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Indigenous Peoples and Radical Futures in Global Politics*

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Abstract *Contemporary indigenous movements in global politics are energized by indigenous histories as paradoxical sites of both domination and resistance. Indigenous knowledges work as sites of indigenous epistemologies that take centuries-long subordination by a myriad of forces and turn it into a process productive of transformative politics. For indigenous peoples, this is a question of strategy of effective politics. This article examines how this strategy is made possible and how it challenges modern politics anchoring the hierarchical relations and institutions of local and global orders. It argues that historically indigenous experiences in modernity point to relations of domination and marginalization of indigenous ontologies as well as highlight the centuries-long insurrectional indigenous engagements with the modern world. The article draws on various historical and contemporary indigenous experiences—in the Americas, in Hawaii and at the United Nations—to contend that indigenous activisms in national and transnational settings offer new insights into how local and global political-economic relations and structures can be radically and constructively re-envisioned.*

Introduction

> Down the roots of Conquest our bodies receive the insult. (Meridel Le Seur[1])

On January 18, 2003, the members of the rightwing paramilitary Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) crossed into Panama and massacred four indigenous leaders in the communities of Paya and Pucuro. They first hacked them with machetes and then shot each with bullets to the head. A Kuna activist from the Indigenous Movement of Panama expressed the magnitude of the loss for the communities in forceful poetics. Those killed were:

> spiritual leaders, *sahilas,* which are the ones who know the oral history, those poets of the world, wise men of medicine, the depositories of our cultural heritage, the soul of the community, maximum authorities of the Community of Paya and

* I thank Jon Goldberg-Hiller, Michael Dillon, Clare Hanusz, two anonymous reviewers, and Joseph Peschek, the editor of *New Political Science*, for their comments and suggestions.

[1] Quoted in CRTFCA (Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America), *Dangerous Memories: Invasion and Resistance since 1492* (Chicago, IL: CRTFCA, 1995), p. 208.

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> Pucuro. Four pillars of the of the community—if we compare them with Western culture, a walking library has died, a Supreme Court justice, a minister of culture, a Nobel laureate.[2]

According to the eyewitness reports, shortly before attacking the communities of Paya and Pucuro, AUC forces seized three US citizens—journalist Robert Pelton and two backpackers. All three were later released to the Colombian authorities unharmed. It was later revealed that the AUC had forced Pelton's guide, also a resident of Paya, to guide them to Paya and Pucuro where they executed the indigenous leaders.[3]

At the time, Pelton's abduction made the headlines in the major US media. Not a single report, however, mentioned the full extent of the sequences of events. The focus was on Pelton and the two US citizens. The monumental losses of the two indigenous communities were seen as unworthy of historical recognition.[4]

Together, the event (massacre) and its story (how the event is told) are symbolic of the relations and conditions of power prevailing in indigenous peoples' lives in most parts of the world. The event demonstrates the prevailing indigenous alterity—"exposed and threatened." The story, ordered and represented as history in which no traces of indigenous losses can be found, highlights the real and rhetorical erasures that displace indigenous subjectivities from view. Together, the power to kill and the power to hide killing operate discursively as a total stage where they labor to push away into non-history, as if into the wings, indigenous subjectivities under domination, of which their privileges are the result or the necessary condition.[5]

Yet the success is never guaranteed. "Watch what you grab," warns the aboriginal Salish story about "the journey to the sky"; "it might grab you like just-ripe berries can grab in the guts." In the story, "ripe salmon berries grab the canoe maker and take him right up just as he is reaching to pick them."[6] Unexpectedly, salmon berries reveal their agency through the canoe maker, thereby showing that agency can be assembled and activated in most surprising ways. Even more crucially, in indigenous worlds, the allegorical agency of berries bespeaks the enduring capacity of indigenous peoples to act, to resist, and even to kill as they strive to exist in this world.

Almost a year after the Colombian paramilitaries massacred the Paya and Pucuro elders in Panama in 2003, in April of 2004, the news of yet another

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[2] Nicaragua Solidarity Network of Greater New York, "Panama: Paramilitaries Murder Kuna Leaders," *Weekly News Update on the Americas* 678, January 26, 2003.

[3] *Ibid*.

[4] For example, see: CBS News, "2 Journalists Kidnapped in Colombia," January 23, 2003; *Christian Science Monitor*, "US Journalists Face New Risks Covering Colombia," January 28, 2003, available online at: <http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/0128/p07s01-woam.html> ; CNN, "Americans Freed, 2 Journalists Still Captive in Colombia," January 24, 2004, available online at: <http://www.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/americas/01/24/colombia.journalists/> ; Nicole Davis, "Grabbed in the Gap," *National Geographic Adventurer*, April 23, 2004, available online at: <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/adventure/0304/q_n_a.html> .

[5] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), p. 121.

[6] Roger Dunsmore, *Earth's Mind: Essays in Native Literature* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico, 1997), pp. 30–31.

massacre involving indigenous people reached the outside world. But this time, the killers were "Indians." The reports stated that "on April 18, Brazil's Federal Police entered the indigenous Cinta Larga reserve to collect the bodies of 29 diamond-seekers killed on April 7 by members of the Cinta Larga indigenous nation ... Survival International (SI) stated that the conflict erupted after the miners responsible for killing several members of the Cinta Larga nation last year returned to the reserve."[7] Unlike the massacre of the Paya and Pucuro elders, this incident was reported widely in the media the world over.[8] Tragic as it was, miners' deaths and how the event was reported highlight significant realities conditioning contemporary indigeneity.

As violently demonstrated in both events in Panama and Brazil, contemporary indigeneity, though increasingly more resilient, remains in a condition of marginality in modernity. It resides in a "blurry zone" in relation to the institutions and subjectivities of modernity. It is an expression of what Giorgio Agamben would call modern "relations of ban" in which indigeneity still remains captive to the logic and fortunes of the territorial nation-state system and global capitalism.[9]

Historically, the roots are traceable to the 15th century Columbian expansionist visions, which from the beginning enacted a specific politics of encounter representing and treating indigenous peoples into what Agamben calls "bare lives,"[10] as though the indigenous communities were without their own rich and textured civilizations and political systems. Thus "politically unqualified," indigenous peoples came to be subjected to regimes of ban—power relations that denied them any historical political status while also holding them in the thrall of the expansionist orders. Ultimately, developed further in the next section, the "relations of ban" operate as mechanisms of domination and control over indigenous communities while declaring them to be autonomous or even sovereign. This paradoxical situation—domination and denial—works as a "ban" or a "bar" on autonomous indigenous agency. Not surprisingly, all around the world, indigenous membership in the national communities remains ambiguous and indigenous subjectivities are regularly called into question or negated altogether. Their condition of vulnerability is an open secret known to all but recognized by few.

Still, this vulnerability need not be the terminal statement on contemporary indigeneity. From the beginnings of the Columbian era, indigenous peoples have struggled to accommodate and translate the Conquest's premeditated orientations into relations in support of their visions. They have formed counter-spaces, or "heterotopias" within modern orders.[11] Where much of the rest of the world

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[7] Nicaragua Solidarity Network of Greater New York, "Brazil: Indigenous Kill Miners," *Weekly News Update on the Americas* 742, April 18, 2004.

