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The Arc of Justice: Indigenous Activism and Anthropological Intersections

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SPRING 1975

The office of INDÍGENA was full of people late in the evening. Marie-Helene Laraque was on the phone, talking to an American Indian Movement activist; Bill Meyer was sitting at his desk, smoking, and muttering about the state of the world; I was working on an article for the first Spanish language edition of our newspaper; and Sandy Davis was at his typewriter, composing and puffing on his pipe. Suddenly, there was a commotion on the street below and we all went to look. People were pouring into the street to join a parade, with lit candles in their hands. This was Berkeley, California, April 30, 1975, and the celebration of the end of the Vietnam War, the final departure of American troops from Saigon. All of us ran out to join the march. We felt the joy of vindication. The hard-fought struggle of the Vietnamese, their long quest for independence was bearing fruit and we had done our part. We felt hopeful too that if the Vietnamese could prevail, so could indigenous people throughout the Americas, who, after all, were still engaged in the struggle for their home places, a struggle they had been waging for nearly 500 years.

SUMMER 2009

The “*paro amazónico*”—an uprising of indigenous peoples across Peru’s Amazon region had been in effect for several months. I was conducting a rapid social assessment in the Upper Morona River, on the Peruvian-Ecuador border. I had been working in the Amazonian regions of Peru for eight years for The Field Museum. The uprising was a largely grassroots effort, coordinated by the indigenous organization, AIDSESEP (*Asociación Interétnica de Desarrollo de la Selva Peruana*). Its objective was to protest the passage of a series of changes to Peru’s forestry laws designed to facilitate export of Peru’s raw natural resources in conjunction with the recently ratified free trade agreement between Peru and the United States of America. The changes to the forestry laws, together with

changes in land titling policies were implemented by the administration of President Alan Garcia without significant consultation with indigenous organizations (and even “fast-tracked” to avoid Parliamentary debate). As indigenous peoples perceived it, these changes eroded land tenure rights and abrogated the conditions of the International Labour Organization Treaty 169 to which Peru is a signatory[i]. These latest actions were the last straw to a building hostility on the part of the Peruvian Administration toward indigenous peoples, who Garcia himself had characterized as standing in the way of “progress”—like “*perros hortelanos*”—farm or manger dogs who jealously guard bones, neither chewing them nor letting others near them (Garcia 2007). For most of Garcia’s time in office, land-titling processes for native communities had been stalled or frozen, and not a single territorial reserve for groups in voluntary isolation had been decreed. Indigenous peoples (particularly, the Awajún, whose territories span regions in Northern Peru, between the Departments of Loreto, Amazonas and San Martin, bordering on Ecuador) were blockading roads and holding marches in major Amazonian towns and cities. The Administration placed detention orders on several key leaders. On June 5th, a violent altercation occurred between Peruvian National Police and protestors in the Amazonian town of Bagua. According to local accounts in the ensuing battle, perhaps hundreds of protestors (although official accounts number only ten) were killed along with twenty-three policemen. The President of AIDSESEP took refuge in the Nicaraguan Consulate, and then went into exile along with five or six other leaders. The violence sent shock waves through the nation, generating a wave of sympathy for indigenous peoples despite a harsh attack from the government in the media channels. Ultimately, Peru’s Congress froze the new laws and a process for dialogues with indigenous representatives and interlocutors was initiated. Although this appeared to be at least a short-term victory for indigenous groups, a year later, in June 2010, the dialogues ended with no clear resolution of the issues.

SHELTON DAVIS AND SCHOLARLY ACTIVISM ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLES’ RIGHTS

These two accounts bracket the more than three decades during which I have been intermittently concerned with indigenous peoples’ struggles, inspired in no small part by the work and life of Shelton “Sandy” Davis.

I stumbled into anthropology in 1971, four years before the liberation of Saigon, at a moment of disciplinary ferment. The mid-century anti-colonial movements progressing through the terrain that anthropologists had made their fields of study were causing a heartburn; a disenchantment with old teachings. The de-colonization of anthropology was beginning (Harrison 1997). At Harvard,

Sandy was a leader, an unlikely champion of activism. Considered a rising star in the department, Sandy had obtained his doctorate rapidly and been appointed to a junior faculty position. Shy and soft-spoken, he became the center of a coterie of graduate and undergraduate students undertaking to transform the discipline. Together the group formed the “critical anthropology workshop” intent on historicizing anthropology and infusing it with political economy.

Sandy’s field experience in Guatemala and Brazil led him to engage with the cause of indigenous peoples in the Americas. At the time, their struggles were largely unknown in the United States of America. But Native North Americans, inspired by the civil rights movement, were gaining visibility through organized protests, such as the actions at Wounded Knee, South Dakota and the occupation of Alcatraz Island. Sandy connected to the North American Indian movement, bringing activists to Harvard to lecture in his course on Native Americans in the United States—a course he developed and the first of its kind to be taught at Harvard. As Sandy came to know Native North American activists, he talked to them about the growing crisis in Central and South America. Looking back, close to forty years later, it seems obvious that an anthropologist would draw comparisons between indigenous peoples across two continents, but at the time it was revolutionary.

