Ethnic groups and the globalization
Process - Reflections on the Amazonian
groups of Peru from a human ecological
perspective

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Introduction

The concepts 'ethnic groups' and 'ethnicity' are frequently used in the current social sciences, everyday political debate and in discussions on the causes of contemporary social, political and environmental problems. In this chapter these concepts are discussed from an interdisciplinary human ecological view on the relationship between human beings, environment and society. A human ecological study is distinguished from other social scientific studies of ethnic groups in that it considers the relation between human beings and both natural and social structures, and the link between individuals through their actions and reciprocity. Accordingly, in this essay ethnicity is analysed including all three corners of a 'human being-environment-society' triangle (Steiner and Nauser, 1993). Integrating these three dimensions and defining the relations between them is rather complicated, since we are dealing with an extremely complex web of causes, effects and interactions at different levels of aggregation. One appropriate method is therefore to combine empirical studies from various social, cultural and environmental settings.

A concept often used when analysing these relations is 'adaptation'. This concerns the interaction between man and the natural environment and can be seen from the point of view of the practices and activities of human beings that influence the survival of the population and involve cultural as well as biological factors. At the same time, nature has its own evolution. In this study, nature refers to the tropical rain forest, which is the subsistence base for the Amazonian population. The river changes its course, new plants and animal species evolve and still others disappear over time and space. A major theme is how human beings, as biological creatures, adapt to their physical environments through their culture, including their behaviour and lifestyle. Different aspects of this adaptation by human ecological and anthropological researchers have been widely discussed (Boyden, 1987, Hames and Vickers, 1983; Moran, 1979 and 1993; Sponsel, 1986) and I will elaborate the concept further on.

I wish to add one more theoretical concept, the 'theory of structuration' expounded by the sociologist Anthony Giddens and mainly limited to the social sciences. Nature is here seen as a product altered by humans through, for instance, agricultural practices, and not in the ecological sense as something existing outside and independently of human beings. The theory can be expanded to include ecological structures, meaning that ecosystems are composed of abiotic and biotic components which interact through the flow of energy, matter, and information, all of which vary in space and time (Steiner
and Nauser, 1993). According to this definition, the ever-changing social and ecological structures constitute the framework within which the individuals or groups act, while it is this very action that creates or helps to re-establish those structures. This means that both the actions of people, here the ethnic groups, and the structure, such as the economic-political-cultural system, and the management of the resource base, must be taken into consideration in a reciprocal and dynamic way.

In this chapter the human ecological view on the process of globalization among ethnic groups is elucidated specifically in the context of the Americas through two historical perspectives: first, how ethnic groups have emerged over the years, and second, how they have assumed a certain identity through various social situations and encounters with people with a completely different world view. Against this historical background the accelerating processes of depletion of natural resources, population increase, urbanization, and the assimilation of 'traditional' cultures by the dominant society affecting Amazonian populations are analysed in the larger context of modernization, globalization and power.

**Historical approach to ethnicity in Latin America**

The present situation of ethnic groups in Latin America can be understood only from their historical development. Two distinct historical perspectives of interest for interpreting the encounter between Columbus and the people living in the Americas have been proposed by Crosby (1986) and Todorov (1982). Crosby sets up an ecological model of explanation to describe the encounter between the Spaniards and the indigenous people from the time of Columbus's voyages until the beginning of this century. He analyses the displacement and replacement of the native people and how these actions affected their survival. The 'Indians' are enclosed in the ecological context of their crops, wild and domesticated animals, weeds and disease agents. Crosby shows how the Europeans predominated in the encounter between the two 'biota', because of the attuned coexistence of the plants, animals, and microbes they brought with them. The diseases such as smallpox, whooping cough and measles, to which the natives had no prior immunity, killed up to 90 per cent of many native groups and in some cases eliminated them completely (Crosby, 1986).

This approach shows that no human actions are without their effects on the environment, and that the environment in turn is a continuous and active element affecting the survival of a group or an individual: human activity and social and environmental structures influence each other reciprocally. This refers to the duality mentioned above, that is, the human agents both act as members of their society within social as well as spatial-ecological structures, and, by this very action, also help to re-establish those structures (Steiner and Nauser, 1993:1).