[8] For example, see CBS News, "35 Dead in Clash over Diamonds?" April 19, 2004, available online at: <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/04/19/world/main612690.shtml>. See also Mario Osova, "Violence Stains National Day of Indigenous Peoples," *Inter Press Service*, April 19, 2004. Carmen Gentile, "Brazil: Killings were Warning, Says Chief," *United Press International*, April 23, 2004. Associated Press, "35 Feared Killed by Amazon Indians," *Guardian*, April 16, 2004.

[9] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 8–10.

[11] Heterotopia is a kind of minority space as conceptualized in Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16:1 (1986), p. 23.

was carried away under promises of Enlightenment and Modernity within the territorially-bound body of the nation and the state, the domination imposed on indigenous worlds paradoxically helped preserved indigenous epistemologies as distinctly extra-modern knowledges and practices by pushing them into the underground. Today, rich and varied, these subterranean knowledges are the sources reactivated in the emergent space of critical dialogues. Indigenous epistemologies, and the historical struggles they reanimate over space and time, continue to extend into the world in support of progressive visions of the future.

The nexus between indigenous peoples' prevailing vulnerability and their enduring political capacities demands critical attention beyond the simple positions of either celebrating indigenous capacities or lamenting their passing. Only an inquiry attentive to both conditions reveals the historical closures and limits as well as the contemporary openings and shifts in broad political grounds. A different political calculus is in order.

Clearly, given the centuries of complex histories, it is difficult to articulate such a calculus through anything but experiential "fragments of struggles" from indigenous worlds. Yet, arguably, even the fragments can instructively map to a larger story, thereby revealing historical conditions that have engendered indigeneity as a field of politics of "ban" and as a different, even alternative, "worlding" inspiring fresh political visions in the world.[12] Creative tensions abound where critical dialogues appear both necessary and immanent. The Kanaka Maoli (Hawaiian) poet Imaikalani Kalahele shows a way to begin such a task in the metaphor of "twisting":

> Twisted tight the patterns of our ancestors revealed.
> Twisted tight the shape will come ...[13]

Twisted tight new shapes of indigeneity figure into local and global politics as sites of critical dialogues. Politically and normatively, for the dialogues to have any meaning and acquire any practical power, they have to be suffused with an attention to indigenous epistemologies in heterotopic sites of life within the dominant geopolitical organization. They have to affirm the historical and contemporary legitimacy of indigenous knowledge systems and the struggles, which have encountered and negotiated dominant epistemologies in what Glissant calls the "processes of denaturing introduced by the conquerors."[14]

In all this, care must be shown to comprehend indigeneity not as a monolithic experiential condition in the world to be simply found and represented. We know that indigenous worlds are rich and varied, and cannot be encapsulated into universalizing categories. At the same time, casting

[12] Noel Castree, "Differential Geographies: Place, Indigenous Rights and 'Local' Resources," *Political Geography* 23 (2004), pp. 134–135. Ronald Niezen, *The Origins of Indigenism: Human Rights and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 132–133 and the introduction.

[13] Imaikalani Kalahele, *Kalahele: We Remember Now* (Honolulu, HI: Kalamaku Press, 2002), p. 82.

[14] Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997), p. 8.

indigeneity as a purely local contingent condition in each case is reductionist, in denial of experiential commonalities historically forced upon indigenous peoples, beginning with mercantilist colonialisms and continuing through capitalist modernities. It is important to avoid essentialization of indigenous cultures and identities. However, it is equally significant to listen to and take seriously when indigenous people assert what they see to be their voices and visions. Clearly, all identities are historically developed and are ultimately political and cultural performances. Yet as they cohere, they also inform and guide people in their particular and collective struggles. Given the negations visited upon their histories, more than others, indigenous struggles compel a political calculus that registers indigenous identity practices. This is the political-ethical sensibility intended in the article, informing three central aims.

The first aim is to highlight and challenge the underlying thinking on indigenous peoples across much of the world. Even now, the Columbian prejudices historically imposed onto indigeneity are projected in much of the world in political and cultural orientations toward indigenous peoples. The second aim is to highlight and project indigenous agency in contemporary local politics and in the global arena. Many around the world hold that native peoples' self-consciously indigenous identities have long been captured and neutralized in modernity's hegemonic projects of secular nationhood and sovereign statehood. Yet the contemporary indigenous activisms belie this view, attesting to the endurance of indigenous worldviews. The third aim is to intimate ways in which indigenous visions may be relevant to progressive political movements. Their refusal to be fully swallowed up in the primacy of modernity should be taken seriously. They are part of what Tom Mertes calls "a movement of movements" gathering in support of progressive transformations in the political-economic landscapes.[15] Indigenous peoples' historical subordination paradoxically affords them a greater capacity to think imaginatively about possible alternative futures.

The three cases I examine below represent spaces of struggles exemplary of contemporary indigeneity as a condition of both the ongoing vulnerability of indigenous peoples and their enduring capacities to shape their lives and ours in critical dialogues. These are the Zapatista rebellion in Mexico, the native Hawaiian sovereignty movement and the collective activism of indigenous peoples at the United Nations and beyond. Together, these movements shed light on local, national and global dimensions of indigeneity as expressions of historical "relations of ban" but also as productive sites of a new political dialogue. The roots of the potential dialogue, as the roots of the Conquest, lie deep in the shapes and patterns of the history of encounters.

From the Roots of Conquests toward the Radical Politics of Indigeneity

The political poetics of Meridel Le Seur's work expresses the nature of the history of encounters, including its dominant trajectories or its directions of power. Down the "roots of the conquest" she reminds, indigenous bodies continue to receive the "insults." Put more prosaically, indigenous peoples' contemporary vulnerability

[15] Tom Mertes, *A Movement of Movements: Is Another World Really Possible?* (London: Verso, 2004).

reflects a specific historical political ontology of domination and control—following Giorgio Agamben's conceptualization, "relations of ban," which brought indigenous worlds under specific political, economic, and cultural penumbra centered around European modernity, yet denied or banned their authenticity and autonomous trajectories. From the Renaissance to Enlightenment to Modernity, it is through the ascent of repressive relations of power that indigenous peoples were apprehended as objects of Europe's interests and for Europe's felicity. Indigenous spaces, otherwise primarily shaped in spatial openness or transversality, were captured through practices of rising sovereign territoriality. The resulting political relations of power and hierarchy structured Europe's encounters, among others, with indigenous worlds, ultimately enabling Europe to emerge as the civilized center, the desirable "rule" in the world, while relegating indigenous peoples to the rule's "exception" to be held in the captivity of the "relations of ban."