Sandy’s combination of scholarship based on comparative example to illustrate structures of power and his activism for social justice became the hallmark of his career, and influenced many of his students and mentees, including me. In this paper, I discuss my experiences at the intersection between forms of anthropological activism and the indigenous rights’ struggle in the Amazon region to examine the ongoing challenges to achieving justice for indigenous peoples. I draw on a decade worth of work with Amazonian peoples in Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia as part of the Field Museum effort to secure large areas for protection of biological diversity and to simultaneously collaborate with indigenous and forest-dwelling communities to strengthen their subsistence base and modes of livelihood[ii].

ACTIVISM MOVING FROM GRASSROOTS TO INSTITUTIONALIZATION: 1970-2000

The 1970s represented a time when indigenous activism in defense of land and human rights became internationally recognized and embedded in a process of institution building. Egregious violations of human rights and territorial displacement were taking place as a result of the “renewed” push by national governments to exploit natural resources and colonize in remote frontier regions[iii]. Anthropologists who were studying in these areas were eyewitnesses

to the trauma and the corresponding response of indigenous communities. Coming home, they began to disseminate their reports to each other, and then to the wider public to call attention to the grave danger to lands and livelihoods of indigenous peoples. In parallel to the institution building of indigenous peoples, anthropologists created non-governmental organizations. Among the earliest to form an institutional base for these efforts was the International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), a network of individuals and organizations formed in 1968, with headquarters in Denmark. Soon after, other organizations were formed, such as Survival International (1969—started by human rights activists in collaboration with anthropologists and journalists), Cultural Survival (1973), and INDÍGENA (in 1973). As these organizations created international awareness for the events occurring in indigenous homelands, anthropologists working in the relevant countries were also actively pursuing legal and organizational means to assist incipient indigenous organizations and grassroots efforts centered on securing land rights and human rights.

INDÍGENA differed from the other organizations first because it focused solely on indigenous peoples of the Americas, and second because its work centered on making connections between their causes. The information that anthropologists and human rights activists in Central and South America sent to Sandy and the INDÍGENA staff was immediately circulated to North American Indian activists. One critical moment was a conference in the spring of 1975 at the University of Florida, Gainesville. The conference theme was bilingual education in South America, but Marie-Helene Laraque learned that indigenous leaders would be coming and she decided that we should go, together with leading activists of the American Indian Movement. We showed up at the conference with Russell Means, among others, and brought together the South American indigenous people with the North Americans. The South Americans—Aymara from Bolivia, Shuar from Ecuador, Quechua from Peru and others—recounted their stories to Means and the AIM activists. A highly emotional event, it also provided insight into the common threats that indigenous peoples were experiencing from the exploitation of their natural resources by governments and private industries.

The events in Peru during the 1970s exemplify the intertwining circles of international support, national-level action, and grassroots struggle. Three major Amazonian indigenous groups—The Asháninka, The Shipibo and the Awajún, were leading struggles in their homelands, forming local organizations. Stefano Varese, a young Peruvian anthropologist who had just completed fieldwork with the Asháninka (then known as the *Campa*) for his doctorate took a newly created post in the Ministry of Agriculture in 1970, and began to work on policy that would enable the titling of lands for Native Communities. Varese's successor in the post, Alberto Chirif, made history in Peru when the government passed a law

in 1974 creating a pathway for native communities to secure communal title, averaging about 5,000 hectares per community (c.f. Chirif 2006 for a full account)[iv]. Meanwhile, Varese, Chirif and other Peruvian and American anthropologists submitted reports to IWGIA, Cultural Survival, and *INDÍGENA*, creating international awareness for the securing of land titles[v]. Peru-based anthropologists outside of government continued to facilitate and promote indigenous organization (Chirif 2006). Finally, in 1980, local indigenous organizations coalesced to form a national organization—AIDSESEP. AIDSESEP has a three-tiered structure, with a National Directorate based in Lima, six regional organizations based in key Amazonian cities, and Federations representing geographically-bounded communities, either from one or sometimes multiple ethnic groups. Thus, for example, the Regional organization ORAU (*Organización Regional AIDSESEP Ucayali*) currently groups together eleven local federations and associations representing Shipibo, Cacataibo, Asháninka, and Yine communities along the Ucayali River and its tributaries (AIDSESEP n.d.).

Throughout the 1980s, the international support structure of advocacy for indigenous peoples documented and made public their struggles while indigenous people, supported nationally by a variety of NGOs and religious institutions consolidated their organizations. In 1984, AIDSESEP joined other national Amazonian organizations to form COICA (*Coordinadora de las Organizaciones Indígenas de la Cuenca Amazónica*), a pan-Amazonian coalition to defend indigenous rights and territories (COICA 1989).

The institutionalization of grassroots activism and the creation of international advocacy organizations were accomplished with minimal resources. Few large foundations or private donors were willing to invest in this cause. *INDÍGENA* survived on small donations for two years, after which Sandy Davis closed it down, moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts and created the Anthropology Resource Center, which continued the work of *INDÍGENA* but within a broader frame of “public-interest” anthropology. Sandy was inspired by the work of Ralph Nader and his “Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs),” and felt that a similar effort with an anthropological focus could contribute to public awareness on human rights and social justice concerns. Sandy integrated concerns of US-based efforts to address the consequences of inequality with the concerns of indigenous peoples. He took on issues such as education, energy, and the actions of multinational corporations, drawing on a small corps of staff and volunteers who helped write and publish the Anthropology Resource Center Newsletter and later, the ARC Bulletin (see also Nash 1981). His focus on the structures and operations of the politically and economically powerful placed the human rights concerns of indigenous people on equal footing with societal concerns everywhere. His book, *Victims of the Miracle* (1977), was an indictment

of the relationship between transnational economic organizations, national governments and the elites that supported them. As June Nash astutely pointed out in her 1981 review article of the world capitalist system, Sandy's book provided a holistic account of the impact of these economic and political processes on indigenous people in Brazil within a "structural historical framework" (Nash 1981:415). Although other scholars were also beginning to use this approach, very few merged it with activism against the systems of inequality they documented.