Our understanding of the consequences of the European expansion for the people living in Latin America today has to start with this encounter. We are not concerned here with the first wave of immigrants, on foot, since its consequences and destiny belong to a long prehistory. The second wavebrought by the wind-was that of the Europeans. This marked the beginning
of the 'construction of the other' in this region, and the 'creation' of the people whom we today call Indians or ethnic groups.

Todorov's approach is to understand the encounter between two very separate world views by interpreting how Columbus and Hernando Cortés, on the one hand, and the native Americans, on the other, were caught within their own social contexts, with neither of them being able to think beyond their own cultural limits (1982). This focus also includes the components of the 'human ecological triangle', but he treats them very differently from Crosby. Todorov defines Columbus's world view as consisting of three dimensions: natural (harmony between man and nature), human (culture and material wealth) and sacred. Columbus viewed the indigenous people as if they were a part of the landscape. 'His allusions to the inhabitants of the islands always occur amid his notions concerning nature, somewhere between birds and trees' (Todorov, 1982:34). The other reflection that Columbus made concerned their nakedness: '…the absence of clothes, which in their turn symbolize culture' (op.cit.). As a Christian, he also perceived them as pagans, without law or religion. He was only able to understand what he saw from his own cultural context in which clothes, wealth, and the expulsion of humans from Paradise stood for culture. He did not, in fact, have the capability, imagination or creativity to translate the people he met into the categories of another culture.

Columbus's initial image of the indigenous population obeys the same rules as his description of nature. He found them beautiful, good-hearted and peaceful, but from the beginning one can sense a feeling of superiority, which engendered protectionist behaviour. Columbus's attitude with regard to the people he met is based on his perception of them. Two components can be distinguished, which have survived in practice to our own days, in the relations between the colonist and the colonized. As a Christian, he conceived them as human beings with the same rights as himself; and this behaviour led to assimilationism, the projection of his own values onto others. The other component was the difference he saw, immediately translated into notions of superiority and inferiority. Both components of his perception of 'the other' are grounded in ethnocentrism, which is the identification of our own values with values in general, of our I with the universe, in the conviction that the world is one (Todorov, 1982: 42-43).

This historical background gives two different but converging explanations of the Western influences on today's Latin America and the indigenous groups. What we can see is that Columbus 'discovered' America, but not the Americans. Today, the rich part of the world has discovered the wealth of the tropical rain forest-Amazonas-but not the importance and value of the survival of either its inhabitants or various natural species. The continuum from Columbus to the modern Western view of the exploitable natural resources in the tropical rain forests is easy to trace in history.

The ecological perspective

From an ecological perspective, what we call 'traditional human societies' have, throughout history, been quite well adapted to their ecosystems. They have used natural resources from those 'systems at rates that did not disrupt'
natural flows and cycles, and in cases where their use of resources might have endangered the natural system, adaptation such as a nomadic lifestyle has often facilitated ecosystem recovery and maintenance. The populations have been small, at least in part due to the factors that naturally limit other animal species, including infectious and parasitic diseases and a high mortality rate among newborn and small children. This picture is undergoing a rapid change today as many indigenous groups in the Amazon lowland are confronted with the modernization process. Human activities are no longer only directed towards meeting the basic needs, but the previously rather isolated Amazonian groups are becoming integrated into the market economy through goods, products, tourism, and so on. From an ecological point of view, the ecosystems are threatened and sometimes destroyed, resulting in the disappearance of animal and plant species. The number of studies in the area has grown considerably during the '90s and there is today a variety of literature within the field of Amazon ecology and adaptation (e.g. Sponsel, 1986) and on changes in Amazonian indigenous anthropology (e.g. Viveiro de Castro, 1996).

For a more general discussion on adaptation, the process can be examined in four phases, which Boyden (1993) calls 'biohistory' in terms of the culture-nature interaction. The four phases, hunter-gatherer, early farming, early urban, and modern high-energy, differ from each other especially concerning resource management and energy consumption. Although there has been a shift towards the later phases, societies reflecting all four coexist today in, for example, the Amazonian region. When people from a range of biohistorical phases, with different consumption of non-renewable resources and varied world views, come together, change of some kind is inevitable. Biohistory is especially concerned with the impacts of societal activities on the biophysical variables of the biosphere, and on human beings. It pays attention to the processes of cultural adaptation that may be brought into action in response to socially and culturally induced threats to human survival and well-being (ibid.).