For Agamben, the relations of ban rest on a sovereign politics of inclusion and exclusion or the rule/exception distinction that creates and empowers a hierarchy across forms of life: those that are "deserving of protection and privileging and those that are not,"[16] those that represent the desirable trajectories of history and those that are considered politically inconsequential to history. This distinction is normatively crucial; it conditions the ethical boundaries in politics. It orders varied human landscapes into spaces of sovereign power extending over those qualified to be properly political bodies and spaces where sovereign power "suspends itself."[17] Those excluded from or deemed as being outside of the sovereign power's ambit are treated as the "remainder or excess" in relation to the politically qualified populations. It is at that juncture that the excluded are regarded and treated as exceptions, humans in the primordial "bare" sense of existence, but "no-longer humans"[18] in the sense of the dominant political and cultural subjectivities and qualifications. They can be cast aside, but also exposed and threatened in the "sovereign ban" imposed on their existence. As Prem Rajaram points out, "to cast outside in Agamben's terms, is not to dispense carelessly, but to deliberate a place outside, a political space of exception, and to hold in a relation of the norm."[19] As Agamben writes, it is at once by "excluding bare life from and capturing it within the political order that, the state of exception actually constitutes, in its very separateness, the hidden foundation on which the entire system rests."[20]

The rule, the dominant political order, is therefore dependent on the issuing of some humans as embodiments of "bare life" and declaring them as the rule's exception, for it is only by separating and including "bare life" as exception to itself that the political order can claim and take on its historically privileged meanings and positions. In the process, it acquires its sovereign normative powers, delineates sovereign space, and articulates and justifies political projects and programs. All the while the exception is held in thrall, at once excluded from

[16] Prem Rajaram, "Dystopic Geographies of Empire," *Alternatives*, 31:4 (October–December, 2006), p. 480.

[17] Agamben, *op*. *cit*., pp. 17–29, 27–29.

[18] *Ibid*., note 16, pp. 475–506.

[19] *Ibid*.

[20] Agamben, *op*. *cit*., p. 9.

and captured by the political order. In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben points to this insidious entrapment.

> He who has been banned is not, in fact, simply set outside the law and made indifferent to it but rather *abandoned* by it, that is, exposed and threatened.[21]

The insidiousness of the relation lies in the fact that the relation of ban is not a final abandonment, leaving the excepted to his/her own infinity of experiences. Rather, it continues to keep the abandoned in its ontological and epistemic thrall. It "applies in no longer applying."[22] Agamben suggests that this logic of relations of ban has animated much of Euro-Western histories since the Greek and Roman Antiquities.[23] Following Agamben, I argue that the same logic, with its relations of ban, has been at work in Euro-Western encounters with indigenous peoples since the inception of the Colombian era in the Americas and beyond. European encounters with native peoples regularly activated the strategy of the rule/exception distinction by mobilizing an array of metaphors, symbols, classifications and themes, ranging from the "monstrous" and "savage" to "exotic "and "innocent" to "backward" and "traditional." Indigenous lives were characterized as "bare lives" in "state of exception" in relation to Europe as the normative "state of rule," the proper, if not inexorable, civilizational trajectory in history.

It is this way that historically indigenous peoples were captured but yet simultaneously incorporated into Europe's colonizing imaginaries as an exception. Indigenous vulnerabilities were further exacerbated where the spaces of inclusion and exclusion regarding indigenous people were shifted into "zones of indistinction"[24] with respect to the boundaries of their juridical status or the boundaries of the relation of ban to the juridical order. "It is literally not possible," writes Agamben "to say whether the one who has been banned is outside or inside the juridical order." Ultimately, the condition of ban is a relation, one that links in separation, incorporates in distancing, or includes in excluding. Agamben argues that the word "ban" itself reflects the intimate intrinsic, if concealed, relation between the banned and the instigator of the ban. "In Romance languages," he states, "to be banned originally means to be 'at mercy of,' 'at one's own will,' 'freely' and 'to be excluded' and also 'open to all, free'."[25]

Through this dynamic, indigenous peoples were historically issued as objects of power subject to the mercy of others, "Christianizing," "colonizing," "enlightening," and finally "modernizing." The boundaries with respect to their

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[21] *Ibid*., p. 29.

[22] *Ibid*., p. 28.

[23] Agamben suggests that a foundational instance of such a political mode is found in the Greek Antiquity in the political distinction made between two forms of life: *zoe* as "bare life" or the simple act of living in itself and *bios* as "political life" which is organized through and through with normative intentions and purposes. In the *zoe* (bare life)/*bios* (political existence) binary, *zoe* emerges as the exception, that which lacks meaningful political capacity, language (logos) sufficient for civilization and political sovereignty. In relation, *bios* is the presumed site of political intellect, language, and sovereignty, that is, the site of the *polis*. The *bios*' relation to *zoe* is concealed in the active relegation of *zoe* as a site of "bare life" devoid of politics, which otherwise has its voice and agency. *Ibid*., p. 9.

[24] *Ibid*., p. 19.

[25] *Ibid*., p. 29.

place in this world were blurred to cast them as "voiceless" and "worldless." Where that happened successfully, indigenous worldliness was denied altogether and "anything goes against Indians" became the prevailing "blurry" rule.

It is instructive that, in spite of the epochal shifts in Europe from Renaissance to Enlightenment to Modernity, the relations of ban have remained central to encounters with indigenous peoples. The Columbian era, from Columbus' arrival in the Caribbean to the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas, Mexico, is saturated with the manifestations of intentionalities that deploy the same logic of "sovereign power," that works to cast indigeneity into spaces of exception, thus into relations of ban, all the while striving to obscure the roots and mechanisms of the relation. This form of sovereign power was and remains imperial. For all the modern claims on emancipated humanity, it continues to shape contemporary indigenous lives even as it rhetorically valorizes indigeneity.

The endurance of the historical logic is especially troubling against the background of a proliferation of developments in the 1990s, heightening the awareness about the status of indigenous peoples in the world. From the UN's declaration of 1995–2004 as the Decade of Indigenous Peoples to the UN's Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 1994 to Rigoberta Menchu receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 to the Zapatista rebellion in Mexico in 1994, developments appeared to both solidify the political ascent of indigenous movements in the global arena and signal their growing radicalization.

While a new balance of relations started to form as indigenous peoples around the world began asserting their visions, much also has remained steady. Global giants of "finanscapes," for example, still dig deep in indigenous lands, as seen in the Cinta Larga case, while settlers and miners supply an impoverished company to extractive operations. Further, as in the Kuna case, the shadowy paramilitary extensions of states and transnational giants still prey on indigenous communities with impunity. Finally, the critical global attention on the struggles of indigenous peoples, due largely to the Zapatista rebellion, has subsided as the rebellion has been transformed into a protracted struggle. The status quo reflects the still strong hold of relations of ban on indigenous lives.

The Kuna and the Cinta Larga cases evince that the dominant order rarely affirmatively protects indigenous peoples and their interests from transgressions (such as killing, illegal mining, deforestation, and displacements from their lands). Indigenous strategies are shaped concomitantly. If, as Marta Silva Vito Gaurani put it at the inauguration of the UN indigenous decade in 1994, "in Brazil the murder of Indians does not shock anymore,"[26] for the Indians, the murder of miners stops being extraordinary in 2004. Ironically, even the radicalization of native tactics and strategies is expressive of the enduring legacy of relations of ban through the ages.

Not surprisingly, "Indians" relate cautiously to the logic and language of modern statism and territoriality. They engage the forces surrounding their lives, but they also strive to assert their alternative visions expressed in indigenous epistemologies and cosmologies. From political and environmental catastrophes to economic devastations, the real and perceived crises of modernity lend further

[26] Her speech is in Eric Langer and Elana Munoz (eds), *Contemporary Indigenous Movements in Latin America* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2003), p.188.

legitimacy to their ancestral visions. In turn, this legitimacy compels the dominant orders.

