *indigenous anthropologies* and their dissenting, contradictory and dialectical couple, *academic anthropology*, is not only possible but inevitable. It implies a re-appropriation of the political and cultural space by indigenous communities and intellectuals that were forced underground and by the non-indigenous intellectuals and practitioners disillusioned by military authoritarianism, skepticism, and despair at given stages of Latin American recent history. Such a [A] process of cultural creation — and therefore political inventiveness — [that] strongly believes in a future scenario in which diversity and the right to be different will be as important as the right to social equality and political justice. Last but not least, as it was expected, the development of Indigenous agency throughout the Americas makes us aware of the strong potential of the ecological, anthropological and Indigenous philosophies correlations that are leading Indigenous Peoples toward broader and more effective forms of participation in elected governments.

The December 2005 presidential elections of Aymara Evo Morales Ayma, the first Aymara elected to lead as head of the Bolivian state since its inception in 1825 is but a

logical consequence of Indigenous Peoples rethinking politics and globalization while seeking self-determination. President Morales Ayma is calling for the total restructuring of the Bolivian state in a nation of indigenous majority. In times of neo-liberalism and globalization that strongly recommend the shrinking of the state and the reduction of welfare and safety nets for the poor, the Aymara president calls for a re-invented state that delivers rather than abdicate its responsibility. To the globalizing forces and the inevitability of a well-interconnected world that places hardship on historically exploited peripheral areas, Aymara President Morales Ayma responds that the Indian Country's riches of land, water, oil, natural gas, minerals, preserved forests, high levels of biodiversity, cultural diversity and millennial heritage of social organization will be the tools for defeating the never solved poverty of Bolivia and its Indigenous Peoples. Can we think of a better prospect for academic anthropology than to position itself on the side of these renewed Indigenous Anthropologies that are betting all their resources to make this world better than the one we found?