The process of adaptation may be regarded as changes and modifications of varying rapidity that enable a group to survive in a certain environment. The biological and cultural adaptations of human beings are essential for obtaining food, for protecting themselves against the stress of the climate through dwellings and clothing, for the socialization of children, as well as the care of the newborn, the sick and the aged within the group. Health and disease may be taken as positive and negative results of the capability with which human groups, combining biological and cultural resources, interact with their environment. Pathogens can breed only within certain demographic densities, which indicate basic shifts in the man-nature equation. The connection between mobility and the incidence of disease and epidemics has been noticed in the context of isolated groups (Crosby, 1986; McNeill, 1976).

From an ecological perspective, health problems can be seen as arising from the divergence between the environment to which human beings are genetically adapted and incidents in the disease pattern, when changes such as de-territorialization and urbanization occur. There is a constant adaptation to new conditions, but the biological nature of human beings is limited, and the discrepancies between the social and cultural changes and human biology.
create what he calls the 'principle of evodeviation', which is maladaptation (Boyden, 1987).

From a local or regional perspective, the environment imposes certain limitations on the survival of the group, such as the size of the group that has to find arable land for agriculture, other food products and water. Central to an individual's relation to the resource base is the local or traditional ecological knowledge which is the individual's or the ethnic group's collective memory. This knowledge embraces such survival strategies as familiarity with biodiversity, environmental assessment and information systems, which inevitably affect human well-being and survival (Follér, 1995 and 1997, Follér and Garrett, 1996). Ethnobotanical studies of the Amazon, with detailed categorizations of soil, plants and animals, help us understand the complexity of other knowledge systems besides the scientific ones. A comprehensive view of indigenous culture is essential to explaining how local people make use of certain plants for food, medicine or house construction, and avoid others. For example, Shipibo-Conibo, an ethno-linguistic group of approximately 30,000 persons living along the Ucayali River in the tropical rain forest of Peru and scattered in 100 to 120 villages over a large land area (Follér, 1990), name and classify aquatic and terrestrial animals into a complex consistent order (Tournon, 1994a and 1994b). Guillermo Arévalo, a Shipibo medicine man, has documented 400 medicinal plants used by the group, including the preparations for their therapeutic use (Arevalo, 1994).

The environment of the people living in the Amazon region is currently affected by the lifestyles of people living far away, with the result that their habitat and home are destroyed, entailing a threat to their survival as ethnic groups, since they are forced to expand beyond their natural physical limits and available resources. The people living in the Amazon are facing the problems of the scarcity of arable land for food production, the exploitation of non-renewable resources of minerals and energy within the region, as well as the exploitation of the forest for timber logging. Another threat is a rising population, coming from urban settlements, partly due to migration from the Peruvian Andes as a result of erosion on the mountain slope's and partly, in the case of Brazil, to an active government policy to give landless peasants plots within the Amazon (Moran, 1993:148ff). Increasing population causes pollution of water and air, with injurious health effects.

Species diversity has declined as a result of both floral and faunal species becoming extinct. The land and groundwater have been poisoned by pesticides and by mercury and other heavy metals (Boischio and Henshel, 1996; Gray, 1986). The rate of deforestation has been spectacular: during the 1980s and 1990s about 1.3 per cent of the forests has been destroyed annually, the highest rate of loss in the developing world (World Resources Institute, 1990). Furthermore, soil erosion caused by deforestation has been extensive and has led to river pollution, mudflows, and flooding.

The disruption that occurs between a local population and its environment may be perceived in a global context. Questions that might be raised are: 'What does the territory mean to the Amazonian groups and what happens when their land, the resource and subsistence base, is threatened?' One central concept is 'security': in this case, ecological or environmental security which concerns the maintenance of the local and the planetary biosphere as
the essential support system on which all other human enterprises depend (Buzan, 1991:19). There is a wealth of current studies on the interrelationships between gender, identity, power, the nation-state, ecological security and the right to land for marginalized ethnic groups, as intertwined factors influencing the security of local societies (Buzan, 1991; Langlais, 1995; Stern-Pettersson, 1993). For the ethnic groups in the Peruvian part of Amazonia, state policy, transnational timber and oil companies, and significant guerilla movements such as Sendero Luminoso continue to be real threats.