Indigeneity is being reissued under these conditions of contemporary globality, or what Michel Foucault and Edouard Glissant together might call heterotopic transversality—a heterogeneous and polyvalent spatial-political unity issued out of the interactions of multiple political and economic spaces and identities, where all spaces reflect their own plurality of projects and programs, all coexist and interrelate, but, as Foucault argues, are neither fully reducible to one another nor finally superimposable on one another.[27]

Historically, transversality signifies the permissive spatial realm, the geographical openness in which the politics of ban was conceived and implemented *vis-à-vis* indigenous communities. As Glissant states, in transversality, the relations of power exploded into networks engendering and revealing the totality of the world around a new set of hierarchies. In transversality, too, the discoverers and the discovered found themselves in new "commonplaces," where the openness of temporal and spatial horizons was supplanted with a new territoriality confining and controlling places and people. Places became territories to be seized and governed and peoples became resources to be administered and exploited. Ultimately, what began in the commonplaces grew into the relations of ban. These relations in turn supported the ascent of sovereign territoriality culminating in the modern states system. Yet, the resulting dominance of sovereign territoriality never acquired a full hegemonic status with the world's indigenous communities. In fact, somewhat unexpectedly, it has fueled indigenous heterotopic spaces which, as Foucault reminds, exist within territorial orders yet remain largely in conflictual proximity to their dominant projects and programs. This tension is largely a reality around the world.

Given this tension, indigeneity has to enter into contemporary politics as a fully legitimate trajectory. Where the indigenous voices rearticulate the "Indian" into the "voices preserved," the sensations kept, and memories activated, the rule/exception division is made to reveal the limits of its claims that the modern rule of "free-market" ideologies, nations, states, and territoriality is the absolute exhaustion of feasible economies and polities in the world. Thus exposing the rule and recuperating the onto-cosmological otherness of the self, the "Indian" is once again transformed into "people," and as De Certeau suggests, can then show the way to a "different place (different, not opposite)," for he/she still comes from a different place.[28] The "different place" is the heterotopic place indigeneity represents within the predominant geopolitical map. Therein lies the normative import of indigenous struggles. The dynamism of their struggles points to possibilities of alternative visions in the world. "Indigenous communities," writes Antonio Rodriguez, "is where a different form of human relations is being built."[29]

The momentous history that has energized the subordination of indigenous communities has been centuries in the making. Yet, its enduring legacy is being

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[27] See Glissant, *op. cit*. and Foucault, *op. cit*.

[28] Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other* (Minneapolis and London: Minnesota University Press, 1997), p. 229.

[29] Kintto Lucas, "Ecuador: Indigenous Movement on the Rise," *Inter Press Service*, October 30, 2002.

challenged by the exhilaration of indigenous struggles. Both the promises and the limits of the new political dialogue are revealed in these struggles.

Memory Opens to Resistance: Zapatistas and the Politics of New Indigeneity

Nearly 500 years after the Castilian Spanish brought the Maya of Southern Mexico into their colonial proximity, when in 1994 the Tzetzal and Tzotzil Maya rebelled once more in Chiapas, Mexico, they employed the language of transversality in temporal and spatial senses. On the one hand, they traced their rebellion through the histories of constant uprisings to the indigenous bodies marked with the violence of colonialism and statism. On the other hand, they cast a horizontal net linking their struggles with the struggles of others throughout the world. In both ways, both temporality and spatiality were liberated from the limits of modern territoriality. In the formulation of the rebellion, memory as the history of the contemporary Maya Indian body worked to blur the meaning and place of time—the time of time in life—thus to rescue time from its linear chronological captivity. Liberation came in confusion about the concept of time, as the Subcomandante Marcos attests remembering his early experiences with the Maya in the Lacondan Jungle:

> You were not always sure about which era they were speaking; when they spoke they could be talking about a story that happened that very week, or that happened five hundred years earlier, or even when the world began.[30]

In Maya time, memory, representing trans-temporal ancestral, mythical, and "civilizational" experiences, is present as an agent in all its cosmological senses. To remember is to "re-member"[31] the past in the present, rendering it an agent of the present. Memory thus allows the Maya to escape the limits of the modern enunciations of time, place and space. In contrast, in the modern realist concept of time, "memory is considered unreliable" because it produces history as an unstable text, "a text without an order or unity."[32] In the modern sense, "memory is to remember, in a chronological order,"[33] a series of events already past, in a way that reflects the unity of action and direction which created them in the first place. For the Maya, however, the sense of time is not merely mimetic, but syncretic; it refracts the present and past in light of the prevailing political and social conditions of their lives. It is plural-rhythmic. Multiple temporal rhythms co-inform the Maya, guiding their subjectivities and relations within and interactions without.

An instructive example of Maya time was manifested during the negotiations between the Zapatistas and the Mexican government officials. When the government representatives complained about the Maya negotiators taking too long to consider points of negotiations, the Maya replied by indicating that time is experienced differently in their lives. The Commandante David recounts:

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[30] Nicholas Higgins, "The Zapatista Uprising and the Politics of Cultural Resistance," *Alternatives* 25 (2000), p. 364.

[31] Dunsmore, *op. cit.*, pp. 48–49.

[32] Richard Flores, "History, 'Los Pastores', and Shifting Poetics of Dislocation," *Journal of Historical Society* 6:2 (1993), pp. 176, 178.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 176.

> We as Indians have rhythms, forms of understanding, of deciding, of reaching agreements. And when we told them that, they replied by making fun of us; well then, they said, we don't understand why you say that because we see you have Japanese watches, so how do you say you are wearing indigenous watches.[34]

"We use time, not the clock,"[35] was the response. There is clearly a de-linking of the indigenous time from the modern time in these remarks. The Maya time is subject to a different normative cultural and social economy. Time is associated with patterns, cycles, and processes that are integral to the politico-ethical imperatives in the community. It is not abstracted and removed from sites of societal imperatives. Time is not external to life: it does not rule over life; rather, it becomes meaningful in the processes of life. This way, the Maya time is protean, reaching far back in times past and expanding horizontally in the present. It is simultaneously a function of past, present, and future—it is trans-temporal.

The Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas captivated many around the world in part because of the remarkable display of indigenous temporality as an alternative rhythm in timing time. The alternative timing was evident not only in the dynamics of negotiations. It became evident also in the language of the Maya negotiations, especially in their public pronouncements. The poetics of their communiqués, which creatively rearticulated the political, in effect, demonstrated the political rigor of a different language informed by discrepant Maya sense of trans-temporal time. For example, explaining their vision, the Maya stated:

> In our dreams we have seen another world. A true world ... It was from ahead that it [the true world] came, it was from the next phase that we're giving. It was in this dream that we began to go towards achieving that this dream would sit at our table, illuminate our house, grow in our fields, fill the hearts of our children, clean our sweat, heal our history, and for everyone it would go.[36]

In this syncretic reactivation (or co-activation) of the past, the present, and the future in their lives, the Maya are able to speak through a set of indigenous rhythms, referents and markers that cast differently what are otherwise familiar issues—democracy, autonomy, land reform, economic justice, political changes, and respect for cultural plurality and indigenous peoples. For example, repeated references to the "heart" in the context of the memory (of ancestors, myths, stories, and symbols) produce the "political" from a different plane. Consider the following Zapatista communiqué which rearticulates and re-inflects democracy as a path of the rhythms of the "true heart."