As the years went on, Cultural Survival, Survival International and IWGIA achieved more stable funding but remained relatively small. Although not as explicit in treating the systems of power and inequality, they continue to play an important role in publicizing the perilous situation of indigenous people worldwide.

Despite the lack of resources, in the 1980s until the mid-1990s, indigenous organizations and allies achieved significant successes in titling lands or creating new forms of secured territories in their homelands (see Davis and Partridge 1999; Davis and Wali, 1993; Wali and Davis 1991). In Brazil, rubber tapper communities and indigenous peoples established new forms of secured homelands such as extractive reserves; in Colombia, indigenous peoples secured titles to "*Resguardos*" which incorporated traditional concepts of indigenous territory and governance; and in Ecuador, reserves were also created (Davis and Wali 1994). In Peru, as of 1999, native communities successfully titled approximately eleven million hectares in community lands and two million hectares for territorial reserves for people "in voluntary isolation" (Chirif 2006). AIDSEP established an office to assist communities in mapping their boundaries and preparing the technical documents necessary to submit petitions for titles. The *Instituto de Bien Común* (IBC), founded by two anthropologists in 1998, also worked extensively on land titling.

Indigenous organizations and their allies also were successful in enshrining the concept of human and cultural rights in international treaties and policies. Indigenous organizations obtained the adoption of International Labour Organization Treaty 169, which transformed the older Treaty 157 by recognizing the cultural autonomy of indigenous peoples. In 2001, UNESCO created the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO 2002). In 2007, the United Nations issued the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (United Nations 2008). Most recently, indigenous cultural identity and perspectives have been recognized in the most recent constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia (de la Cadena 2010).

Sandy Davis, working with colleagues at the World Bank, was able to formulate and obtain adoption of a groundbreaking policy on indigenous people, first adopted as Operational Directive 4.20, in 1991, and then modified and

adopted as Operational Policy 4.10 in 2005. The policy committed the Bank to require the implementation of a participatory process, social assessments and an indigenous peoples plan in any projects affecting indigenous territories[vi].



Figure 1: Sandy on mission “in the field,” Panama (photo credits: Mary Gubbins)

Additionally, indigenous organizations waged some successful battles against massive infrastructure development projects, stopping some altogether, winning concessions in others to compensate for land loss and displacement. It was in the course of these battles that indigenous organizations encountered organizations working to conserve rainforests and the biological diversity that flourished in their environs. The environmental conservation establishment was significantly more successful than anthropological or indigenous activist organizations in garnering financial resources and establishing a worldwide presence to promote their cause. In the late 1980s, the conservationists began to adopt strategies for protection of rainforests and other biodiversity-rich habitats that relied on the creation of large protected areas. Throughout the Amazon region, at the instigation of international and national conservation organizations, countries designated national parks, reserves, and sanctuaries to protect fragile habitats and biological diversity.

Initially, conservation organizations ignored indigenous activism, fostering standard models for conservation by putting boundaries on areas and protecting them with guard posts and park guards (what some have termed “fortress conservation”). However, by the early 1990s some conservation organizations began to work with COICA (*Consejo de las Organizaciones Indígenas de la Cuenca Amazonica*) and national indigenous organizations to jointly promote the causes of indigenous human rights and biodiversity protection, stimulated by COICA’s appeal to support indigenous stewardship of the Amazon (COICA 1989; and see Chapin 2004 for a full account of how the

relationship started). The focus of these efforts however, was on developing projects that were imagined to provide a benefit for indigenous communities in the service of conservation, and not on the central issue of securing land rights. International human rights and indigenous advocacy organizations however did use the connection to environmental stewardship to gain support for securing territory for indigenous people. Indigenous organizations were enthusiastic in their espousal of environmental conservation, harking back to a much older strain in their political and cultural discourse about their relationship to their land (Davis and Wali 1994; and see for example the introduction to the “*plan de vida*” from AIDSESEP (2008).

There can be no doubt that the strategy of linking indigenous rights and environmental stewardship or protection has had significant impact on the advancement of indigenous people’s cause and their ability to hold on to their lands and modes of livelihood. It has brought financial and technical resources to indigenous organizations and their international allies that have enabled them to keep indigenous affairs in the international consciousness. The link has been further supported by interdisciplinary research conducted by anthropologists, geographers and linguists that has shown the strong correlation between areas where indigenous people live and relatively intact tracts of forest habitats (c.f. Chapin, Lamb, and Threlkeld 2005; Maffi and Woodley 2010). Perhaps most importantly, it has allowed for alternative ways to secure indigenous homelands and the larger ecosystems of which they are a part. My own experience working with ecologists at The Field Museum exemplifies some of these alternatives that have emerged.

