

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

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**Introduction in the Guise of a Story**

**The Journey**

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

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

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

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

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

In 1967 I published an article with the title “The New Conquest of the Jungle” (Varese 1967, 1974a) in *Amaru*, a new journal of culture and politics founded by eminent Peruvian poet José Emilio Westphalen. In the article I denounced President Belaúnde’s government of genocide and charged him personally with crimes against humanity. President Belaúnde had personally ordered the Peruvian Air Force to bomb and machinegun the villages of three of the four clans of Mayoruna (Matsés) Indians of the Yaquerana river. The fourth clan at that time was living across the border in Brazilian territory. The bombing of defenseless Matsés men, women and children was presented by the national press as an act of heroism of Peruvian airforce pilots fighting against brutal savages that were opposing the progress of the country. The truth behind the media propaganda was that the Mayoruna Indians were in the way of a few national and transnational timber companies. In 1970 my wife Linda Ayre and I traveled to the Mayoruna territory and interviewed the survivors of the bombing. An older woman who could speak some Spanish told us the details of the attack by the Peruvian Air Force. The Mayoruna people had developed survival techniques that included teaching dogs not to bark when ordered to, cultivate small *chacras* (polyculture plots) in different hidden spots of the rain forest, and establish shorter periods of itinerant horticulture in order to avoid to be detected by Peruvian *mestizos*. The older women could afford to be ironic in telling us that most of the bombs of fragmentation were exploding in the canopy of the forest and not on the ground. In my short research I could determine, contrary to the opinion of the evangelical missionaries of the Summer Institute of Linguistics who were attempting to christianize them, that the Matsés-Mayoruna were not an isolated group of non-contacted Indians, but rather an indigenous group that had escaped from Spanish colonial oppression and sought refuge in the depth of the eastern Amazon region of Peru in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by traveling more than 800 kilometers from their original territory in the lower Huallaga river. My denounce did not even deserve an answer or an explanation from President Belaúnde’s government nor did the Matsés-Mayoruna received ever an official apology<sup>ii</sup>.

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

the Matsés-Mayoruna and the socialist guerrilla insurgency of the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR).

On June 24, 1969, the revolutionary government of Velasco Alvarado promulgated a sweeping land reform, which abolished the old coastal plantations and Andean *haciendas*. In a televised speech Juan Velasco Alvarado announced the agrarian reform of Peru with these words:

Today, for the Day of the Indian, the day of the Peasant, the Revolutionary Government honors them with the best of tributes by giving to the nation a law that will end forever the unjust social order that impoverished and oppressed the millions of landless peasants who have always been forced to work the land of others ... As of this lucky June 24, Peruvian peasants will truly be free citizens whose motherland has finally recognized their rights to the fruit of the land they work and a position of justice within a society where nevermore will they be second-class citizens, men to be exploited by other men ... To the men of the land, we can now say in the immortal and liberating voice of Túpac Amaru:

Peasant: the Master will not longer feed off your poverty! <sup>iii</sup>

The nationalization of the oil industry and the agrarian reform were the first two structural reforms initiated by the Revolutionary Government of the Armed Forces as part of the "Inca Plan" aiming at forging a state-directed "third way" of national development that would avoid the ideological trap of the mutually excluding capitalist or socialist ways. The Velasco's government reforms included nationalization of foreign enterprises, the establishment of self-managed workers' owned mid-size enterprises, co-management of co-owned (workers and state) large size enterprises, nationalization and socialization (as workers' cooperatives) of mass media, and the creation of a state- and social organizations-run National System of Social Mobilization (SINAMOS) charged with the implementations of social reforms. In addition, the government initiated an educational reform with reformulated curricula, a revisionist approach to the social and cultural history of the country, a bilingual (Spanish-Quechua) early literacy program, and finally the declaration that Quechua language was the official language of Peru on equal footing with Spanish. Of all these sweeping structural changes, by far the most substantial was the massive land reform which changed radically the country transforming a feudal rural society with 80% of the lands owned by a few dozen oligarchic families into a modern aggregate of autonomous communities of Indians, peasants, farmers, and agrarian cooperatives. Obviously, these radical social transformations provoked the anger of the oligarchy that had ruled over the

country for one hundred and fifty years, the aspiring capitalist class that was relying on the social, political and economic status quo, and the United States government and investors that had benefited shamelessly of this neo-colonial situation for years.

The huge Amazon region of Peru, however, had been left out of these fundamental changes. In 1969 I was appointed director of the newly created Division of Native Communities of the Jungle, as a branch of the Ministry of Agriculture and the National Office of the Agrarian Reform. My responsibility was to research, develop, and implement the state policy regarding territories, jurisdictions, and cultural and political rights of the indigenous peoples of Peru's Amazonian region. I did not accept this overwhelming assignment lightly nor was I prepared for the enormity of its political and moral implications. With very scarce resources and a few friends and colleagues from the university we initiated a process of demographic and ethnic survey, territorial and resources evaluation, and consultation and political mobilization of the "tribal peoples" of the Amazon. By 1974 our collective work resulted in the Law of Native Communities of the Jungle (Legal Decree 20653) which introduced sweeping reforms and radical changes in the situation of the indigenous peoples of the jungle, by now officially denominated Native Communities. Peru's Law of Native Communities garnered centuries-old indigenous demands for cultural and political autonomy and territorial stability as well as a series of Latin American indigenous people's claims that were increasingly voiced at Indian congresses, meetings, and social mobilizations.

### **European Interlude**

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

In the northern Huallaga valley and along the shores of the Sisa, Mayo and Saposoa rivers live several thousand *Llakwash* or *Lamistas* Indians. They speak a dialect variation of the Andean *Quechua* which is also spoken by other thousand jungle indigenous people of the Napo (*Santarosino*), Pastaza (*Inga*) and Tigre rivers (*Alamas*). The *Llakwash*'s oral tradition claims that they were Andean *Quechuas* defeated by Inca imperial expansion who sought refuge in the depth of the Amazon jungle. Whatever their historical origin is, the contemporary *Lamistas* have a reputation of being extraordinary healers with a vast ethnobotanical knowledge of the Amazon forest. It was this reputation that brought French ethnologist, writer, and traveler Bernard Lelong to Peru in the late sixties. Lelong combined a very pragmatic interest in indigenous biomedical knowledge and in the more esoteric aspects of indigenous spirituality and shamanism. I met him in Peru when I myself was in the process of trying to understand *Asháninka* Indians spirituality. As I think back in the kind of friendship that we developed I realize that we had established some sort of unspoken reciprocity system by which I facilitated his entries into Peru's jungle and he made it possible for me to approach and re-visit Europe and especially France.