> Our path was always that the will of the many be in the hearts of the men and women who command ... Thus was born our strength in the jungle, he who leads obeys if he is true, and he who follows leads through the common heart of true men and women. Another world came from afar so that this government was named and this work gave the name of "democracy" to our way.[37]

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[34] Jen Couch, "Imagining Zapatismo: The Anti-globalization Movement and the Zapatistas," *Communal/Plural* 9:2 (2001), p. 249.

[35] *Ibid*., p. 249.

[36] SIPaz Report, December 2003, p. 7.

[37] Quoted in June Nash, "The Power of the Powerless in the New World Order: A View from Chiapas," *Indigenous Affairs* 1 (January/February/March 1995), p. 23.

Just as with democracy, in the Zapatista Maya movement, a whole host of issues, ranging from autonomous self-making and participatory governance, to poverty, and ecological devastations, was thrown open for contemplation. These issues lost their territorial markers, thus highlighting broad subalternity—indigenous and non-indigenous—the world over.

Since 1994, the Zapatista Maya and allied indigenous groups have been living in resistance. Much has been written, celebrating the resistance. However, little has been said about the difficulties. Undoubtedly the Mexican government's intransigence is the foremost challenge facing the Zapatistas. Further, competing interests of various indigenous groups, actively cultivated by the government, limit the reach of the Zapatista political influence. Even worse, there have been constant tension and sporadic violence between the government supported Maya communities and the Zapatista communities. Given the local and national realities, in the last year, the Zapatistas have focused on the building of the "true world" they had previously evoked in 2003 when they had declared the formation of the "Juntas of Good Government" in the Zapatista Autonomous Rebel Municipalities. For the Zapatista Maya, this represents a sharpening and intensification of their autonomy project. As a SIPaz report puts it, this new move is a "challenge to the official power by assuming the government's role in all its scope (education, health, justice, development, etc.)."[38] Somewhat surprisingly, the Mexican government's response has been one of resigned acquiescence to the shift in power relations. Reflecting this position, the governor of Chiapas suggested that the "Juntas of Good Government could be able to frame themselves in the Constitution."[39] Prevailing circumstances issue a paradoxical politics.

On the one hand, the challenges still abound to the Zapatista Maya efforts to free themselves from the relations of ban. The governor of Chiapas, after all, can still presume to have the sovereign power to declare the Zapatista autonomous communities as being either within or outside the law. In many ways, the line between the Zapatistas' inclusion within the law and exclusion from it is still blurry and always shifting. In the "zone of indistinction," the Maya still appear exposed and threatened.

On the other hand, the grounds of indigenous politics in Mexico and beyond are shifting permanently, however slightly and imperceptibly, emboldening indigenous peoples. The latest Zapatista initiative, the "Other Campaign," aspires to a much broader role politically and economically in Mexico and beyond.[40] For example, during Mexico's presidential election of 2006, Zapatista representatives crisscrossed Mexico to promote "networks of alternatives to neoliberal capitalism" and its governmental expressions, both in Mexico and abroad. Their ideas unmistakably resonate in progressive struggles in the rest of Latin America from Bolivia to Ecuador to Venezuela.

The worldwide resonance of the Zapatista movement showed the power of indigenous memory-as-agent to disarticulate the dominant geopolitical map of the world and the nation-statist contents it supports. The Zapatista and other indigenous movements inspire and guide transversal solidarities in "placing time"

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[38] SIPaz Report, December 2003, p. 1.
[39] *Ibid*., pp. 1–2.
[40] SIPaz Report, "The Other Campaign: A Provocation of Imagination," October 2005, p. 7.

and "timing place" differently. They are opening up and intensifying expansive heterotopias everywhere, but more crucially, across the modern statist territoriality.

Of Aina and Aloha: Kanaka Maoli and Indigenous Revival in Hawaii

The struggle of Hawaii's indigenous people, the Kanaka Maoli, certainly represents the expansion of the heterotopias of resistance. To many across the world, to speak of Hawaii in terms of indigeneity might be surprising given that many imagine Hawaii through stories of paradise in the Pacific. "Golden beaches, golden people, the sun, sand, sea, surf, blue skies, palm trees,"[41] and friendly natives together animate the travel imageries that conjure up Hawaii as a paradise on earth. However, for the Kanaka Maoli the paradise story is not a story of paradise simply found and represented. Rather, it is a façade behind which lies the story of their massive political, cultural, and cosmo-ecological displacements.

Historically, Kanaka Maoli trace the story's genesis to the 19th century encounters with colonial projects. Specifically, they locate it in 1893 when these encounters culminated in the overthrow of the indigenous Hawaiian Kingdom by a group of American and European businessmen.[42] The overthrow precipitated the process by which Hawaii was made into an outlying possession for imperial geopolitical and economic interests. More importantly for the indigenous people of the islands, the overthrow intensified the loss of control over their own lives. By the time Hawaii was annexed by the United States in 1898, the Kanaka Maoli had been dispossessed in political, cultural, and economic senses. Beyond the loss of political sovereignty, they had also lost their authorship in social and cultural arenas, including the unfettered use of *olelo*, their indigenous language. Ironically, this history of dispossessions and displacement was hidden beneath the emergent paradise story with friendly and content natives.

Stories, suggests de Certeau, organize history through the displacements they obscure or hide. Yet, the political, cultural, and economic displacements remain in positions of conflictual relations with the dominant stories, constantly laboring to reverse their work.[43] Hawaii and the paradise story reflect these dynamics in the lives of the native Hawaiians. While the "paradise" story has translated into massive displacements, those whom the paradise story has placed in a relation of domination managed to preserve their knowledges, thus to "re-member" themselves as agents.[44] Indigenous Hawaiians increasingly assert ancestral cosmo-ecological knowledge in Hawaii, particularly in opposition to unfettered capture and exploitation of their culture and lands by transnational capitalist interests. This re-positioning has a profound effect in meditating the Hawaiian resistance. Dr. Kekuni Blaisdell, a Kanaka Maoli activist, highlights this cosmological interdependence:

> We listen to the wind and the ocean and we observe the clouds and the rainbows, as well as the fish and birds, . . . and they guide us in our thinking and in our acts, and

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[41] Quoted in Nevzat Soguk, "Incarcerating Travels: Travel Stories, Tourist Orders, and the Politics of the Hawaiian Paradise," *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* 1:1 (2003) 35, pp. 29–53.

[42] Noenoe Silva, *Aloha Betrayed* (Durham: Duke University, 2004).

[43] de Certeau, *op. cit.*, pp. 118–120.

[44] David Baker, "Ea and Knowing in Hawaii," *Critical Inquiry* 23 (1977).