Human actions always have unintended consequences; for the ethnic groups in the Amazon the consequences may be traced both to their own actions and to the actions of geographically distant structures. By thinking beyond the dualism between people and their habitat, structuration theory leads us to interpret and define components of a whole ecosystem in which people are but one constituent. Human attitudes, motives and values influence what people perceive and construe, how they use precise settings, and how they modify them over time. The interrelations between energy flows, material resources, human labour, and knowledge, communication and information should therefore be examined over an extended period of time in the context in which they occur (Lawrence, 1993).

Changes induced by modernization and globalization in the Amazon

The speed of change in a Western urban population might differ from that in an ethnic group living in the Amazon, but even within rather isolated indigenous societies such change is constant. The dynamic nature of culture can be seen in the way perceptions and strategies gradually evolve in indigenous societies as part of the process of adaptation to the resource-base. When social groups come into contact with other cultures, as they have throughout history, the changes become both more intense and more rapid.

One of the major current forces of change shaping human societies is modernization. It has its origins in Western Europe, but has spread to all parts of the world during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, often in conjunction with economic development efforts, and has brought about worldwide cultural transformations. Some aspects of modernization are clearly beneficial to the survival of human beings, such as advances in health care, hygiene, new crops, technological and scientific knowledge, leading to, for example, a longer lifespan for humans in general. It is more difficult to measure changes in the quality of life due to modernization. Several consequences of modernization are both the solutions to many of today's problems and a part of the problem. Without modernization, the world population would not have risen to close on six billion, and many of today's epidemics, infectious and 'civilisation' diseases would not have existed without the present demographic structure. The current ecological problems, global and local, can also be seen as a continuation of the rationalization and modernization process.

To indigenous groups, modernization signifies that they are suddenly catapulted from their traditional ways of life into tension and conflict, both within their own group and in their interaction with other cultural groups.
Some caution is, however, advisable when using the notion 'traditional'. These societies may have experienced many changes due to interethnic contacts, natural disasters, and so on, even before the European contact. New tendencies seen today are possibly the erosion of the support system of the group and the breakdown of the extended family. De-territorialization and urbanization are just two more. However, these abrupt and rapid changes do not follow a uniform pattern and therefore need to be analysed, including the diverse components of the process.

Another major process of social change affecting the Amazonian population, and closely linked to modernization, is globalization. An important aspect of globalization is that it connects the local with the general and can be defined as:

'A social process in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding' (Waters, 1995: 3).

With globalization, the world is shrinking, and the dominant cultures of Europe and the United States are penetrating the local world of urban and rural areas in Africa, Asia and Latin America, reaching as far as the scattered and isolated Amazonian population. What we can see is that time-space distancing, disembedding and reflexivity mean that complex relationships develop between local activities and interaction across distances. In Amazonia, transnational timber logging and oil drilling by national and international companies, and the global network of narco-traffic are some examples of the shrinking distances and penetration of the local world.

Several scholars, among them the Norwegian anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen, see globalization in a positive light. He emphasizes the vitality and originality occurring in the cultural encounter, which he calls 'creolization' (1994). The process implies a coming together of all humankind, a recognition of common values and goals, and an acceptance of cultural differences. This image of 'the world as one' is inherent in references to 'the global village'. International tourism, new broadcasting systems, computer networks and transnational industrial companies are just one side of it.

The serious inequality found in current societies is another side of globalization, which could also be largely attributed to the spread of capitalism and the market economy. Nevertheless, globalization is a part of the economic system of today, and what we see is mainly a one-way transmission of Western ideas, products and interests to other parts of the world. In this process, the knowledge and practices of local cultures are inevitably devalued.