In between 1999 and 2010, the Field Museum’s Rapid Inventory Program has collaborated with indigenous organizations and their non-governmental organization allies to designate territories for either co-management or direct management by indigenous groups. The earliest collaboration was with the Cofan Nation in Ecuador, through the Cofan Survival Fund (or FSC, in Spanish—*Fundación para la Sobrevivencia del Pueblo*). The first rapid inventory with the Cofan, in 2001, resulted in the creation of the first nationally recognized protected area in Ecuador directly under the stewardship of an indigenous group (the *Reserva Ecológica Cofan Bermejo*)[vii]. Three Cofan communities are settled inside the reserve and are active in protection work while continuing their traditional resource use patterns. The Cofan Nation has subsequently implemented their own park guard program, established a conservation training center for indigenous peoples, and is also undertaking research and action programs around conservation and management of natural resources (see www.cofan.org for details)[viii]. In Peru, the Field Museum has worked with both CEDIA and IBC to conduct inventories and obtain protected areas managed by indigenous people. Two major successes achieved in collaboration with CEDIA were the designation

of the Megantoni National Sanctuary (after Rapid Inventory No. 15 in 2004), which recognized and protected lands for a group of indigenous peoples in “voluntary isolation” and the designation of a National Reserve for the Matses (after Rapid Inventory No. 16 in 2004). The Matses leadership, together with CEDIA, is developing the management plan for the Reserve (see www.cedia.org.pe for details). A rapid inventory conducted in collaboration with IBC, in the northern region of the Department of Loreto, Rapid Inventory Number 12, in 2003, resulted in the designation of a regional conservation area (see www.ibcPeru.org), to be managed jointly by the local indigenous federation and the regional government (all of the rapid inventory reports are available on line at www.fieldmuseum.org/rbi).

Activism focused on indigenous capacity to care for their lands and natural resources has also been an avenue for a new emphasis on what is now called “traditional knowledge” or “local ecological knowledge” (Berkes 1999; Gilchrist and Mallory 2007; Menzies 2006). Anthropologists and activist organizations have amassed a wealth of documentation concerning the ways in which, through retention of indigenous languages, maintenance of swidden horticulture, and hunting, fishing and collection of wild fruits and nuts, indigenous peoples have sustainably used their forests and waters without whole scale destruction. The evidence is incontrovertible that indigenous peoples, despite over 500 years of disruption, displacement and social change, have continued cultural practices and cosmo-visions that constitute a different perspective on both social and ecological relationships[ix]. The defense of indigenous knowledge systems has also opened a new pathway through activism around intellectual property rights (Brush and Stabinsky 1996; Greaves 1994). Indigenous organizations have brought successful cases for exerting control over their knowledge in the face of bio-prospecting and attempts to commoditize medicinal plants. The most notable was the revocation of the patent taken by a US-based company on Ayahuasca, a plant widely used across the Amazon (c.f. Fecteau 2001).

These forms of activism related to indigenous relationships to their homeland environments have expanded the initial activism around defense of human and land rights. The advances of the 1990s, however, proved to be fragile as countries renewed and accelerated the push to invite exploitation of the Amazon’s natural resources from global corporations looking for ever-larger profit and to meet growing global demand for energy. Resource exploitation is now occurring in places previously remote from the reaches of the market, and is widespread across Amazonia. Demand for energy and natural resources boomed from fast-developing national economies (most notably in Asia—China and India). In Peru, the government of Alan Garcia, who assumed power in 2005, provided concessions to oil, timber and mining companies at an unprecedented

scale, covering fully 70 percent of its Amazonian region. In Brazil, despite rhetoric about concern for deforestation, the government of President Lula da Silva facilitated the expansion of the agro-industrial frontier and continues with massive infrastructure projects (discussed elsewhere in this issue). The hyper-exploitation of oil, timber and mineral resources then joins previous “booms” that wreaked havoc on indigenous and forest-dwelling societies. Pressure is even more intense because small and medium sized infrastructure projects (roads, dams) are being replaced by mega-projects spanning national borders (the inter-oceanic highway connecting Brazil, Bolivia and Peru; dams and electric transmission lines across Bolivia and Brazil, concessions for oil exploration on the borders of Peru and Ecuador), economically integrating the Amazon region as never before. In the face of such massive exploitation, what can be the response from indigenous organizations and their allies? This is the question that compels us a decade into the new millennium.

CURRENT FORMS OF ACTIVISM AND THEIR CONSTRAINTS: 2000-2010

Indigenous organizations’ protests have more and more centered on the extractive activities of private and public entities. Protests have taken a variety of forms including public demonstrations, legal actions, and dissemination of information. But activism has been constrained by a complicated set of interrelated factors including continued lack of resources, weakness in the structure of organizations, and contradictory actions that undermine the advocacy agendas. Implicated here is the manner in which external organizations—international environmental organizations and indigenous advocacy groups, have approached the current challenges.