> our chants simulate, our chants take on the great forces of our cosmos. So we Kanaka Maoli are one, we are *lokahi* with everything in our cosmos, inherently, because we have the same parents and therefore we are all siblings and therefore we must respect, revere, everything in our environment.[45]

Locating themselves increasingly on this different plane of consciousness, Hawaiians strive to recast their world in a different light. Not unlike the Maya in Chiapas, they practice time and place differently to energize their struggles. The Hawaiian poet Imaikalani Kalahele expresses this dynamic practice:

> Ho'omakaukau ... [get ready]
> the call begins
> the grounds are ready
> the ocean awaits
> and Lono speaks
> Pa [finished].[46]

The Kanaka Maoli struggle has intensified in the last three decades, characterized as the "Sovereignty Movement."[47] Activities have proliferated on all fronts, catapulting the Sovereignty Movement into a significant actor in Hawaii's politico-cultural landscapes. These activities disrupt the narration and the practice of the paradise story. Several years ago, a chill went through the tourist industry when some Hawaiian groups initiated demonstrations at Hawaii's airports to educate tourists about Hawaii's contested history and call for indigenous sovereignty over the islands.[48] Subsequently, the state of Hawaii banned such demonstrations in airports. Reflecting the flexible mode of activism, the Hawaiian militancy shifted to other sites of symbolic and substantive meaning. Protests at the State Capitol are now common occurrences. Huge banners appear suddenly on the streets, protesting, explaining, or advocating. Like their guerilla counterparts, the banners' authors move swiftly across Honolulu's urban maize. The University of Hawaii at Manoa has become the cauldron where Hawaiian militancy theorizes itself as a "movement of movements." Kanaka Maoli public intellectuals confront the status quo relentlessly. In early 2006, 600 intellectuals and activists gathered in front of the university president's office to oppose the patenting of several varieties of Hawaiian taro plants. Referring to themselves as the "Children of Taro," participants protested the selling of *mana* (wisdom, and knowledge) that taro represents for native Hawaiians. "We will join people from around the world in fighting ownership of peoples," said a *kumu hula*, master of hula, reflecting the convergence of consciousness with similar struggles around the world, such as the Maya and the maize (corn) in Mexico.[49]

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[45] See Kekuni Blaisdell, "Kumulipo/Hawaiian Cosmos," available online at: <http://www.alohaquest.com/scripts/kumulipo.htm> .

[46] Kalahele, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

[47] For organizations active in the sovereignty movement, see "L I N K S to Hawaiian Sovereignty and Culture Resources on the Web" available online at: <http://www.hawaii-nation.org/links.html > .

[48] Gary Kubota, "Thousands to Demonstrate for Hawaiian Entitlements," *Honolulu Starr-Bulletin*, January 31, 2001.

[49] Mathew K. Ing, "Hawaiian Groups Voice Opposition to Taro Patents," *Ka Leo O Hawaii*, March 6, 2006.

Not unlike the Zapatistas in Mexico, the Sovereignty Movement is faced with a multitude of difficulties beyond the sheer challenge of convincing the United States to grant Hawaiians broad sovereignty. Moreover, the Movement is composed of multiple groups, which even under ideal circumstances articulate differing sovereign visions, ranging from complete independence to the "nation within a nation" status. Additional popular challenges from the non-indigenous communities of Hawaii beset the Movement's efforts. Yet, the challenges need not obscure the revival of indigenous consciousness and cultural and political life in Hawaii. Characterized as "the Hawaiian Renaissance," the renewal is re-shaping the political and cultural countenance of life in Hawaii. It relates to all aspects of life, both highlighting the extant native undercurrents in politics and culture and reasserting indigenous Hawaiian ontologies in everyday life further. Hawaiian language immersion schools are a remarkable example of such a return of the Hawaiian culture as well as the people who give the culture its "Aloha," that is, its "life breath."

What is instructive in the ways native Hawaiians assert their agency is that their current displacements are enabling them to expose the historical relations of ban, which continually displace Hawaiians yet remain concealed in the nation-story of the United States. Therefore, while displacements certainly preserve the relations of ban on the Kanaka Maoli, they also fuel the counter-hegemonic movements. Remarkably, their sense of space and place is still informed through traditional cosmological senses. For many Hawaiians, a shark is still the ancestor that protects them at sea and *Pele* is the goddess of fiery creation.[50]

The case of the Makua Valley is instructive in this sense. The story of the Makua Valley never makes it into the discourse of paradise, but, to many Hawaiians, it is a major site of struggle over their historical position in the islands. The valley supported indigenous settlements until World War II when its inhabitants were evicted for war purposes. After the war ended, the valley was transformed into a military training and firing range and its former residents, mostly native Hawaiians, were not allowed to return to their homes. To the US military, Makua is just one of many live firing ranges it uses. For the Kanaka Maoli, it is a "*wahi pana*," a sacred place, with its *heiau* (temples) and numerous *ahu* (shrines) as well as burial grounds. In the cosmo-ecology of indigenous Hawaiians, what is being assaulted in Makua is the *aina* (land) and, in the *aina*, the indigenous Hawaiians as its siblings. Here, too, the counter-territorialization is underway with groups such as "Malama (Protect) Makua" working to stop the live fire trainings. While the September 11 attacks in the US slowed down these efforts, the broader sovereignty struggle is still being waged in other sites—always evolving. As it shifts, it is also showing how the indigenous sovereignty struggle in Hawaii relates to our own concerns. Recently, native Hawaiians hosted a group of indigenous women coming to Hawaii to talk about "strategies for change" around issues as diverse as indigenous women networking, combating bio-colonialism, genetic engineering and associated racism, resisting corporate control of the world's resources, and defending indigenous cultural knowledges. Clearly, their works help to loosen global capitalism's managerial control over indigenous and non-indigenous futures alike.

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[50] See, for example: Timothy Hurley, "Shark Highly Respected in Hawaiian Culture," *The Honolulu Advertiser*, September 28, 2004.

Statecraft and Indigeneity at the United Nations

Just as the movements of indigenous peoples continue to pressure states and territoriality into the openness of transversality, resistance to them is most manifest in sites that states still manage to dominate—formal structures and institutions. Through those institutions at both national and international levels, states still work to capture indigenous lives while appearing to recognize their political and civilizational qualifications. The most prolific site, paradoxically, is the United Nations where intergovernmental efforts attempt to rein in indigeneity.

From the League of Nations to the United Nations, intergovernmental sites have always figured as paradoxical fields of politics for indigenous peoples. On the one hand, such organizations offered platforms for the "promotion" of indigenous peoples' rights.[51] On the other hand, they have limited their actual potentials by qualifying them in narrow political and cultural parameters within the sovereign territorial nationalism and statism.

The International Labor Organization, for example, has always played a significant role in negotiating the status of "indigenous labor." The 1957 ILO Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Population focused on the historical circumstances of indigenous experiences, and "enlarged" the scope of rights for indigenous peoples. A more prominent body within the UN system has been the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues since 1994.[52] Entering a field of politics already deeply regimented, the Forum has been prolific in its activities, but primarily the 1994 United Nations Draft Declaration guided the Forum's activities on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Declaration was endorsed by UN Human Rights Council on June 29, 2006 and forwarded to the UN General Assembly (GA) for a final approval.[53] On November 28, 2006, the General Assembly refused to adopt the declaration, dealing a serious blow to indigenous aspirations.[54]

A non-binding document even when adopted, the declaration nevertheless embodies a number of rights for indigenous peoples.[55] From the principle of political self-determination for indigenous peoples to their inherent "collective" rights to ancestral territories as life spaces free from molestation, the draft declaration reflects the minimum aspirations of indigenous peoples. Yet, after more than ten years of deliberations, its endorsement as a GA resolution falls short of a "binding" UN convention and leaves unresolved the "key issues on self-determination, lands, territories, and resources."[56]

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[51] Andrea Muehleabch, "Making Place at the United Nations: Indigenous Cultural Politics at the U. N. Working Group on Indigenous Populations," *Cultural Anthropology* 16:3 (2001), pp. 415–448.