The implications of globalization for the lives of the ethnic groups in Amazonia include the loss of local knowledge, de-territorialization, new diseases spreading through tourism, and modern high-mobility lifestyles. Andean flute music, handicrafts from indigenous groups, exotic food and native clothes are, of course, examples of transmission in the opposite direction. But what we see is a fragmented piece of what can be called 'folklorization' and 'exoticization' (Urban and Sherzer, 1991:11). We thus construct the role of 'the other' as 'a source of indigenous customs that can be relocated, and as an exotic image to attract the tourist industry.

Using Boydens' biographical perspective, we see a cultural encounter taking place between two different perceptions of the world. One of these cultures is able to dominate, thanks to its technological, military and economic
power. This leads to a widening of the gap between rich and poor, reinforcing the marginalization and poverty of the indigenous populations. The marginalization is both physical-in that the ethnic groups are pushed into less desirable lands-and social and cultural-in that they exist on the edge of the prevailing economy, outside the power structure, in the periphery.

One question that has been raised is whether globalization implies homogenization or integration. Globalization merely implies greater connectedness and de-territorialization (Waters, 1995:136). How is it possible for ethnic identification to survive without a relation to a specific territory or a place? Among the Amazonian groups, place is often strongly connected with identity. Identity cannot be moved out of context. It is a complex phenomenon, a process of formation that continues and changes depending on external and internal factors. The various disciplines distinguish different aspects of identity formation. Political, ethnic, and gender identity are just some examples, and various identities may exist in one and the same person. The identity among the groups considered here, such as the Shipibo-Conibo, Ashaninka and Masigenka in the Peruvian lowlands and mountains, is strongly connected with language, cosmology, concepts of health and illness and territoriality, that is, the land and culture of their ancestors (Foller, 1990; Baer, 1992).

De-territorialization is often connected to the process of urbanization. The long-term trend of moving from small, scattered villages and towns to cities and megacities continues all over the world. Urbanization is a major force changing Latin America, and in Amazonia urban growth is about 6 per cent per year, according to the regional statistics (INEI, 1993). In a country like Peru, urbanization increases the marginalization of the ethnic groups. The transition from a rural, peasant, self-subsistent, and traditional way of life to one that is urban, and possibly supported by wage work, involves a significant breakdown of their social support system. They are facing new environmental problems and health hazards while dealing with the loss of the cultural identity and social network that they had in their villages. Distancing from the environment in which people have learned to make a living too often leads to poverty and a degraded life style.

The making of ethnicity in the Amazon

Two paradoxical facts characterizing the process of globalization and the ethnic situation in Latin America today are the difficulty of identifying the Indians in the Latin American melting pot of people of very different origins, and the overall reality of a multiethnic society. This can also be expressed as a dialectical trend towards homogenization, on the one hand, and pluralism, on the other. The idea of a modern, homogenized world culture, with shared values and attitudes, as a necessity for solving environmental problems and famines, population issues, energy consumption, and so on, is much advocated in current debate. But another trend can also be observed: ethnic groups around the world are resisting various aspects of modernization, for a diversity of reasons. The ethnic distinctiveness that will be discussed here concerns issues such as the role of the population in relation to territorial integrity, political autonomy and a certain control over the natural resources needed for survival.
In Latin America, few indigenous groups have any degree of guaranteed territorial integrity within the nation states that encompass them.

The representation of the indigenous peoples called native Americans, Amerindians or just Indians is undergoing an important transformation. An ethnic wave is passing through world society and is contributing to many international conflicts emerging in the South as well as in the North. Part of this wave is the appearance of new ethnic movements, some of them with an anti-colonial profile and a strong political aim of territorial control. As in many other parts of the world, ethnic groups in Latin America are increasingly aligning themselves with political movements for indigenous rights.

The globalization seen here as the deconstruction of the relationship between the local and the modern is not only a uni-directional trend of Western homogenization, but also the emergence of something new. These strategies of local persistence are expressed in the articulation of ethnic differentiation, which is shaping present-day world politics (Hettne, 1992).