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

These were the times when Latin American anthropology was critically reconfiguring itself against the backdrop of the Paris 1968 students and popular rebellion, the 1968 Mexico-Tlatelolco students massacre, the anti-Vietnam war and civil rights movements in the U.S., the

Cuban revolution, the peasant and Indian movement in Latin America, the American Indian Movement in the U.S. and the anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist critique exercised by Franz Fanon, Albert Memmi, Jean Paul Sartre, Amilcar Cabral, Léopold Senghor, Ho Chi Minh. In 1975, a shorter and modified version of the article published by IWGIA<sup>vii</sup> was included by Jean Copan in his edited book on *Anthropology and Imperialism*<sup>viii</sup>. The trip to Europe became the catalyst of my anti-imperialism that I conceived as the most appropriate political position as Peruvian and Latin American social scientist engaged in the revolutionary experiment of my country. At the same time, I began to develop strong sentiments and analytical perspectives of anti-colonialism as the proper tool to understand the historical process of subordination of the indigenous people of Latin America.

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

In 1972 I took a brief visiting lecturer job at the University of California, Berkeley that confirmed to me that even in the midst of “imperial academia” the foundations of “objective empiricism” and politically detached social science were fast collapsing under the students’ movement and progressive intellectual strong criticism. The revelations of anthropologists’ involvement in U.S. government anti-insurgency activities in Latin America, South East Asia and the rest of the Third World had caused commotion among liberal social scientists in the U.S. and an outrageous, albeit not surprising, response throughout Latin America. Fortunately for the international progressive movement a few brilliant and honest minds were fighting the imperial project from within and towards these American intellectuals and activists, some of us Latin American anthropologists felt a great sense of respect and solidarity. British anthropologist Kathleen Gough and UC Berkeley professor Gerald Berreman<sup>ix</sup> had led a devastating critique of mainstream anthropology and its political quietism and moral abstinence on the central issues of war, social inequality, counter-insurgency politics, political repression, and human rights abuses. *NACLA Report on the Americas (CITA)*, the *Monthly Review* publications, and *Latin American Perspectives* became essential and inspiring tools of analysis, and very early in my intellectual career I became disappointed (and frankly bored) by mainstream professional journals issued in the United States which were indulging in purported scientific objectivity while systematically avoiding any commitment to social justice, world peace, and the ethics of knowledge<sup>x</sup>.

### **Reconciling Class and Culture**

I believe that I owe to my early exploration of Antonio Gramsci’s writings in Italian my late discovery of the power of culture. All this happened in a kind of itinerary of *corsi e ricorsi* between my native Italy and my adopted Peru. It took me a few years of double journeys from Italy - which I abandoned rather hastily in search of a mythical Peru - and then back to Europe in an attempt to reconcile the future of my past never fully understood, that gave meaning to my European background and to my newly found Latin Americanism. In my youth, secluded in the basement of my maternal grandfather’s bookstore, I had known –not precisely read- Antonio Gramsci and some Italian translations of socialist philosophers<sup>xi</sup>. From the working class children, companions of mine at the Quintino Sella school in Turin, I had learned about the assassination attempt against the Secretary General of the Italian Communist Party, Palmiro Togliatti, and the general strike that followed and paralyzed my city, and most importantly my beloved tramways. With my school friends, whose names I have long forgotten, I also learned about the *dopolavoro* club, which became a sort of secret alternative to the Catholic parish boy scout club where my mother insisted I should go. With my school friends I would join the FIAT car factory workers and their family in the joyous First of May socialist festival where I could wear red carnations and sing revolutionary songs. My loosely Catholic upbringing in my



anticlerical grandparents' home did not contradict my newly discovered socialist ideals, nor did the growing admiration that I was developing for Jazz and for American literature.

At some time, at what age I don't remember, as I was laying in bed ill I heard the news of Stalin's death, and I cried desperately. But then again, years later as I was driving an old Chevrolet on Avenida Wilson in Lima I cried without control to the news of J.F. Kennedy's death. Some years later, I found myself reading avidly Antonio Gramsci in the scarce free hours that I had after my work in the office on Native Communities of the Jungle, trying to make sense of his central concepts and applying them to the indigenous communities of the Amazon forest. Fortunately for me, my aging Italian language became again a precious tool of knowledge. With the generous help of my mother –and probably against my grandfather will – I kept *aggiornato* and well informed on the development of Italian and European social sciences and philosophy. Between 1957 and 1970 I was educating myself in Peru with Italian and French books sent discretely by my mother. Each brown paper packet of books, covered with dozens of Italian stamps and the return address of my mother's bookstore, was like a gift from some protecting and nurturing deity of the intellect. Slowly, almost furtively, American authors started to appear in the packages interspersed with Raffaele Pettazzoni (1965, 1966), Benedetto Croce (1955), Ernesto de Martino (1958, 1962), Norberto Bobbio (1955), Claude Lévi-Strauss (1960, 1963, 1966, 1968), Vladimir Propp (1949), or Vittorio Lanternari (1960, 1967). I believe that my first startling discovery of American alternative intellectual life came through some early writing of Noam Chomski read in Italian, then came Paul Sweezy (1942), Wright Mills (1962, 1963), and Herbert Marcuse (1968, 1968a). It was sometimes in this decade that I began to secretly enjoy the notion that Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce was a self-educated intellectual and French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, who had written those wonderful treaties on the metaphysics of fire and water, was a postman. It became clear to me that the poverty of some of the Third World underdeveloped academia I was dealing with was not completely responsible for either my intellectual flaws or any of my few merits. What has excited me ever since in my intellectual life is the conviction that by stepping out of the conventional mainstream thought, either because forced to it by the mediocrity of the educational system, or by choice, I have found avenues of ideas and creative itineraries that would have been obscured by the "light" of the official history.

Was it accidental then, that I shifted, dialectically I would say, between historical materialism and spirituality or even to some expressions of esotericism in my efforts to understand the Campa-Asháninka Indians religion and shamanism? Amazonian poet and novelist César Calvo, surrealist pilgrim of his beloved jungle, had once defined some members of our generation as "spiritual Marxists."<sup>xiii</sup> The obliged eclecticism, a certain taste for improvisation,

the dominant mode of *bricolage* in our formation was seldom perceived as an absence or a weakness, it was rather our challenge, our invitation to discover new paths, to imagine, nurture, and increase the difference. Henry Lefebvre with his apology of the *différance* issued from a well grounded Marxist stand became part of our most precious intellectual belongings.