[52] Sharon H. Venne, *Our Elders Understand Our Rights: Evolving International Law Regarding Indigenous Rights* (Pencticton, British Columbia: Theytus Books, 1998).

[53] For the text of the declaration, including its historical evolution, see: International Work Group on Indigenous Affairs, available online at: <http://www.iwgia.org/sw248.asp> .

[54] See Amnesty International, "UN: Third Committee Rejects Strong Draft Declaration to Protect Indigenous Peoples," November 28, 2006, available online at: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engIOR410252006?open&of = eng-393> .

[55] Venne, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

[56] See IWGIA, available online at: <http://www.iwgia.org/sw248.asp> .

Not unlike the original state of abandonment conceived and performed in the early encounters between indigenous peoples and their antagonists, the declaration and the intergovernmental political regimentations displace the fundamental indigenous aspirations at the very moment that they promise them a future of affirmation. Only, they accomplish it through a strategic inversion in the order of the logic of ban. The inversion promises recognition, but, in effect, performs a disappearance act. In the declaration, the indigenous peoples are included in the juridical-political system by the promise of the full recognition of their indigeneity and the sovereignty that flows from it. Yet, in this inclusion, their differences are simultaneously flattened into the category of the state-centric "citizenry" expressed in terms of "constitutional limitations to rights," "territorial integrity of the state," "national unity in the country," "universal rights of individuals to private property," "the interests of the society in general," etc.

States' official responses to the original draft declaration reveal the logic of abandonment that has conditioned the negotiations until the end. Some states such as China and India refuse to accept the existence of indigenous peoples in their territories altogether. Hear the Chinese position, for example:

> The Chinese government believes that the question of indigenous peoples is the product of European countries' recent pursuit colonial policies in other parts of the world ... Although there is no indigenous people's question in China, the Chinese government and people have every sympathy with indigenous peoples' historical woes and present plight.[57]

Other states walk a tightrope between appearing sympathetic to and curbing the legal and political competence of the declaration. Japan's response captures the essence of such an attitude:

> The declaration ... should not be understood as legally binding. Thus, it is inappropriate to call upon states, or to bear legal obligations on states to take effective measures, as this draft declaration says ... Collective rights stipulated in the declaration ... can not be found in international instruments drafted and adopted by the United Nations."[58]

Having a number of indigenous groups, from the Okinawans to the Ainu, demanding further autonomy, Japan's efforts to narrow the application of the declaration are not surprising. "No new category of rights"[59] should be created, insists Japan. The United States advocates a similar view. It argues that competency of the declaration should be articulated in terms of "goals" and not "rights," for the "rights referred to in the draft declaration do not exist under international law."[60] True to its frontier ethos of "rugged individualism,"

[57] United Nations, Economic and Social Council, "Consideration of a Draft United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," E/CN.4/1995/WG.15/2 (October 10, 1995), available online at: <http://www.cwis.org/fwdp/International/95-14322.txt> (hereafter: Main Text).

[58] See the Addendum to the text of the Main deliberations: "Consideration of a Draft United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," E/CN.4/1995/WG.15/2.Add.1 (November 13, 1995), available online at: <http://www.cwis.org/fwdp/International/95-14402.txt> (hereafter: Add.1).

[59] *Ibid*.

[60] *Ibid*.

the United States presses for the formulation of indigeneity primarily through an individualizing language. For the US, indigeneity can at most be taken as a source of limited self-government within the political state that envelops indigenous groups.[61] As Ronald Niezen puts it, recognizing the "collective rights of indigenous peoples" raises ontological questions for sovereign territorial statism. In effect, he suggests:

> many states have vested interest in controlling and usurping the collective rights ... of indigenous peoples ... Emphasizing exclusively individual human rights leaves states with an opening to interfere in group identity, to provide only those cultural choices that weaken both indigenous societies and the distinct collective (principally treaty) rights that are part of their relationship, as sovereign entities, with the state.[62]

What is noteworthy in the statist attitude is the continuation of the original logic of disarticulating indigenous agency. Although the contemporary logic is expressed differently, specifically through the liberal rights discourse, its effect is a displacement of indigenous modes of identity and forms of governmentality that flow from them. Ultimately, this logic is a logic of ban; it works at once to capture indigenous peoples and to curtail their distinct claims of sovereignty over their lives their lands.

Mexico's stand on the draft declaration under the shadow of the Zapatista Maya uprising clearly reflects this concern. "The government of Mexico appreciates," submits Mexico "that a declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples should be proclaimed." Then, Mexico stresses the "desirability of developing a definition of indigenous peoples." "Indigenous peoples should have the right to be recognized and to define themselves as such, as part of the plural society that makes up the State to which they belong." [63] As quickly as Mexico recognizes indigeneity, it takes it back by framing indigeneity solely as a question of/for the state and by reducing indigenous peoples to one of many constituencies of the state. Indigeneity is politically subsumed into the logic of organization of the state, particularly over areas regulating territory, property, and land use. "Nations shall, at all times," the Mexican government statement declares, "have the right to impose on private property such limitations as the public interest may demand ... [and that] the ownership of the lands and waters within the boundaries of the national territory is vested originally in the nation ... and the ownership by the nation is inalienable and imprescriptible."

Other states, especially the states in the Americas, similarly employ a strategy of disappearance of indigeneity into the reified construct of citizenry. The Argentinean response is emblematic:

> The Argentine Republic is peopled by individuals of different origins and has a tradition of respect for ethnic and cultural pluralism, based furthermore on specific constitutional guarantees. Respect for and protection of the cultures and traditions of indigenous communities is a part of official government policy ... It is, however, understood that there are limitations to this principle in cases where the practice of

[61] *Ibid*.
[62] Niezen, *op. cit*., p. 133.
[63] All references to Mexico's position are from Add.1.

> such usages, customs and traditions might endanger the life, health, morals of the population, or public order, in accordance with the provisions of the laws in effect for the entire national community. Likewise, it should be pointed out that the restitution of cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property cannot be an absolute right, since much of this property has become a part of the *common heritage of society* and cannot be the exclusive property of individuals or groups of individuals. The use of the word "right" should be avoided in cases where, as in the present instance, the concept corresponds more to a general objective or aspiration, the fulfillment of which must take into account ... the interests of society in general. (My emphasis)[64]

From a state-centric point, this politics of pluralism is intended to devolve indigenous claims to national politics whereby indigenous "difference" is pulverized into customs, usages, and, traditions, subject to health and morals of the population, or public order, and ultimately subsumed into the national community. Not only are indigenous identities reduced to a mere behavior without history, but also historical indigenous alterity is hidden in the pluralist ethos. With that, indigenous resources are once again made available for taking, this time as the "common heritage of the society" instead of the "common heritage of humanity," which had justified the earlier interventions in indigenous worlds. Although inverted and obscured, the logic of abandonment remains at work.