In Peru, most Amerindians live in the Andean mountains, la sierra. About 65 ethno-linguistic groups coexist and inhabit the Amazonian region, la selva. They belong to 12 linguistic families, and they have their own languages, myths, religions and rationalities. This diversity is a value that has not been appreciated by the people governing the country. Historically, these groups have been in contact with the Western world since the sixteenth century, through conquerors, missionaries, explorers and merchants. One of Columbus's men, Vicente Pinzon, discovered the Amazon estuary in 1500. But the interior of the Amazon region, later called the 'green hell', was not discovered until about 40 years later. The Spaniards arrived in the tropical lowland after first crossing the Andes. From then on the exploitation of natural resources, such as rubber, timber, gold, oil, and exotic animals, has intensified, and there is no sign of any decrease.

As mentioned above, Todorov explained how Columbus perceived the Amerindians as inferior as a result of his cultural restraints and religious narrowness. Other descriptions from the sixteenth century by protoanthropologists and travellers such as Lery and Thevet indicate a similar perception of the inhabitants of Amazonia. They were still not seen as noble savages or cruel head-hunters, but even if their humanness was acknowledged, they were regarded as inferior, without knowledge of God, and primitive in their manners. Their technology, medical therapies and religions were also treated as inferior without any attempt at evaluation as to their appropriateness or function. These cultural traits were merely seen as different, and thus without sense, and condemned as worthless. The representatives of Western culture assumed an attitude of superiority in an ethnocentric way. This ethnocentrism has been presented as the only rational way of thinking.

The arrival of the Europeans led to many negative consequences for the native population, which was on many occasions vanquished, enslaved and killed. The technical superiority of the Europeans, with their guns and metal tools, and the power of the Roman Catholic church, which caused religious and psychological disruptions, were some important reasons for the defeat of the indigenous population.

The encounter frequently meant that the intruders imposed on the local inhabitants new values (religious, ethical and medical), and on their resource
base new crops and agricultural technologies. The indigenous groups were moved away, their villages or houses were destroyed, or the men were taken away to work with rubber or timber concerns and, more recently, with oil drilling or coca cultivation. Two processes can be defined: assimilation and resistance. The assimilation process means a loss of language, way of living, the medical universe; and integration into the more powerful culture. From historical and linguistic studies we know that many ethnic groups have disappeared, together with their language. Examples of resistance can be found in the first records from the central jungle, dating from 1557, when Juan Salinas de Loyola, a Spanish chronicler, described the people he encountered, enabling us to form a picture of their way of life. Other examples of resistance to the intruders can be traced from 1657 onwards (Heras, 1975; Regan, 1983).

De-localization was initiated some hundred years later by Franciscans and Jesuits who established mission stations in the region, reducciones, to pacify the indigenous population (Regan, 1983). The disastrous effect of the new infectious diseases that the intruders brought with them has been mentioned earlier. These decimated the indigenous peoples from the first moment of contact (Crosby, 1986). The depopulation of wide areas reflects both the ravages of the introduced infectious diseases and the dislocations associated with the incorporation of the indigenous people into the Western economic scheme (DeBoer, 1981).

During the post-colonial period, after Peru had become a sovereign state, Amazonia was increasingly penetrated by merchants and colonists from the rest of the country and abroad. Amazonia was regarded as an immense common property filled with natural resources. Combined with the ethnocentrism of the immigrants, this encouraged conflicts over land. In 1849 a law was established which made it easier for foreign colonists to acquire land and settle down in the region (Chirif and Mora, 1976). This can be seen as the beginning of the marginalization of the indigenous inhabitants of Amazonia and the destruction of the fragile tropical ecosystem, of which the colonists had no understanding and no relevant ecological knowledge.

The rubber boom in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries intensified the destruction of the environment and signified further resettlement of the ethnic groups. The indigenous population was again captured, enslaved, relocated and, this time, put to work tapping and collecting latex until the rubber market collapsed around 1910.

The increased settlement in the Peruvian jungle following the rubber boom made it necessary for the government to regulate and define rights to land and exploitation of resources. A law in 1909 did not even mention the indigenous groups in the area (Rosengren, 1987:46). Not until 1957 was landowning by the lowland ethnic groups taken into consideration in Peruvian law. Comunidades nativas is the most common settlement pattern today, and a law from 1968 acknowledged the legal right of native groups to exploit more extensive land areas, including the right to use and sell natural resources such as wood and game, and the right to collect other resources. The authorities gave the community a legal deed, título comunial, to the land.