I never fully abandoned Europe nor did I shut my Italian ethnic background in the aching trunk of nostalgia. I intentionally became bilingual and then multilingual in my Italian-Peruvian environment where the Genovese, the *Zeneise* (dialect or language?) of my father and stepmother displaced my mother's *Piemontese* (dialect or *Langue d'Oc*?) in a constant game of linguistic code shifting. I believe that the polyglot atmosphere of my Peruvian home firmly marked my later positions on language rights of the indigenous peoples and Mexican and Latin American migrants to the U.S., or my more recent radical stand on the intellectual and cultural destitution of American society in its dogmatic and parochial insistence on "English only" policy. My polyglot conviction constitutes also the port of entry to my impassioned multiculturalism that I perceive as the basic human rights to express and develop one's own cultural preference and option with the only restrictions that emanate from the social other's equal rights. Language and culture pertain to the domain of diversity; social, political, and economic justice pertain to the domain of equality.

### **The Mexican Connection and the Island of Barbados**

I must have begun to exchange letters with Mexican anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla around the year 1969. His letters were mostly inquiries about the Peruvian Revolution and its approach to indigenous peoples' issues. Bonfil, like most of the intellectual of his generation, had emerged deeply wounded by the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre experience and the disillusionment of almost fifty years of revolutionary promises never fully delivered. With six other anthropologists, he co-authored a merciless indictment of the Mexican official anthropology and its undeserved progressive and pro-Indian reputation<sup>xiii</sup>. Since the nineteen-forties, when post-revolutionary Mexico's President Lázaro Cárdenas convened the First Inter-American Indigenous Congress in Pátzcuaro, Michoacán, the Mexican government had carefully built a continental fame of postulating and implementing progressive Indian policies that favored some form of soft integration of indigenous communities to the larger national society. Huge government investments in education and community development were channeled through the *Instituto Nacional Indigenista-INI* (National Institute of Indigenous Affairs) and its numerous local agencies staffed with anthropologists and other young professionals. The reputation of the successful Mexican indigenistic policy was based, among other things, on the historical precedents of Manuel Gamio's early writings (1916, 1922, 1935, 1948), his academic links with one

of the founders of modern American anthropology, Frantz Boas<sup>xiv</sup>, the open support of John Collier, the initiator of the New Deal approach to the Native Americans social and cultural issues and innovator of the Bureau of Indian Affairs-BIA's policy, and last but not least, to the undeniable influence of Marxist sociology on some of the social scientists and policy makers of Mexico<sup>xv</sup>.

The inheritor of this tradition of pro-Indian indigenistic reputation was Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, brilliant medical doctor turned into anthropologist and government top administrator of indigenous peoples affairs. What Guillermo Bonfil Batalla and his peers were demonstrating was the falsity of Mexican Indian policy of integration and its true nature of crude assimilationism of indigenous peoples by a powerful authoritarian state, in collusion with private investors and capital, interested mostly in controlling Indian resources and domesticated labor force (Bonfil Batalla et al. 1970).

A couple of years after we initiated our correspondence, in June of 1971, I finally met Guillermo Bonfil Batalla and another fourteen Latin American anthropologists in a sunny beach of the Caribbean island of Barbados. The World Council of Churches (Geneva) and the Ethnology Department of the University of Bern (Switzerland) under the leadership of Jorge Grünberg had convened all of us to the University of West Indies in Barbados with the charge of analyzing the situation of the indigenous peoples Latin America with particular attention to the tribal peoples of the South American lowlands. We all arrived prepared with detailed reports on the genocide and ethnocide situations we had witnessed more or less directly. After one painful week of testimonies and factual proofs of atrocities against the Indians of Argentina, Paraguay, Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela and Mexico we could only express our rage in the rhetoric of an iconoclastic declaration that we thought should accompany the dossier of denounces. The English edition of the dossier survived almost unknown in a Swiss publication of the World Council of Churches (Dostal 1972), while the Spanish publication in Uruguay had a much more heroic fate: it was burnt publicly by the military dictatorship of Uruguay as a subversive document (Grünberg et al. 1972). What did escape scholarly anonymity or the ire of the extreme right was the couple of pages of the Declaration of Barbados I. Issued in Spanish and immediately translated into Portuguese, English, French, the Declaration of Barbados I became a political tool in the hands of indigenous peoples of the Americas, in some of the emerging political organizations and even among governmental officials, members of the Catholic church, and NGOs. The document, in its simplicity and directness, expounds the responsibility of states and governments, the Catholic Church and the various Protestant and Evangelical denominations, the private sector, and the anthropologists and the scientific community in the

mistreatment and abuses against the Indians. According to Alison Brisk<sup>xvi</sup> the indigenous "... transnational movement formally began in 1971 with the Barbados Conference of dissident anthropologists, who pledged to promote indigenous self-determination and enter politics ... " (Brisk 2002: 18). The Barbados declaration demanded a moratorium on missionary work, the radical revision of the relation between the state and the indigenous peoples, and a political and ethical commitment of non-Indian social scientists to support indigenous peoples self-determination and autonomy. The core statement of the declaration was that the liberation of the Indians could only be achieved by the Indians themselves.

No Indians were present in the meeting of Barbados I. It would take another six years for the Barbados group to convene a second, larger meeting of thirty five participants, eighteen of which were active militants in the Latin American indigenous movement. Some of the Indian members of Barbados II traveled to the island secretly. The Guatemalan Maya and the Colombian Páez were actually risking their lives by being at the conference. Finally in 1993, the Barbados group met in Rio de Janeiro, 23 years after the first meeting, to mourn the death of one of its most enlightened members, Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, and to address again old Indian issues of neo-colonialism, wars, land eviction, genocide, human rights abuses, and cultural destruction. These old problems, however, were now presented by the transnational community of capitalists as the unfortunate price to be paid by the weak to give way to necessary globalization of the economy and the establishment of a "new world order."

The three Barbados meetings can be read as a 25-years synopsis of a few Latin American anthropologists who had accompanied the Indian movement of liberation. The Declaration of Barbados I, "For the Liberation of the Indigenous People," in 1971, was a strong denunciation and demand sent out to the state, the church, the private sector, and the social scientist to satisfy the basic human and ethnic rights of the indigenous people. Barbados II, in 1977, reflected both the Indians and anthropologists' activism and direct involvement in the social movement of liberation. A decision to be involved in such activism carried many risks. Some of the indigenous participants and some of the anthropologists were already either in hiding within their own countries or in exile. The Declaration of Barbados III, "The Articulation of Diversity," in 1993, evaluated the last 25 years of Latin American anthropology and its contributions to the Indian struggle of decolonization. There is little optimism in this assessment that recognizes the ethical distortions of contemporary theoretical meandering and self-gratifying solipsism that disguise the lack of commitment of academic anthropology to the Indian's liberation struggles. Finally, Barbados III emphasized that at the end of the century, the Indian movement of the Americas is

an issue on the international agenda that will have to be weighed in any major decision regarding world peace and development.