The relations of ban materialize in the affirmation as the "rule" of modern statism as largely devoid of, even antagonistic to, indigenous political sensibilities. The exception, then, is created in the presumed affirmation of indigenous agency and sovereignty, which, in effect, subordinates indigeneity to state sovereignty diffusing it into the body politic. In short, the sovereign power that determines the parameters within which indigeneity can "be" remains fundamentally modern statist in imagination and praxis. Left unchallenged, this power is poised to confine indigenous peoples within the juridico-political order of a state-centric geography. Remarkably, it is challenged.

Dialogical Beginnings with Indigeneity

Recollect the Salish story about the journey to the sky. "Watch what you grab," it warns us. "It might grab you like just-ripe berries can grab in the guts." Nowadays, the dominant worlds are being grabbed in the guts and twisted by indigenous struggles. Beyond pointing to their tortured histories, more significantly, indigenous movements are intertwined with grassroots struggles all over the world, informing and supporting them from different experiential sensibilities. Perhaps the real power of indigenous struggles lies precisely in their distance to the dominant political trajectories on epistemic grounds. Indigenous peoples of the world might well be the only peoples who "escaped" the near total epistemological hegemony of the modern territorial and nation-oriented imaginary. They did so, in part, because they resisted it actively, and, in part, because they were excepted from it in relations of ban, a condition which, as de Certeau suggests, prompted indigenous peoples to recast their beliefs and memories into fugitive forms, often "hidden beneath the occupier's system."

[64] Main Text.

Together, these memories and beliefs form a kind of indigenous palimpsest: "the occupier's writing does not erase the primary text which remains traced there. They enable indigenous resistance to avoid being disseminated into the occupiers power grid, to avoid being captured by the dominating systems of interpretation."[65] June Nash says that although operating from the margins of the dominant orders in the world, and still vulnerable in relations of ban, indigenous peoples are formulating innovative ways of rethinking citizenship, autonomy, sovereignty, and territoriality. [66] Political and economic hierarchies empowered in colonial and global corporatist times are being denied of their ideological legitimacy.

Undoubtedly, these movements have limits in impact or reach. Further, divisions among indigenous peoples enervate their critical capacities. Still, refreshingly, what they generate in the margins reverberates back toward the centers to inspire and energize new beginnings in the centers. The inauguration of Evo Morales as the president of Bolivia in January 2006 was a momentous event in this sense. Morales is the first indigenous president of Bolivia. Arguably, a more important reason is Morales's spectacular embrace of indigeneity as the source of his political visions. "We are here to change history," Morales stated in his inaugural speech. "I wish to tell you my Indian brothers that the 500 year indigenous and popular campaign of resistance has not been in vain. We are taking over now over the next 500 years. We are going to put an end to injustice and inequality." A day earlier Morales went to an Inca site for indigenous ceremonies, where he made offerings to *Pachamama*, the mother earth, dressed up as a sun priest and received a baton symbolizing his Indian leadership in the political arena.

Revealingly, BBC News described the indigenous ceremonies as "colorful," an expression reminiscent of the perennial characterizations of indigeneity in relations of ban as lacking serious constitutive political agency. Yet, it is possible to argue that colors of the ceremonies bespeak a certain anticipatory intentionality in Morales' itinerary from indigenous to state ceremonies. Morales's literal move from indigenous ceremonies to official state ceremonies can be said to reflect the ordering of his cultural and political worlds of identity. Through the order of the ceremonies, it is as if Morales is heralding that he comes to politics primarily from his indigeneity. In the temporal ordering of the ceremonies, indigeneity is being projected as the historical beginning, the political center. It is not an afterthought or an appendix to prevailing modernist visions. Rather, it is an alternative vision itself anchored in the history of a people long dominated by others' ambitions. In short, in Morales' inauguration, it is an indigenous vision that is being rehabilitated, and finally taken seriously, "after 500 years of domination." The colors of the Aymara-Inca ceremony project historical indigeneity into the future, into a kind of what the Zapatistas call "another geography" of political-economic and cultural realities.[67]

Whether in Mexico or Bolivia, questions persist as to the strength of indigenous political movements to realize their aspirations in the entrenched economic and political systems locally and around the world. The devolution of the Zapatista movement from the heights of global resonance to a more regional

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[65] *Ibid*., spp. 229–230.

[66] June Nash, *Mayan Visions: The Quest for Autonomy in an Age of Globalization* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), p. 2.

[67] SIPaz Report, October 2005, p. 7.

experiment, for example, seems to support such an assessment. At the same time, many now recognize that assessing indigenous movements' efficacy requires approaches attuned to indigenous heterotopic positions in dominant geographies. After all, despite its limitations, the Zapatista movement has affected a sea change both in Mexico and beyond, in effect, reconditioning the entire field of indigeneity.

The latest Zapatista initiative, the "Other Campaign," speaks of "another geography" exactly in this sense, that is, as a product of a self-consciously dialogical, even heterological, methodology of encounters. Its logic is intimated in the *Sexta* declaration in evocative ways:

> ... peace will therefore be an open concert of words and many views towards another geography ... The world begins to be born when one word and another word find each other and do not argue, rather they meet and reach an agreement because they have mutual respect ... The first word is not born alone, rather it is born with ears, and it is with these ears, by listening, that the first words grow because they reach agreement, and the first words that found each other agreed, and the first they thought the world and than they made it.[68]

We know that the normative context of this new "form of politics" of "another geography" is the collective opposition of subaltern people to "neoliberal capitalism" in Chiapas, Mexico, the Americas and beyond. There, while indigeneity is only a word among words, it is also uniquely novel because it was hardly heard before in the "dance of the words" now pregnant to a new geography. Morales and Bolivia's indigenous movement clearly map onto this geography. Despite their many differences from the Zapatistas, they are fueled by similar historical conditions of indigeneity defined almost universally in the relations of ban and capture.

Historically, the relations of ban "linked the places of the world into a whole made up of peripheries" listed all in "function of a Center, namely, Europe to be known also as the West."[69] Thus emerged an uneven geography, an order of "words without ears."

It is this geography of power that is being pressured from within individual states as well as across states in transnational movements. Indigenous communities, from the Maya in the Americas to the Hawaiians in Oceania, animate these struggles uniquely forcefully. After all, relations of ban still blatantly figure in their communities. James Tully, for example, shows how national constitutional sites are serving as crucial sites of change.[70] For Tully, although facing many obstacles, the results of constitutional indigenous activism (in places like Canada and New Zealand) have already set "a world reversal in motion," highlighting the justice of indigenous claims for recognition. "A post-imperial dawn" is being revealed with its promises in the new constitutionalism of diversity with the larger state structures.[71]

While the rise of a post-imperial era is already intensifying intra-state indigenous activism, the objectives of activism are not necessarily for the recuperation of the modern statist foundations of the relations. To many indigenous groups, pluralism

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[68] *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.

[69] Glissant, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

[70] James Tully, *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 119, 139–137.

[71] *Ibid.*, pp. 136–137.

conditioned by sovereign statism still remains predicated on relations of ban—it still excludes indigenous cosmopolitics as an equal foundational ideal of governance. Concomitantly, beyond the sovereign state politics, indigenous activism is mobilized simultaneously in various other local and global sites. More importantly, it is mobilized by appealing to the transversality of space where new modes of place-making take form—at once rooted in specific locales and "transnational in compass."[72] In the process, broad struggles under the rubric of indigeneity expand the dialogical grounds for progressive historical projects.

[72] Castree, *op. cit.*, p. 136.