This administrative and legal organization still exists, but has been more and more undermined by various changes in the constitution. The latest threat to the survival of the ethnic groups and their right to land in the Peruvian
Amazon comes from the present leader of the country, President Alberto Fujimori. The congress has approved a new law, and the future of the comunidades nativas is once more seriously menaced (Aroca and Maury, 1993). One risk with the new constitution is that it gives opportunities to sell the collectively owned land to colonists, who may commercialize and exploit it for timber felling.

The globalization of the Amazonian region and its incorporation into the market economy have had devastating effects on the ethnic groups since they are socially and culturally exhausting processes leading to overexploitation of the ecosystem. In this process the indigenous groups have had to struggle for territories and resources, for their language, world views, religious rituals and medical practices.

The ethnic groups encountering the nation state

If we see the Amazonian population in earlier times as composed of relatively isolated and autonomous groups, their situation is now totally changed. Ribeiro (1971) viewed the assimilation process as consisting of five stages: isolation, intermittent contact, permanent contact, integration and extinction. Probably there still exist groups at all the stages, especially in Brazil with its enormous area. In the Peruvian part of the tropical rain forest, the riverbeds and fertile flood plains are densely populated, and there have been armed conflicts, cultural revitalization, religious movements, repossession of resources and other manifestations to guarantee their right to land. The ethnic groups have been incorporated to a greater extent into the nation state, and this has had certain implications.

For the people living in the Amazon and their encounter with the nation state, three characteristics of the state are especially important (Urban and Sherzer, 1991:8). These are its claim to have a monopoly over the legitimate use of force within its territorial boundaries, its assertion of autonomy related to other states, and its gradual development of citizenship as the form of membership in the collectivity.

Today a trend can be seen questioning the more established conceptualization of indigenous people. New studies focus more on the processual nature of indigenous identities, instead of transforming collective self-representation of particular social groups as indigenous (Field, 1994).

A brief summary of the changed view of ethnic groups within social science can be obtained from two sources. The first is a rather traditional or static anthropological approach influenced by Boas, which bound language, material culture, and cultural identities together. The second is British structural functionalism, which envisages social relations as a homeostatic organism in which individual and collective behaviours are defined by cultural norms and values in order to maintain social equilibrium.

Another approach to the study of ethnic groups emerged with Barth's Ethnic groups and boundaries in 1969. His central tenet is that ethnicity is a form of social organization. This implies that 'the critical focus for investigation becomes the ethnic boundary that defines the group rather than the cultural stuff that it encloses' (1969:15). The critical feature of ethnic groups is, according to Barth, the characteristic of self-ascription and ascription by others.
What is new in Barth's work is the shift from a static to an interactional approach to ethnicity and the differentiation between ethnicity and culture. Barth presents ethnicity or ethnic identity as an aspect of social organization, not of culture. He also includes environment and ecology in the main framework to understand how cultural differentiation and ethnicity are linked to the concept of 'niche' (Barth, 1994).

This approach is still highly valid in the discussion on boundaries between groups, between 'us' and 'them', and in order to see the processual and relational views in the definition. Ethnic groups are seen as interest groups operating within larger societies, among whom markers of ethnicity are produced through interactions with other social sectors. Notions such as markers or negotiating ethnicity also give rise to the dynamic view of 'who are the Indians?' There are historical examples of how indigenous groups invented and reinvented traditions as a part of the reproduction of their identities (Elsass, 1992). According to this approach, the survival of an ethnic group, the gap between extinction and assimilation or acculturation, can be derived from its cultural potential, such as cosmovision, language, a logical structure in the way of thinking, local knowledge (including ethnomedicine and shamanism), perception of nature, and so on. Nevertheless, the term 'ethnic group' is ambiguous and vague, and the relationship between ethnicity and other types of identity, social classification and political organization, such as class and gender, is changing constantly (Hylland Eriksen, 1993).