### **Indian Frontiers of Civilization and National Projects**

In 1964, Brazilian anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro, one of the most autonomous intelligence of Latin America, was forced into exile by the military dictatorship of his country. For almost 30 years he traveled as an expatriate in Latin America, from country to country, Uruguay, Venezuela, Chile, Peru, Mexico, waiting patiently to return to his beloved country and fighting for democracy and social justice. In his journey through Latin America, Darcy Ribeiro taught generations of Latin American social scientists and intellectuals not only his theory of "Anthropology of Civilization" as the fundamental tool to understand our Iberoamerican subcontinent, but especially the practical application of his theory to the gigantic task of emancipating our countries from neo-colonial dependency by developing all their *civilizational* potentials. Darcy Ribeiro's anthropological contributions began in the late fifties with studies of indigenous peoples of Southern and Eastern Brazil. His work with tribal people of Brazil marked a watershed in modern Latin American anthropology. After Ribeiro's studies (see especially Ribeiro 1970) it became impossible for us young Latin American social scientist to keep doing conventional field ethnography disconnected from the regional, national, and international arena as well as synchronically insulated from the historical "long duration." By the early seventies Ribeiro had published some of his most important books (Ribeiro 1970, 1970a, 1971, 1971a, 1973, 1976). In the eighties Darcy Ribeiro wrote short stories and novels where, as he confessed to us anthropologists, he could freely express the poetry of indigenous life without feeling constrained by the logic of formal science. Finally, in 1995 before his death, he was able to finish what he considered his most important contribution to the people of Latin America, a manuscript that he had carried with him for decades of exile in which he exemplified his theory of anthropology of civilization to understand and explain the "Civilization of Brazil" (Ribeiro, 1999).

I met Darcy Ribeiro in 1971, in the island of Barbados, and again in Lima at the beginning of 1973 when he was invited by the revolutionary government of Juan Velasco Alvarado to direct an ambitious project of social and political popular participation sponsored jointly by the Peruvian government and the United Nations' International Labor Office (ILO). At the Centro (Center for the Study of Popular Participation) Darcy Ribeiro convened an international team of social scientists, most of them expatriates and exiled from the dictatorships of Brazil, Argentina and Chile, with the charge of developing a simulation model of what Peru's society would look like when and if all the structural changes and reforms introduced by the revolutionary government would take place. Darcy Ribeiro invited me to coordinate the social science team. I

accepted, leaving the Division of Native Communities of the Jungle in the hands of my anthropologist colleague and friend Alberto Chirif (1976, 1991) who had developed an outstanding knowledge of the Amazonian indigenous communities and their social, political and economic needs. Alberto Chirif was not only morally committed to the indigenous peoples liberation movement but also personally engaged in the movement.

At the Centro I worked with a team of mathematicians, system analysts and social scientists such as Argentine Benjamin Zacharias and Oscar Izcovitch, Brazilian Carlos Senna de Figueiredo (1983), and Italian Carlo Magni. The principal investigator on the U. N. team was Argentine physicist and mathematician Oscar Varsavsky, founder of a pioneering social methodology based on “numerical experimentation” and simulation models. His central contributions to Latin American social sciences and social movement are contained in his theory of “National Projects.” Varsavsky developed the idea of National Projects in 1967 in the process of producing an incisive critique of Latin America’s scientific and cultural colonialism which he identified not only among mainstream scientists but also and especially among thinkers of the leftist opposition. His proposal of a “creative socialist model” of development called for a radical conceptual autonomy of the ‘new’ Latin American thinkers. “Oscar wanted a better world, that we could reach and in which we could live. But it was not enough to dream with such world, it was necessary to construct it. And for this it was not sufficient to act, but it was essential to talk, discuss, imagine it, define it, calculate if it was viable and how it could be made viable...” (Figueiredo 1983: 16-17). Varsavsky was reminding us that recent history showed that is less difficult to attain political power than to use it correctly in order to reach the objectives. A negative characteristic of progressive political programs is precisely the incomplete, vague definition of the objectives in their essential elements and the impreciseness of the means to achieve them (Figueiredo 1983: 17)<sup>1</sup>.

Darcy Ribeiro and Oscar Varsavsky’s pivotal ideas of constructing a “utopian” societal model by analyzing, quantifying, and projecting the effects of structural modifications, reforms and the displacements of the old “distopian” social order, coincided fairly well with my office of Native Communities of the Jungle’s proposal of verifying the consequences of the legal and structural changes introduced by the Law of Native Communities. Armed with these ideas, in mid 1973 I began a participatory research project that aimed at probing the possible effects of structural, legal, and institutional changes and reforms directed at the indigenous communities of the Amazon region. The bill of Native Communities of the Jungle had been already presented to the Revolutionary Government and was being reconciled with other relevant legal instruments, especially in the area of the agrarian reform, the legislation governing the logging and forestry

industry, and the educational, cultural and language policies. With demographic and statistical information input at the national, regional and local level provided by researchers at the National Institute of Planning (Instituto Nacional de planificación-IPN), the National Office for the Evaluation of Natural Resources (Oficina Nacional de Evaluación de Recursos Naturales-ONERN), and the various other relevant government ministries and departments, we were able to initiate the construction of a model of numerical experimentation that would inform us on the broader consequences of the legislative reforms.

An extremely contested and politically hot issue that we needed to define with caution and accuracy was related to the amount and modality of territorial legal recognition and allocation to the approximately sixty indigenous ethnic “nationalities” of the jungle. The ideological battle with economists, agricultural economists, and social planners was fought on the cultural/civilizational terrain. We had to argue against the prevalent notion that land and resources (nature/the world in all its cosmological complexity for the indigenous communities of the Amazon) can be treated exclusively as quantifiable and commoditized entities. For the officials of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Agrarian Reform office the quarter of a million members of indigenous people of the jungle could be granted a certain fixed amount of hectares of land per family according to a formula devised in some abstract ethnocentric social laboratory. At the Centro we played the ideological game on two complementary fronts: a strictly *quantitative* approach of numbers of hectares needed by a native family in order to survive and be productive; and a *qualitative* approach that would look critically at the indigenous definitions of *family, economy, production, land and resource use, sacred values of territory, historical rights*. With the help of mathematicians Oscar Iztovich and Benjamín Zacharías we developed a mathematical model that included all the environmental, agro-ecological, cultural, historical, social and political variables intervening in the definition of the minimum requirements of land allocation for the survival and reproduction of the social group. First, in its indigenous subsistence economy; and second, in its combined integration in the regional and national market economy. To this mathematical model we were going to add the more complex model of “numerical experimentation” and “ethnic project” developed along the theoretical and methodological lines of Oscar Varsavsky. What we intended to do was to use Oscar Varsavsky’s “...abacus to calculate the truth of our dreams.” (Figueiredo 1983: 57).