Since the initial phases of the institutionalization of indigenous activism, the availability of financial resources has been a problematic driver of the type and character of organizations. Indigenous organizations could rarely rely on community-generated resources and became heavily dependent on funding from non-governmental organizations to carry out their work. Initially, NGOs funded operating expenses for organizations as they established offices in the capital cities of their home countries. They also paid travel costs for leaders to international forums and conferences where they could make the case for human and land rights. However, increasingly, the NGOs provide funding not for operations, *per se*, but for specific projects, such as land-titling, capacity-building, and development of bilingual education curricula. Such project support enabled some activity, but did not provide a stable base for operations. Leaders are

typically not paid a salary for serving in the organizations, but receive “honoraria”[x].

The case of AIDSESEP is one example of the way unreliability of resources and organizational structure constrain activism, which I have personally observed over the past nine years during the course of my work in Peru. AIDSESEP maintains a national office in Lima, and the regional organizations maintain offices in the major Amazonian cities. At the local level, the base federations might also have an office in the major town. AIDSESEP’s leadership does not earn a salary and there is very few paid technical staff. The same is true for the regional offices and for the local federations. At the regional level, and among the Federations, there has been tension because some leaders have signed contracts with lumber companies (or operators), and others have made arrangements with oil companies allowing them to explore for oil in the base communities.

A further major challenge for the Federations is the difficulty of maintaining a legally recognized organizational profile because of the costs and difficulties of bureaucratic practice that govern state agencies. The Federations, to be legally recognized, must at the time of their constitution file their statutes and governance procedures with the civil register. Every time there is a change of leadership, proper documents must be filed again with the civil register and the leadership change must be approved by the register. Problems arise in the process of leadership transfer because Federations do not always follow their own statutes and because elections may be conflictive. The Civil Register often does not approve the new leadership if even minor irregularities surface in the documents and the Federation remains in legal limbo. The Federations cannot obtain a legal means of administering funds as a result. Instead, any funds they receive for projects must come to individuals (the leaders). This leads to lack of transparency and accountability and also to lack of organizational continuity. Such was the case of FENACOCA (*Federación Nativa de Comunidades Cacataibos*), based in the regional town of Aguaytiya in the Ucayali Basin of Northern Peru. I have been collaborating with FENACOCA over the past two years, as part of a wider project for implementing community-based conservation and resource management strategies in the buffer zone of the Cordillera Azul National Park (cf. Wali 2010).

FENACOCA was one of the earliest Federations to join AIDSESEP, and was formed under the leadership of the charismatic Bolivar family members Washington and Edith. For many years, the Bolivars were outspoken both at the local and national arenas in defense of indigenous rights to land. Edith Bolivar was a pioneer in the formation of bilingual schoolteachers for indigenous communities. By the late 1990s, still in power, they were facing many accusations of corruption and collusion with loggers and oil companies. Around 2006, Washington Bolivar emigrated to the United States, claiming he was being persecuted by loggers. Other Cacataibo leaders are skeptical of these claims and

criticize the Bolívars and their allies for impeding orderly transitions of leadership. The current leadership of the FENACOCA, selected in late 2009, has been trying to obtain legal recognition from the Civil Register. The Civil Register bureaucrats insist that the elections must be conducted on the dates specified in the statute (which was not the case in the most recent election since no one remembered what had been written in the statutes). Finally, at the end of 2010, the Federation's leadership obtained legal recognition, with considerable support from IBC. Yet, caught between internal factionalism and arcane bureaucracy, the Federation has still not been able to establish a solid organizational footing. FENACOCA's case is typical of the situation the Federations find themselves in. All of the transactions with the Civil Register require legal advice, which the Federations cannot afford. Non-governmental organizations sometimes provide the legal assistance, but mostly on an intermittent basis because they too cannot afford the necessary sustained resources.

Legal and institutional entanglements such as those described above are symptomatic of deeper structural flaws in many indigenous organizations. These flaws stem in part as well from the rupture between forms of leadership and governance that characterized indigenous societies historically and the new forms of governance that indigenous organizations had to adopt to build institutions and political credibility. Although Amazonian societies have considerable variety in leadership and governance styles, seldom are they as structured in ways that conform to national laws or practice. Elected leaders who rotate through offices in fixed posts, hierarchical positions (e.g. President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary), and codified statutes were adopted as governance forms as people settled into communities and subsequently formed supra-local organizations. Although communities adjusted to these processes and are devoted to them today, they are interwoven with other forms of leadership based on either kinship relations, accumulation of spiritual power, or on relations of patron-client that formed throughout the Amazon as a result of participation in the extractive economies.

The mixture in styles and forms of governance can be debilitating as it lacks transparency and prevents stability in the political structures. In AIDSESEP, for example, the leaders of all three tiers are chosen through convening delegates, but the process of selection depends on the emergence of a charismatic persona rather than on any continuity of policy or programmatic plans. If a leader does not "deliver" results, community members come to lose trust and feel frustrated with the organization. In order to maintain position, leaders build personal networks instead of strengthening the institution, undertake projects as a way to fund operations, and engage in personal reputation-building through attending national forums or expounding in public venues (virtual as well as physical).