Today the ethnic groups of Latin America are fighting for survival through their own organizations for self-determination. They are working together through various local and national federations. A basic political aim of these federations is territorial control and access to natural resources; this is the central focus of indigenous rights throughout the world. Every indigenous community must be able to conserve, use and organize its resources freely to ensure its survival through coming generations. Secure land is of fundamental importance to indigenous people who wish to continue their own way of life. Their sense of identity is strongly coupled to the perception of their existence within the forest. This collective identity is in turn essential for their survival as an ethnic group.

Guaranteed territory is a key to the long-term protection of the South American rain forest. Natural resource management strategies that are culturally appropriate and economically sustainable are being sought for the area. Global changes and the impact of these changes on human society have become important items both in research and on political agendas.

Just as 'Indians' did not live in the Americas until Europeans invented the term and its social positioning, the multitude of distinctive indigenous societies of these continents became 'ethnic groups' only as their territories were incorporated into the colonial, and later republican, national regimes. Ethnicity and ethnic groups should be understood as processual terms that signify changing identities in relation to colonialism throughout history, rather than as a set of more or less fixed categories.

Since the first encounter with the Europeans, an interface has been created. The nature of this interface depends on the nature of the encounter. Highland groups such as the Aymara and Quechua comprise numerically large populations that in their own way have internalized European social and cultural
forms since the contact, while lowland people, living in small, dispersed groups, have remained more isolated and closer to precontact conditions for a long time (Urban and Sherzer, 1991).

Conclusions

The process initiated by colonial intervention in the Amazon, leading to a destruction of livelihoods, is almost akin to an unavoidable human and natural calamity. The encounter signified a biological disaster for human beings concerning the disease agents brought from Europe against which the people had no immunity and which nearly led to their extermination. From Todorov's perspective, the cultural encounter signified that the superiority in the context of the European value system and during the long colonial history led to the marginalization, de-territorialization and cultural impoverishment of the ethnic groups and destruction of the tropical rain forest, their home. The action of the Europeans and what they brought with them in the way of biological agents, plants, crops, animals, microbes, on the one hand, and economic, political, religious agents, on the other, and the interaction at this special historical event, form the background for explaining and understanding the present situation.

The two perspectives reinforce the calamity for the ethnic groups in the Amazon. I would like to describe it as an incorporation of European (Western) biological and cultural elements into their own framework of social life. In this process a geographically unbounded 'global' setting emerged. The cholera epidemic in 1991 was just one more dagger thrust from the biological (lack of immunity to the new bacteria) and social (poverty) results of globalization (Follér and Garrett, 1996). These factors interact and minimize the possibilities of survival for the ethnic groups in Amazonia in the way they have chosen to live. Through transsocietal processes, globalization is involving the exchange and flow of goods, people, information, knowledge, microbes and biota.

Global de-territorialization means that people are displaced or migrate in search of survival for ecological or political reasons. One effect that cannot be denied is that young people who move to the cities forget the language, last name and cultural manifestations binding them to the environment of their ancestors.

Changed patterns of land use and the systematic harnessing of all natural resources for the continual enhancement of global industrial production and trade have had devastating implications for the livelihood and survival of ethnic groups. Ethnic survival in the modern world would be possible and meaningful if its own intrinsic dignity were recognized, and not only seen in the context of progress and growth. If the nation state has homogenization as a primary goal, difference will appear as resistance-and that is what we see in Latin America today.

The international United Nations summits-in Stockholm about the environment, in Rio about environment and development, in Cairo about population, in Copenhagen about social development, in Beijing about women have been the most obvious symbols of the massive amount of analysis, discussion, and action being directed toward the future of the planet Earth.
Ethnic groups all around the world have also at last entered into this mutual dialogue concerning their future. The value of their way of life, their way of thinking and their traditional ecological knowledge has slowly begun to be recognized. Western civilization has begun to realize that it probably has much to learn from the indigenous groups in order to ensure a sustainable development.

In the future we will observe ethnic groups and individuals choosing from a variety of paths. Whether they choose to articulate their ethnic differentiation or to become integrated in the process of the big global 'melting pot' or creolization will depend on the interplay of internal and external factors. What we can see today is the creation of new institutions to organize the interests of ethnic groups. The double character, or duality, of this action is apparent: where the free action creates the prerequisites for its own limitations.
Ethnic groups and the globalization process—Reflections on the Amazonian groups of Peru from a human ecological perspective


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