We never finished our projects at the Centro. The September 11, 1973 bloody military coup against the democratically elected socialist government of Salvador Allende in Chile marked the beginning of the end of the Peruvian Revolution. The Centro was slowly starved politically and economically throughout 1974, and finally shut down just before the counter-

revolutionary military coup of General Morales Bermudez. Juan Velasco Alvarado suffered a fatal coronary illness, the amputation of one leg, and a premature death that spared him the pain of witnessing the systematic dismantling of six years of progressive changes and reforms that had restored hope and self-reliance among the poor of Peru.

What was the balance of the social reforms introduced by the Law of Native Communities of the Jungle and the political initiatives and programs implemented by the Revolutionary Government among the indigenous peoples of the Amazon? Since the very beginning of our engagement in carrying on the revolutionary transformations needed in the Amazon region we postulated that very little could be achieved by delivering to the indigenous communities, from the top of governmental agencies, well intentioned measures and reforms. We insisted that it was absolutely indispensable to induce a massive social mobilization and to facilitate the full participation of the indigenous peoples in all the stages of the planning, operation, and implementation of the political reforms. With the scarce resources assigned to Division of Native Communities of the Jungle we were barely able to conduct a pilot consultation on the proposed bill among a random sample of indigenous communities (Yanesha, Asháninka, Huambiza, Aguaruna, Quechua of the Lower Amazon, Llakwash). With anthropologist friend Richard Ch. Smith, who had worked for years among the Yanesha helping them to organize their own political ethnic organization<sup>xvii</sup>, we were able to gather some feed back on the main issues at stake for most of the indigenous communities of the Andean Jungle. Some friendly Catholic and Protestant missionaries were also involved in the survey and in contributing with their expertise on shedding light on the needs of the indigenous communities in specific regions. The dynamics of social mobilization, consultation, and community participation in the measurements and definition of land and territorial needs required by the law produced a phenomenon of ethnic-politization among many of the indigenous people of the Amazon. Congresses, meetings, communication between different ethnic regions created a sense of commonality and of shared history and political culture that persisted even through the successive regimes of counter-reforms and repression. The Law of Native Communities of the Jungle recognized the rights of indigenous people to form ethnic federations and multiethnic confederations that would be the official interlocutors with the government. And this political opening was understood and used by indigenous communities and organizations to advance their own ethnic agendas and political projects. Besides a series of local indigenous councils, congresses, and assemblies established along the lines of linguistic and ethnic affiliations and geographical proximity, the Peruvian Amazon Indians formed one important national multi-ethnic organization, AIDSESEP (Asociación Interétnica para el Desarrollo de la Selva Peruana, Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Rainforest) and joined COICA (Coordinadora Indígena de la Cuenca Amazónica,



Indigenous Coordinating Body of the Amazon Basin) an international federation of Amazonian Indian movements from nine countries of South America<sup>xviii</sup>. The national and international political mobilization of the indigenous peoples of the Peruvian Amazon had begun and would not abate even under the most severe moments of repression and violence during Alberto Fujimori's regime in the decade of the 1990s.

### **Expatriation Two**

I hope I am paraphrasing correctly José Martí. I became Peruvian in Peru, Latin American in Mexico and hopefully universal in my late years in California. I left Peru somehow in haste at the beginning of 1975. My friend Guillermo Bonfil Batalla had sent me an open invitation to join him in Mexico in his new project as director of the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH). With the Centro in Lima dismantled, the counter-revolution successfully reversing every political achievement of the Velasco's regime and most of my friends and colleagues either in exile or on their way to internal ostracism, I decided to accept Bonfil's encouragement. The decision turned out to be appropriate: a few months and years later both my sister Chiara and my brother Luis were arrested and thrown in jail in an irrational orgy of political persecution of mediocre peoples resented by the resistance and persistence of revolutionary ideals.

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

Guillermo Bonfil Batalla was in the process of de-centralizing the huge bureaucracy of the INAH. He had created a few Regional Centers in the provinces of Mexico where he intended to entice some of the hundreds of anthropologists, archaeologists, linguists, historians, and specialist in colonial art that were concentrated in the central offices of the Institute. The task was

never fully achieved, but the INAH Regional Centers became, nevertheless, important site of research and intellectual activity. Bonfil's suggestion was that I would go to the INAH center in Mérida, Yucatán. As we started to drive toward Yucatán I was already experiencing panic attacks thinking in the hundreds if not thousand of texts that I would have to study in order to approach any possible research project dealing with the Maya civilization. In two days we were camping in Oaxaca under some mangos tree, close to the house of the director of the INAH Regional Center. We never made it to Yucatán. Oaxaca's spell was immediate and incurable. We settled, raised two children, adopted a few other dogs and cats, and became careful and respectful student of one of the most complex, fascinating, and seducing civilization areas of the Americas.

The state of Oaxaca, the third poorest entity of the Mexican Federation, is nevertheless privileged by the presence of some sixteen distinct indigenous ethnic-linguistic groups or "nationalities" that constitute more than half of the total population of the state. In the Central Valley of Oaxaca, a few kilometers to the west of *Lulá'* – the city of Oaxaca according to the Zapotec speakers- the ancestors of contemporary indigenous peoples left clear evidence that more than 10,000 years ago they had domesticated squash (*Cucurbita pepo*), which became one of the basic staple of ancient Mexicans. A few kilometers to the north east of the Valley of Oaxaca, and some centuries later, Mesoamerican Indians domesticated corn (*Zea mays*), beans (*Phaseolus vulgaris*), and avocado (*Persea americana*). The Valley of Oaxaca and the surrounding areas became one of the main centers of plant domestication and agricultural development of the world setting the stage for the unfolding of an astonishing phenomenon of civilization.

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

Coming from my ethnographic study area expertise of small “tribal” people of the Amazon I saw this new task as an overwhelming challenge. I had to reconfigure myself as a scholar of agrarian societies, a specialist in peasant cultures, an ethnohistorian, and possibly in an anthropologist of complex societies. In two years of deeply felt nostalgia for Peru and the security of my Amazonian knowledge, of attempts to grasp some basic Zapotec language – how arrogant of me to think that I was a polyglot- of more of less systematic reading of studies on Mesoamerica, Oaxaca and contemporary Mexico, I produced a manuscript of a few hundred pages that I conceived as the first two chapters of a book titled: *La Aldea y el Estado. Historia Zapoteca (The Village and the State. Zapotec History.)* I wanted to address the 3,000 years of *Bennexon’s* social history with a mixture of methodology: an approach to the Zapotec “long durée” (the long duration) a la Fernand Braudel, and a Marxist analysis of the political economy of the Zapotec people’s ethnic permanence and resistance to pre-colonial state power, to Spanish imperial/colonial state, and finally to the Mexican liberal and post-revolutionary authoritarianism. As I confirmed in my research the core of my argument was that the Zapotec people were able to negotiate, throughout centuries of their existence as an ethnic group, forms of coexistence with the various expressions and manifestation of state power (pre-colonial, Spanish, Mexican) from the safety of their efficient, highly integrated, productive, and “democratically” managed village/community unit. There was very little that any state formation could do to totally subjugate the village, besides taxing it and short of destroying it by eliminating the people or deport them and raze their land. No state formation, not even the liberal modern state, was interested in such a radical outcome. In fact, I could argue that every single state formation that emerged, developed, imposed itself (and eventually was substituted) on the Zapotec village people was interested in maintaining the village autonomy since the whole system success depended economically and politically on the limited sovereignty of each local unit.