Indigenous people and their allies in advocacy organizations recognize the challenges of leadership and governance in indigenous organizations but as of yet, no major structural changes are forthcoming. Some successful models I have seen have been at the local level, where indigenous organizations are based in their home territories and thus more connected to the everyday experience of people living in the forest. For example, the indigenous organization that represents the Matses people combined elements of the Peruvian national protocols for community governance with more kin-based elements that recognized Matses forms of leadership. The organization has no central office, but leaders live in their home communities and convene periodically to make decisions. Young people have formed their own organization, which works in tandem with community leaders. It took the Matses over a decade of deliberation to establish this form of governance (Luis Calixto, personal communication), yet it seems to provide the flexibility and accountability the Matses need to effectively make decisions concerning their territory[xi]. Other Peruvian indigenous groups that have strong local organizations are the Achuar and the Airo-Pai (also known as the Secoya). In other instances, even where the local organizations are weak, charismatic leaders emerge in crisis times and unify people to act (this occurred in the case of the Awajún, during the *paro amazónico*).

NGOs that collaborate with indigenous organizations seem reluctant to initiate structural reforms. Collaborations are generally structured directly with leaders of the organizations and yet when projects fail or funds disappear, leaders are seldom held accountable. In this way, the NGOs place themselves in the position of “patron” and foster or perpetuate the patterns of dependency and clientelism. Although some NGOs have begun to change the practice of facilitating funds for leaders and are demanding more accountability, this is still a small minority of the normal practice. In fact, there is a nested cycle of “patron”-“client”, with large foundations and multilateral agencies channeling funds to local NGOs, who then must “deliver” results or outcomes, which then in turn, rely on indigenous organizations to conduct the relevant activities. Thus, reluctance to work on governance reform in indigenous organizations stems in part from the situation of the NGOs themselves, dependent on continually searching for funding to survive[xii].

Resources available to the international and national allies of indigenous organizations to promote awareness of the continued threat to indigenous people’s livelihoods remain scarce. Although organizations continue to mount campaigns and keep concerns related to indigenous people in the public eye, they have not been large-scale compared to the types of campaigns mounted by better-funded conservation groups. Survival International, for example, according to its annual report for 2009, netted revenues of three million Euros from individual donors and some foundations; Amazon Watch in 2008, according to its annual report,

obtained revenues of less than one million US dollars, largely from foundations. Both Survival International and Cultural Survival rely on sale of products such as t-shirts, cards, and handicrafts to generate revenue as well. IWGIA, based in Denmark, states that it receives its major funding from the Danish, Norwegian and Swedish Foreign Ministries and sales of its publications. Combined, all of these organizations probably have fewer resources than Conservation International alone (which reported a 2009 revenue of USD \$116 million and restricted funds of USD \$266 million) or World Wildlife Fund (which stated that its operating revenues in 2010 were USD \$224 million).

The challenge posed by lack of resources and governance instability is further compounded by contradictions in the current agendas of indigenous organizations. The major political cause of the organizations remains the fundamental achievement of land and human rights. The enshrinement of these rights in international treaty and policy frameworks has not protected indigenous people from encroachment and destruction of their homelands. Perhaps, in some ironic way, the recognition of indigenous people's rights by international bodies has lessened the power of this strategy by creating the impression that the issue of "rights" has been resolved[xiii].

In this context, indigenous leaders have had a harder time convincing governments and international organizations to continue to pay attention to their rights to lands, resources and modes of being. Some leaders have also found themselves espousing contradictory discourses, claiming that indigenous peoples are environmental stewards and therefore must be granted land rights and cultural autonomy (which they have always stated) and yet also espousing the discourse of "development"—claiming that indigenous peoples have a "right" to develop their territories as they see fit, including collaborating with oil companies or lumber barons. They argue that indigenous wellbeing depends on partaking of the national development strategy, based on income generation through better integration into the market economy and improved access to both the national educational and health care systems.

The espousal of a development rhetoric particularly characterizes the second major Amazonian organization in Peru—CONAP (*Confederación de Nacionalidades Amazónicas del Peru*), but is also evident in other organizations. The "right" to be included in the national project of development places indigenous peoples on the same plane as other poor people in their countries and erases a boundary of difference that indigenous people must also claim if they are to continue as autonomous cultural groups (cf. Escobar 2000 on the concept of "difference"). Although indigenous peoples should make decisions about how to manage their lands and resources, including how to "develop" them, they must also find ways to reconcile the contradictions between *claiming their role as environmental stewards and obtaining resources* from large-scale exploiters of

their lands. In AIDSESEP, younger, emerging leaders are aware of the contradictions in the use of these two discourses. According to several young leaders I have spoken with, there is a degree of frustration with the old guard, but a hesitancy to openly question them for fear of exacerbating internal divisions.

The contradictory discourses and modes of action present in indigenous organizations are also present in both advocacy NGOs and in major environmental conservation organizations. At the 1992 “Earth Summit” in Rio de Janeiro, the concept of integrating conservation and development took hold. In the decade that followed, conservation organizations (especially World Wildlife Fund) promoted “integrated conservation and development programs,” investing in infrastructure, natural resource management and training projects for indigenous and forest-dwelling communities. For the most part, these projects used the standard indicators of economic development—improved per capita income and increased access to national services such as health and education to measure outcomes. The projects centered on building health posts or schools, spurring greater access to markets for indigenous commodities, and providing jobs for people as park guards or assistants to scientists (Wells and Brandon 1992; CIFOR 2007; Hughes and Flintan 2001). Yet, as the overwhelming evidence has demonstrated, this model of economic development is neither sustainable nor does it truly improve quality of life. For many of the same reasons that these projects failed as economic development strategies, they failed as conservation-related strategies (Guha and Martinez-Alier 1997). Their failure soured both indigenous organizations and conservationists (best chronicled by Chapin 2004). Yet, both indigenous organizations and conservationists have continued to try to integrate these two models. Advocacy organizations also tried this more integrationist approach, buying into the concept that increased income generation was necessary to indigenous people’s quality of life. Cultural Survival, for example, promoted programs to commoditize non-timber forest products, promoting links between indigenous groups and corporations such as Ben and Jerry’s Ice Cream (Clay 1992). Ultimately, these projects also were not successful (Glasser 1995). Large corporations could not solely rely on small-scale production by indigenous people to satisfy their demand. Indigenous communities were at times overwhelmed by the demand, at times not able to adequately manage the administrative and financial parts of their operations^[xiv].