The manuscript was cautiously stored in one of my drawers. I was too afraid to submit it to my Mexican colleagues and terrified to have it checked by my Zapotec friends. After a few years I gave a fragment of the manuscript to Zapotec historian and poet Víctor de la Cruz for its publication in the Zapotec journal *Guchachi Reza* (Varese 1982a)<sup>xix</sup>. In the process of my research on Zapotec cultural history I realized comparative interviews with one of the greatest Zapotec/Huave writer and intellectual, Andrés Henestrosa (1992), and with poet and historian Victor de la Cruz. Both intellectuals have been strong advocates of the use of Zapotec language in their writings. Andrés Henestrosa since the early 1930s, when he participated in the foundation the journal *Neza* (The Path) and a few years later in the new version of the journal with the title *Neza Cubi* (The New Path). I was fascinated by the conceptual similarity between Quechua writer José María Arguedas and both Zapotec writers Andrés Henestrosa and Víctor de la Cruz (1984).

Henestrosa, in fact, stated that he was aspiring to be like the 17<sup>th</sup> century Peruvian Quechua writers Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, Huamán Poma de Ayala, and contemporary José María Arguedas: compelling defenders and innovators of their Indian language and Spanish as creative bilingual writers.

### **A Decade of Indian Internationalism**

1979 is a watershed point in the contemporary history of the Latin American indigenous movement and marks the beginning of a decade of increased Indian activism in the international arena. After years of armed struggle against the U.S.-backed thirty year old Anastasio Somoza's dictatorship, the FSLN (Sandinista Front of National Liberation) of Nicaragua liberated most of Nicaragua's territory, announced its socialist program of government, and attempted to extend it to the Atlantic Coast of the country. The story of the relations between the *Mestizo* Spanish speaking Nicaraguans, mostly from the Pacific coast and the central regions of the country, and the Atlantic Coast English speaking black Caribbean *Creoles*, and the Indian *Miskito*, *Sumo*, and *Rama*, is paradigmatic of the deep historical misunderstandings and prejudices that have separated mestizo Latin America from its indigenous peoples. In spite of the initial progressive declarations by the Sandinista leadership about bringing social justice to all the oppressed and exploited people of Nicaragua, the encounter between the Spanish-speaking Nicaraguans and the indigenous people and *Creoles* resulted in a bloody and painful armed confrontation, with Miskito fighters bolstered and militarily supported by the U.S. In 1986 an agreement between the Sandinistas and the *Miskito*, *Sumo*, *Rama*, and *Creoles* was reached on autonomy for the Atlantic Coast. Interestingly, the U.S. government after having meddled for years in the internal affairs of Nicaragua and actively and illegally supported the counter-revolution with weapons and money, did not play any role in securing the agreement (Brysk 2000: 112-116; Hale 1994). With the exception of the Kuna Indians of Panamá who reached a certain degree of ethnic autonomy in the early 1920', this was the first case of the successful attainment of autonomy and ethnic sovereignty by indigenous people in Latin America. The victory, however, came at a very high social and cultural cost for the Indians, the people of Nicaragua, and even for those social scientists, anthropologists, and intellectuals around the world who had supported both the socialist experiment of the Sandinistas and the indigenous people ideals of autonomy.

In the late spring of 1986 I accompanied M.I.T. anthropologist Martin Diskin to the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua in a fact-finding mission under the auspices of the LASA Human Rights and Academic Freedom commission (Diskin et al. 1986). My knowledge of the indigenous people of Nicaragua was vague and based on two direct sources: my brother Luis' involvement in Nicaragua, where he lived for long period of times, being later active in the Sandinista

revolution as an internationalist and as an officer of the Sandinista Army, and my personal long-standing acquaintance with poet and Trappist monk Ernesto Cardenal since we had met in Lima after having corresponded for years precisely about indigenous peoples. What I found during my mission with Martin Diskin was the curt corroboration that issues of indigenous peoples autonomy and cultural sovereignty are not only extremely complex and thorny in terms of internal national politics, but almost intractable when they are turned into international geopolitical issues by external interests, in this case linked to the U.S. paranoid government. President Ronald Reagan's administration had unwillingly contributed to the radicalization of Nicaragua's indigenous peoples –and by extension other Latin American Indians- pushing them to both extremes of the political spectrum. The Miskito's armed involvement with the CIA supported *Contras'* war against the Sandinistas and their well planned media exposure and projection to the international scenario as Indians, made it clear to the rest of the indigenous movement that the time had arisen for all of them to play a pivotal role in the global geopolitics being imposed from the top.

Just one year after the Sandinistas' victory, in 1980, hundreds of indigenous peoples leaders and activists from North, Central and South America were invited by the London-based Bertrand Russell Foundation to present their cases of genocide, ethnocide, discrimination and oppression before the *Fourth Russell Tribunal on the Rights of Indians of the Americas*. This people's tribunal, held in Rotterdam (Netherlands) before an international audience of thousands, had a format of a conventional jury court constituted by plaintiffs (specific indigenous peoples) defendants (countries' government), prosecutors (international lawyers), defense attorneys (who were invited by Russell Tribunal to represent their clients, but did not come), and a jury of thirteen members. I was invited to be a member of the jury together with some old and new colleagues. At the Tribunal jury I met again with Guillermo Bonfil Batalla (Mexico), Darcy Ribeiro (Brazil), Robert Jaulin (France), Eduardo Galeano (Uruguay), and met for the first time other international experts on human rights. The sheer amount of cases presented before the court was overwhelming. The extent and depth of misery, suffering and injustice that were presented by the Indian plaintiffs was staggering. All the governments and states of the Americas were found guilty either by omission, by collusion, or by intentionally acting to eliminate the indigenous peoples as part of their national composition.

The case of the Maya people of Guatemala and the later case of the Quechua, Asháninka, and Yánesha peoples of Peru, became the unfortunate example of genocide and "ethnic cleansing" practiced equally by dictatorial and pseudo-democratic governments of Latin America without any accountability. As in the case of the Mapuche Indians of Chile, who suffered violent repression and massive deportation under Pinochet's military dictatorship, most of the

indigenous peoples' egregious human rights abuses were not acknowledged by the national and international communities nor were the government held accountable for such violations. During 1984 and 1986 I was a direct witness of the effects of the genocidal policy against the Maya people implemented by the Guatemala state and governments. In 1985 I joined a team of social scientists who were conducting a research on Guatemalan refugees in Mexico under the sponsorship of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) and El Colegio de México (Aguayo, Christensen, O'Dogherty, Varese 1987). I visited four resettlement camps in Campeche and Quintana Roo to evaluate the impact of the Mexican government response to the massive inflow of Guatemalan Maya Indians refugees across the border and the consequent relocation of approximately 45,000 of them in the eastern frontier states of Campeche and Quintana Roo. What I found in the camps among the Maya refugees was an amazing level of political and cultural wisdom and the clear consciousness that they, as Indians, were the targeted victims of an intentional policy of ethnic and racist genocide. The civil and military élite of Guatemala, culturally and racially *mestizo/ladino/white*, was perceived by the Maya refugees as foreigners that wanted to take away everything the Maya people had: their lands, their culture, their language, their lives. "What we want ... is not to have our children go through the same suffering as we have ... we aim ... to go back to Guatemala: a changed society, with no discrimination, no disregard of human rights, where every rural inhabitant has the right to work his own land ... as long as there are ... landholders who have large holdings, there will be no equality" (interview with a refugee in Los Lirios camp, in Aguayo et al. 1987: 83).

It can be argued that the increased internationalization of the indigenous movement in the decade of the 1980s resulted by the confluence of external impositions by repressive and authoritarian policies and self-generated needs to respond to these national policies at the international and multilateral arena level. What is evident, however, is that from 1980, when the Consejo Indio de Sud América (CISA) was founded, through the IV Russel Tribunal experience (1980), the Miskito's autonomy struggle (1979-1986), the internationalization of the Guatemalan Maya struggle, the Latin American Indian movement reached a degree of high visibility in the global community and in the eyes of multilateral and intergovernmental institutions that are charged with recommending indigenous peoples development policies to national governments. In 1983 the Indians were able to persuade the U. N. to establish a Geneva-based United Nations Working Group of Indigenous Populations with consulting status. In 1989 the International Labor Organization (ILO) revised the Convention 107 on the Protection of Indigenous Populations established in 1957 and issued the ILO Convention 169 which is in the process of being ratified by the majority of Latin American government. What these two latter international

legal instances are producing is an environment of international legality for the specific national and local Indian claims of social, political, and cultural justice.

It is not an accident then, that the first important national Indian uprising, *El Levantamiento Indígena*, took place in Ecuador in 1990 and forced the government to respond to the sixteen demands announced by the Indian organizations that were essentially related to adjustment pressures imposed by the international financial market (Brysk 2000: 154-158). The Indians were responding to the new pressures of globalized capitalism, even before the various national working classes were able to articulate a diagnostic of the situation. In 1992 the Indian movement organized a global, pan-Indian anti-quincentenary campaign that put on the world TV screens and major publications the decolonizing and anti-globalization struggles of the indigenous peoples. In the same year Rigoberta Menchú received the Nobel Prize for Peace for her international defense of indigenous peoples rights. In 1994 QuechuaAymara Víctor Hugo Cárdenas was elected Vice President of Bolivia. In 1994 the Maya Zapatista insurgency of Chiapas, México sent an awesome wave of hope through the Indian world. A few years later, in early 1997, the Ecuadorian Indian movement Pachacutik would successfully remove from office the corrupt and incapable president of the country. As the year 2003 come to an end the Aymara and Quechua people of Bolivia have removed from power the neo-liberal president of the country through a massive popular uprising, the sacrifice of 65 lives of Indian rebels killed by the army, and the refusal to accept the conditions of neo-colonialism presented by the multinational financial conglomerate and its national proxies as the only way out of poverty.

### **Culture as a Resource**

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

The central strategy of Popular Cultures was to complement, enrich –and eventually displace- the policy and programs of the National Institute of Indian Affairs (Instituto Nacional

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

At the core of Popular Cultures' theory and actions lays the principle

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

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



characteristics of the colonized Indian that gives legitimacy to the system of domination and makes it morally and politically acceptable to the victims –the Indians- and the co-victims –the poor mestizo.

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

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

*koynés*, or “national-ethnic languages.” Thirdly, we concentrated on the recuperation of time, of the revised and re-written history of the group from pre-colonial era to contemporary times. Finally, we motivated a reflection on the recuperation of the future, of the collective will to imagine a social project for the future of the community and the whole ethnic region.

### **Expatriation Three. Indian Diasporas**

I learned a few important lessons from my years working with the indigenous communities of Oaxaca. Certainly, the most important was the confirmation of my readings of Amílcar Cabral and my neo-Gramscian intuition that culture has a tremendous revolutionary potential, but only insofar as it is assumed or re-captured by the individuals and the collectivity in a process of critical and painful self-discovery that absolves from any guilt by association with the colonizer dominant culture or neglect and disrespect for one’s own native heritage. The same self-perceived native culture that looks inadequate and useless to a Serrano Zapotec on his way to economic deportation and migration to the U.S., may re-appear to the consciousness of the Zapotec farm worker in the Central Valley of California or in a sweatshop in Los Angeles as a powerful resource for his survival in a hostile foreign environment and for his reenlistment in the Zapotec diaspora. The same *ñusave* language of the Mixtec migrant in California or Oregon that had caused him to be discriminated against in the Mixteca region of Oaxaca can now be perceived as a tool of defense, a shields that protect the whole Mixtec community in exile and allows for its integration as a new political entity.

My third expatriation, this time to California, was strictly due to family reasons. It was however fortunate that the transition from the Valley of Oaxaca and the Northern Sierra Madre to the Central Valley of California was accompanied by my exposure to the phenomenon of massive Oaxacan indigenous migration to California and the U.S. I followed, not by conscious choice, the same route that Mixtecs, Zapotecs, Chinantecs and Trique Indians from Oaxaca are forced to take in order to survive the extreme poverty of their lands and the abuses of the Mexican political system. But my privileged status of academician, legally crossing the international border with all the required documents, not showing any cultural or phenotypical sign of my ethnicity, deeply challenged my sense of fairness and professional ethics. After a short residence at Stanford University and from my safe academic position at the University of California, Davis I felt for the first time uncomfortable, almost disingenuous, to treat the indigenous Oaxacan migrants as my “field of study.” These are the peoples that had received me generously, that had hosted me and my family with warm festivity, with happiness, with friendly irony, with the aristocratic simplicity of people who own nothing and are ready to give everything. Juan, Filemón, Rufino, Sylvia, Federica, Manuel are not the ethnographer’s

“informants,” they are *compañeros* - and metaphor - in an unequal struggle for the survival of entire indigenous peoples not only in Oaxaca, not only in the diaspora, but in the entire American continent. Can my scholarly convictions be shaken and radically reshaped by these new diasporic, transnational, de-territorialized indigenous people who are questioning with their mere presence and persistence most of the methodological and theoretical assumptions of this anemic discipline that we call anthropology? I do not have an answer. I know that, once more, their struggle is now mine.