During Sandy Davis’ tenure at the World Bank, there was a similar trajectory of integrating development and environmental stewardship in some projects. Although, in my opinion, Sandy always tried to keep the focus on the value of indigenous practice and belief systems as the basis for any project (see Davis and Partridge 1999), his ability to effect this change was limited. In our collaboration during his time at the Bank, we tried to make the case for an “indigenous territory” model of land and environmental protection (Davis and

Wali 1994), which would be governed by indigenous concepts of space and time. Although Sandy and others working with him in the World Bank were able to establish a small program for indigenous management of resources, the program never had much institutional support and it was not well-implemented (see Mosse 2006).



Figure 2: Sandy and a family in Ecuador (photo credit: Mary Gubbins)

As the environmental and social unsustainable character of the standard economic development model becomes more and more evident, as well as its failure to address even its stated goal of reducing “poverty,” economists and policy makers are searching for alternative frameworks for crafting policy. It is in this moment that a more promising strategy for securing land and cultural autonomy is emerging around the concept of “wellbeing.” Well-being is fast gaining global currency as an alternative to the use of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as the sole indicator for measuring prosperity. Philosophers, psychologists and economists have critiqued relying on the GDP and called for a more complex set of measurements that include social dimensions such as health, education, and even subjective perceptions of happiness. The President of France commissioned Nobel laureate economists Joseph Stiglitz and Amartya Sen to create measurements of wellbeing, which they did relying principally on the United Nations human development measures (Stiglitz, Sen, and Fitoussi 2009). In November 2010, the new conservative British Prime Minister, David Cameron, commissioned his National Statistician to head up an effort to measure “happiness” for the nation. These emerging international concepts have complicated and varied meanings, not all necessarily leading to environmental sustainability or social justice.

For Amazonian indigenous people, however, wellbeing has a specific definition based on cosmological principles that govern social relations (cf.

Belaunde 2010; Chirif 2007). Wellbeing in many Amazonian societies depends on maintaining kin and friendship relations based on systems of reciprocity. In my own work, conducting rapid social assessments as part of the Field Museum's rapid inventories program, I have witnessed the persistence of this pattern (cf. Wali et al. 2004; Wali et al. 2008,) in varying degrees of strength. In spite of the long history of involvement with the boom and bust extractive waves that has characterized the mode of integration of the Amazon region into the global economy, societies have maintained a predominantly subsistence-based mode of livelihood. What Eric Wolf calls the "kinship mode of production" (Wolf 1982) continues although in undeniably weakened and mixed forms with the capitalist mode of production.

Wellbeing, in Amazonian terms, then becomes a way to talk about the maintenance of a way of life different from the national model. Rather than arguing for "inclusion" into the national development model, standing on a different definition of wellbeing, indigenous leaders are arguing for exclusion—to be left alone to decide the way they want to proceed with sustaining their livelihoods. The rhetoric of "wellbeing" can be seen in the adamant refusal, for example, of the Airo Pai to accept in any form the presence of oil companies in their territories, even though their territory is as yet not legally recognized. It can be seen in the stand of the Awajún people in Bagua (described above) against the new forestry laws. The concept of wellbeing as the basis for a political strategy also draws on ancient forms of conceptualizing the relations between humans and other natural beings. Amazonian cosmo-visions view the natural, "supernatural," and human as of a piece, in constant interaction and in social relation to each other (cf. Descola 1992; Rider Panduro 2005, personal communication^{xv}). In this way, stewardship of the environment must be governed by the cosmological principles from which wellbeing is derived—again very different from the perspective of Western conservation organizations. If this new type of "cosmopolitics" (de la Cadena 2010) can gain a foothold, it could potentially provide a more fruitful path to the defense of indigenous lands and livelihoods, grounded in the reality of the indigenous experience. To date, this strategy is still emerging and it remains to be seen where and how it gains strength.

CONCLUSION

The complexities of activism focused on Amazonian indigenous people, as described here, have only grown in the past forty years. Indigenous organizations and their allies achieved significant advances in the struggle throughout the first three decades, only to face severe retrenchment and new obstacles at the turn of the millennium. Shelton Davis never stopped believing in the cause of a more just

social order. No matter where he was located, he dedicated his entire intellectual energy to advocating for the dignity and well being of indigenous people. If he were alive today, he would be trying hard to find any possible avenue to expanding the place of justice, despite all obstacles. In this, he shared the resilience of indigenous peoples, who continue also to struggle, no matter the odds. Those of us touched by Sandy and privileged to work alongside indigenous communities can continue to draw inspiration from their work, and forge new forms of activism no matter how bleak our world becomes.