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

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<sup>i</sup> Gutierrez, Gustavo, 1971, *Teología de la Liberación*. Lima. Published in English in 1973, *A Theology of Liberation*. New York. Orbis Books.

<sup>ii</sup> Fernando Belaúnde's record on human rights did not improve when 13 years later was elected again President of Peru. At the end of August 2003 Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission issued its voluminous report on two decades of political violence (1980-2000) revealing that more than 69,000 Peruvians died or disappeared in the twenty-year period and three regimes of Fernando Belaúnde (1980-85), Alan García (1985-90) and Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000). Fernando Belaúnde's regime was responsible for the largest number of human rights violations and for 28 per cent of all deaths and disappearances. The Commission's president Dr. Salomón Lerner, sociologist and Chancellor of the Catholic University of Peru, asserted that 75 percent of all victims were indigenous people from the Andes and Amazon jungle confirming the deeply rooted racism and social exclusion of the Peruvian society (see: <http://www.cverdad.org.pe>).

<sup>iii</sup> From Starn, Orin, Carlos Iván Degregori, and Robin Kirk (Eds.) 1995: 265-269

<sup>iv</sup> Aaby, Peter and S. Hvalkof, 1981, *Is God American? An Anthropological Perspective on the Missionary Work of the Summer Institute of Linguistics*. Copenhagen: International Working Group on Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA); London: Survival International.

<sup>v</sup> Jaulin, Robert, 1970, *La paix blanche. Introduction à l'ethnocide*. Paris: Seuil.

<sup>vi</sup> Varese, Stefano, "Considérations d'anthropologie utopique", *Le Temps Modernes*, N. 316, Paris, Nov. 1972c; Varese, S., "Au sujet du colonialisme écologique", *Le Temps Modernes*, N. 321, Paris, Avril, 1973a; Varese, S., "Deux versions cosmogonique Campa: esquisse analytique", *Annales, Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, N. 3, Mai-Juin, 1976, Paris: Libr. A. Colin

<sup>vii</sup> Varese, Stefano, 1972e, *The Forest Indians in the Present Political Situation of Peru*, International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), Document N. 8, Copenhagen.

<sup>viii</sup> Varese, Stefano, 1975, "Les communautés tribales dans la nouvelle politique peruvienne", in Jean Copan (Ed.), *Anthropologie et Imperialism*, Coll. Bibliothèque d'Anthropologie, Dir. Maurice Godelier, Paris: F. Maspero.

<sup>ix</sup> Berreman, Gerald. 1968. "Is Anthropology Alive? Social Responsibility in Social Anthropology," *Current Anthropology*: 391-398. In the same issue of the journal Kathleen Gough published her anti-imperialist position which she reasserted in the nineties, just before her death, in the article "Anthropology and Imperialism Revisited," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 4, August 1990: 1705-1708.

<sup>x</sup> In the 1967 annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, the issue of ethics and anthropology became central to the debate. Kathleen Gough and Gerald Berreman presented a resolution condemning the U.S. war on Vietnam. Margaret Mead opposed such a resolution arguing that political statements were not in the professional interests of anthropology. Young anthropologist Michael Harner, who was conducting field research among

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the Shuar Indian of Ecuador, declared that “Genocide is in the professional interests of anthropology” and the resolution was passed (Gough 1990: 1705)

<sup>xi</sup> Just a few year ago I learned from my older sister Ilaria a story about my “conservative” grandfather that humbled me tremendously. During the war in a deep and dark underground of this basement, called *infernetto- little hell-* my grandfather had hidden and protected a Jewish man from the hatred of nazi-fascists, and by doing so risking his life and the safety of his entire family.

<sup>xii</sup> One of César Calvo’s most representative books is *Las Tres Mitades de Ino Moxo*. 1981. Quito: Proceso Editores.

<sup>xiii</sup> Bonfil Batalla, Guillermo et al. 1970. *De eso que llaman antropología mexicana*. México: Editorial Nuestro Tiempo.

<sup>xiv</sup> Boas, Franz. 1912. “La Escuela Internacional de Arqueología y Etnología Americanas,” *Boletín del Museo Nacional de México*, México, tercera época, Vol 1, N. 10: 187-93.

<sup>xv</sup> Although he never clearly admitted it is obvious that anthropologist and political figure of indigenistic policy Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán was heavily influenced by Marxist literature. See Aguirre Beltrán 1957, 1967 and especially 1976.

<sup>xvi</sup> Brisk, Alison, 2000, *From Tribal Village to Global Village. Indian Rights and International Relations in latin America*, Stanford: Stanford University Press

<sup>1</sup> The thoughts, theoretical, and methodological contributions of Oscar Varsavsky are too complex to be reduced to a few lines; besides Figueiredo (1983) see Varsavsky (1971, 1975) and Varsavsky, Sachs, Figueiredo (1973).

<sup>xvii</sup> In 1967 I founded the Centro de Investigaciones de Selva-CIS (Jungle Research Center) within the Instituto Raúl Porras Barrenechea of the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, Lima. While the CIS was established as an academic unit dedicated to the advancement of ethnological knowledge of the Amazon I was also hoping that it could bring the Amazon indigenous peoples to the attention of the urban community of scholars and politicians. Is in fact at the Centro where I was interviewed for the first time by members of the revolutionary Government and invited to establish the Division of Native Communities of the Jungle. CIS published one issue of a journal/bulletin *KIARIO* (1969) where the first information about the foundation of the *Congreso Amuesha* can be found.

<sup>xviii</sup> AIDSESEP [www.aidesep.org.pe/](http://www.aidesep.org.pe/), COICA [www.coica.org](http://www.coica.org)

<sup>xix</sup> Víctor de la Cruz has recently concluded his doctoral dissertation on the Zapotecs’ cosmology and calendaric thoughts (de la Cruz 2002.). in the spring of 2002 I co-authored with Michael Grofe a paper in which I revisit some of the themes of my unpublished manuscript (Varese and Grofe 2002). “Notas sobre la Territorialidad, Sacralidad y Economía Política Bennizá / Binigulá / Beneshon” that we presented at the Tercera Mesa Redonda de Monte Albán, CONACULTA-INAH, Oaxaca, 26-29 de Junio, 2002.