NOTES

¹ ILO Treaty 169, the Convention on Indigenous and Tribal People was adopted by the United Nations in 1989.

² The Field Museum began this effort in 1994 as an experiment with a small group of ecologists. The group “Environment and Conservation Programs” were affiliated with the Rapid Assessment Program of Conservation International. They conducted rapid inventories of selected areas throughout the Amazon, and presented reports with recommendations for setting aside protected areas. In 1999, frustrated with Conservation International’s methods, the group initiated the “Rapid Biological Inventories” program (www.fieldmuseum.org/rbi). In 2001, I was invited to join the group, to develop a community-based social component for the inventories (for a full account, see Wali 2006).

³ The post-WWII projects of economic development for so-called “underdeveloped” countries has been well documented in the literature (Davis 1977; Hecht and Cockburn 1990). The projects, such as road-building, dam-building, planned colonization schemes, incentives for cattle ranching and other intensive activities, and mining. After a period of relative absence of strong capitalist economic activities in these regions, especially the Amazon in South America, this new wave of exploitation wreaked havoc on indigenous peoples of the regions.

⁴ The law did not contemplate large territories for distinct ethnic groups (e.g. Reservations). Instead, each settlement or village could apply for a communal title for its residents. Conditions were that the land was inalienable and that the villages establish a governance structure conforming to the national standard for rural communities. Alberto Chirif (2006) gives a fascinating and significant account of how the law came to pass and analyzes its significance and its flaws.

⁵ The IWGIA reports from the 1970s, such as those written by Richard Chase Smith, Stefano Varese, Henning Siverts are out of print but titles can be seen at www.IWGIA.org. Articles and reports published by INDÍGENA do not appear to be available on the web.

⁶ The enshrinement of discourses of human and cultural rights in treaties and policies is critically necessary to the advancement of political structures and processes that can empower indigenous peoples, but of course it is insufficient to guarantee protection for their way of life, as I discuss in more detail below.

⁷ The rapid inventory program as designed by the Field Museum team, explicitly includes a “follow-through” component. Immediately after the inventory itself, the Field Museum team works closely with local collaborators to obtain protection for the inventoried area. This process involves presenting results from the inventory immediately on leaving the field, convening relevant governmental and non-governmental organizations to achieve consensus on demarcating the boundaries of the area and establishing ground rules for engaging local people, and producing

a final report within a year or less of the inventory. The final report is often used to create the technical documents that collaborators use to propose and promote the protected area (c.f. Alverson 2005; Hayden 2007).

⁸ The FSC, which is an NGO founded and operated by Randy Borman, son of American Missionaries who grew up and lives with the Cofan and became a Cofan leader, works closely with the organization that represents the Cofan communities, FEINCE (*Federación Indígena de la Nacionalidad Cofan del Ecuador*). For a detailed account of the conservation programs of the Cofan, see also Cepek (2006, 2008).

⁹ In my own work with the Field Museum's rapid inventory program in Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia, I have witnessed this continuity of indigenous knowledge and cultural practice, which has been so well ethnographically documented by anthropologists working in the Amazon. In some places, people have been severely displaced and more tightly bound to the extractive economy, so traditional knowledge is diminished, yet it continues to survive. In other places, where people were able to fend off the extractive economy or fled from it, traditional knowledge and practice is the principle guide for livelihood strategies.

¹⁰ In 2008, a Cofan leader told me that after much tense negotiating, FEINCE prevailed upon an international funding agency to include funds for salaries for FEINCE leadership in the project budget. This is the only instance I have heard of to date of this kind of payment.

¹¹ Luis Calixto, an anthropologist who came to live and work alongside the Matses over three decades ago, has been a key advisor to their leaders. He did his field research on Matses kinship, and perhaps used that information to help guide the development of their government. He is currently affiliated with CEDIA.

¹² I have not considered here the role of a third type of institutions—aid or charity organizations, such as OXFAM, CARITAS, and CARE. These organizations (although different from each other in types and mode of project support) have also increasingly provided project support to indigenous organizations and to their constituent communities. By and large, they also follow the pattern of working with the existing forms of governance instead of supporting efforts for reform.

¹³ In this, the situation is similar to the trajectory of the US Civil Rights Movement, where after the historic passage of the Civil Rights Act, The Voting Rights Act, and Affirmative Action policies, the public perception was that the “problem” of racism had been “solved.” It became much more difficult to address the underlying, deeper persistence of institutionalized racism—less visible and more widespread (c.f. Mullings 2005).

¹⁴ It is interesting to note that Jason Clay left Cultural Survival and is currently at World Wildlife Fund, where he is Vice President for Marketing Transformation. Clay, in a recent talk through the TED series (July 2010) argued that global corporations need to be engaged to change the way they produce products to promote sustainability. This is now a major strategy of WWF—engaging large corporations to produce in more sustainable (“conservation compatible”) ways to protect biological diversity.

¹⁵ Rider Panduro, together with his wife Elsa Mesia, directs the small NGO, ARAA-Choba Choba, which has worked with forest-dwellers in the Huallaga Valley of Northern Peru for over two decades. Choba Choba aims to expand the space for Amazonian-Andean ways of being and living.

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